

CHRONICLE OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FLETCHER LOWE



POOR OLD BESSIE



FLETCHER LOWE CARRIED the box inside the house and set it on the kitchen table. Inside it lay a rapidly fading heart, which Fletcher Lowe had just removed from old Bessie. Under the fluorescent light of the kitchen ceiling Fletcher Lowe placed the heart on a pig-shaped butcher's block and commenced to dissect it. He enjoyed his work. It gave him pleasure.

Lately he had been reading in the newspaper about the poor old Holstein in Washington State that had to be taken out of circulation. Slaughtered, but for the wrong reason. Mad cow disease. What a pity. Now it was Bessie who must be sacrificed for the cause of science. Fletcher Lowe had noticed her stumble and fall on the way to the hay rack this morning. A downer. He was

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sure of it. Fletcher Lowe diagnosed her without the assistance of the good Dr. Josey.

All day he prayed about her. Then, when night fell, Fletcher Lowe took his sharpest kitchen knife to the barn and slit her throat. Easy as pie. She never even winced. Down she fell, then over on her side. Her right side. She made it easy on Fletcher Lowe.

When he got to it under the ribs old Bessie's heart was fibrillating. Fletcher Lowe was certain it was nothing more than spasm. She couldn't possibly be alive. Look at all the blood. It had pooled underneath Bessie's belly and begun to coagulate as Fletcher Lowe worked. He severed the main vessels and removed the vital organ from Bessie's chest cavity. He placed it in the box.

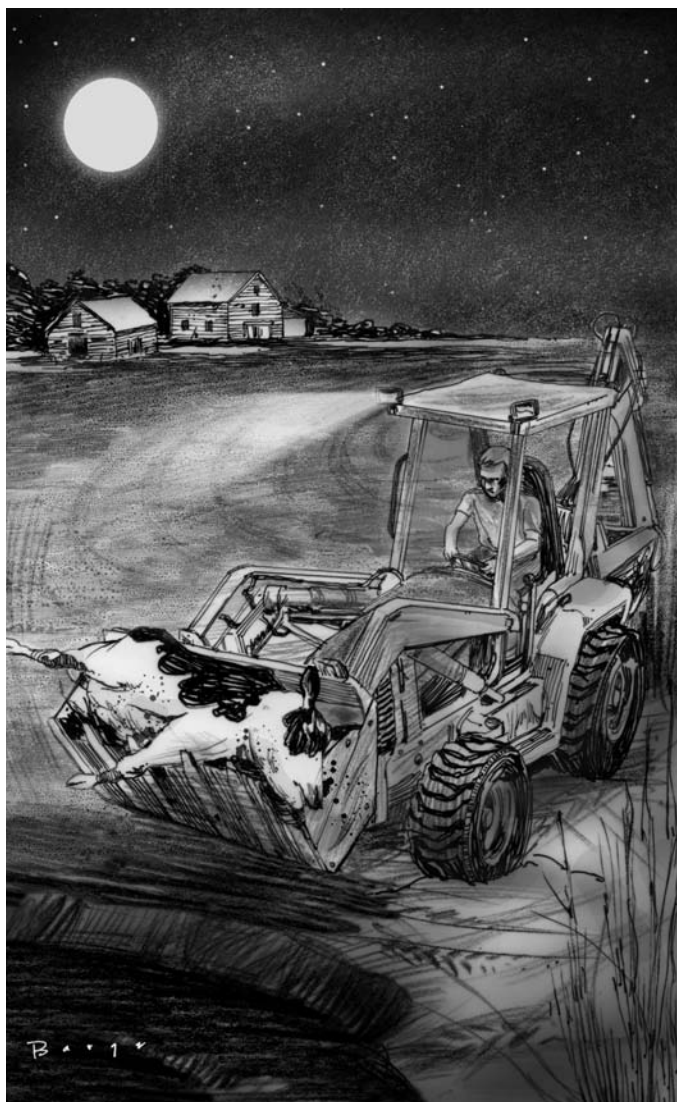
What will I do with the remains? Fletcher Lowe wondered. It was August and there would be flies. Never mind now. He must dissect the chambers of old Bessie's heart. It was the only way to be sure of his diagnosis. Then he would dispose of the remains. And so he placed her quivering heart

on the board and took his sharpest kitchen knife and sliced paper thin sections of auricle, first, then ventricle; auricle again, finally ventricle. He examined each slice with care, the care of a scientist. But Fletcher Lowe found no evidence of mad cow. He was furious. He had killed old Bessie. And for what? His diagnosis had been wrong. It was nothing more than a slip and fall. The good Dr. Josey would have known better.

He walked out the kitchen door and across the yard to the shed. He mounted the backhoe and cranked its diesel engine. The roar shook the night. The stars leapt in the inky sky. Fletcher Lowe drove the backhoe to the barn where Bessie lay, in a puddle of black blood. With the bucket he dragged the carcass from the barn and into the yard. He scooped her up and drove to the field. The moon gave him his light. It was yellow on the brown grass. He dug a hole the size of a small automobile. In it he planted old Bessie.

Fletcher Lowe drove the backhoe to the barn. He pulled the garden hose from the side of the

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house, turned on the faucet and hosed the blood and guts off the bucket. Then he went into the barn, where the pool of blood stood. With the water from the hose he diluted the blood and finally flushed it away, down deep into the dusty dirt floor of the stall where, minutes before, old Bessie stood sleeping.

He went into the kitchen and jammed the severed remains of old Bessie's heart down the disposal. He ground them into the pipe that flowed to the septic tank. He let the disposal run for a long time. He took soap and sponge and cleaned off the butcher's block and the kitchen table.

Then Fletcher Lowe sat down and wept. Wept for poor old Bessie.