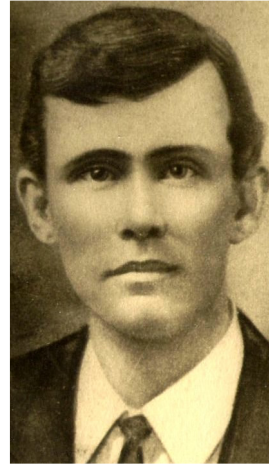


Molly and B.K.



Molly



B.K.

Getting the pictures made was B.K.'s idea. Molly didn't want to, saying she was "too ugly".

The photographer's studio was located on the second floor of a red brick building just off main street. Across the hall was a doctor's office. Downstairs was a drug store and soda shop.

Molly and B.K lived in a little house on the edge of town, beyond where the road turned from asphalt to dirt. The house was constructed during the town's latest growth spurt. There were two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room, with a hallway down the middle. They had not accumulated much yet, just a table, several chairs, an iron-frame bed painted white, a sofa, and a chest. In their bedroom, B.K. had attached pegs to the wall to hang clothes, sanding the pegs smooth so they wouldn't snag.

Just beyond the back door was a well house and 100 feet beyond that at the end of a path through the weeds was a one-hole privy. In the spring, blue bonnets grew beside the path. Sometimes B.K. picked a handful and gave them to Molly to put in a soup can with water. Sometimes, she picked flowers and sometimes she kicked at them with the toe of her black, lace-up shoe.

The house still smelled like newly cut pine. B.K. was a lumberman and liked the smell. The odor made Molly sick although the earthy scent of the privy didn't especially bother her. When it wasn't too hot or cold sometimes she just sat there, reading a book or the newspaper.

They had been married two years when the picture was made. They moved here for the job that B.K. got managing the saw mill. Both of their families still lived in the

mountains. By this time she had already lost one child, a boy, whom they buried in a grave marked with a rock. B.K. visited the grave a few times. Molly went with him once then refused whenever he brought it up. Molly thought about babies when she sat in the privy, poised over the hole.

They dressed in their most stylish clothes and walked the half mile from their house to the studio. There was no sidewalk until they got to the part of the road that was paved. B.K. commented about the big houses that sat back from the sidewalk on well-tended lawns. He especially liked the Mediterranean style mansion with the child-sized cottage in the front yard. Molly noted that it was nicer than the little house where they lived and wondered if the rich people would rent it to them – but then went on to say they probably wouldn't want a family of hillbillies living in their front yard. .

It was July so at B.K.'s insistence they stopped at the soda fountain before going upstairs to the studio. Both had orangeades over shaved ice. They sat at a little table under the ceiling fan letting the evaporating sweat cool them off. B.K. talked about his work, wondering how long it would last, and Molly nodded from time to time and stared out of the window at the bleached summer afternoon. Finally she turned to the big Ingersoll clock ticking on the wall behind the counter and said, "Well, let's go on."

The stairwell was dark and steep. Halfway up Molly felt a pain in her abdomen and wondered if she was pregnant again. She made herself walk keep up with B.K. and was breathing hard when they got to the top.

The photographer greeted them at the door. He was a grinning thin man with red veined cheeks and a soiled tie. Molly had heard from a woman in the Methodist church that he was a drunk. When Molly told B.K., he had said, "Well, he can probably still take good pictures."

Molly brushed her hair and B.K. put on the coat that he had been carrying over his arm. The man tried to get Molly to smile but she wouldn't do it and finally he just stopped and took the picture. The flash powder exploding on the tray in the darkened room left her momentarily blinded. She thought, but didn't say, that it smelled hellish, like hell.

After the session was over and they had walked back down into the glare of the street, B.K. told Molly that he had something to do and why didn't she go on home. She didn't ask him what, knowing that he wanted to go to the bar. She walked away, feeling the heat bake into soles of her shoes, looking forward to the shade, thinking that she might bring it up later.