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Not Worth a New Rope

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MEMORIES

Not Worth
A New Rope

by Kyle Moran

—a nostalgic expose from ranchland

ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN BENNETT HII
I get the feeling sometimes when they look
at me that my mother and two sisters marvel
that I turned out worth shooting. And my dad
used to have the habit of saying, in keeping
with his ranching background, that someone
unworthy wasn't worth being "hung with a
new rope." I have often wondered when he
looked at me incredulously if he might have been
thinking the same thing about me. For I,
that serious family man of today, am that
serious family man of today, am that
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Since I always was and still am today very
close to my mother, I suppose that I resented
my grandmother's interference in our lives.
Grandma lived with my family much of the
time between my eighth and eleventh years.
Since she was not only senile but also epilep­
tic, Mom stayed at home with her most of the
time. I didn't accept my mother's dedication
because I didn't like the way Grandma kept
Mom away from my school activities. And
worst of all, Grandma was a complainer.

It may have been Grandma's bad nature
that caused me to concoct a scheme that would
give her something to complain about. My
plan involved an adult-male costume, which
during those days was no problem because
Mom had stored my deceased grandfather's
and uncle's clothes in our shed room. There­
fore, on the day I decided to dress up and play
the role of the druggist George Johnson, I had a
choice of attire. I chose a dark-brown suit and
and body with soot because I had heard that
dead people turned black. Then I fell down
dead at my mother's feet hoping she would be

Before I knocked on the kitchen door. Through the
creepdoor, I could see Grandma squinting at
God. Creaking to the door, she peered out
to her wire-rim spectacles. "Who's

A person who wasn't acquainted with our
farm would probably park on the highway
that passed our property and walk down the
lane, so that day I walked down the lane lead­
ing to our farmhouse. Our cornpatch which
grew between the house and the highway
completely concealed the house from passers­by.
I had left the house, had run into the corn­
field carrying my costume, and had changed
clothes between a couple of rows. I knew that
Mama was down by the well dressing fryers
for lunch, that my dad was in the back field
plowing, and that my sisters had gone down
the road to visit friends. So Grandma was in
the house alone, probably reading her Bible.

After a while she returned to the door. "Here
you are, Mr. Johnson. From now on you can
just bill me by mail. Elmer goes to town about
once a week. I can give him the money, and he

Back in those days, I never knew how Mama
found out the things she did about me, but by
lunchtime she was brandishing a peachtree
limb at me and telling me that I had to apolo­
gize to Grandma and give the two dollars back
to her.

The apology was difficult to make, but
Grandma — slightly out of character — only
laughed about it. I never did realize until many
years later what a terrible thing I had done —
even though it was only a childish prank.