

### Excerpt from "The Gift"

He ran so fast his chest ached of exhaustion. The echo of his footsteps could be heard in the night air. Tears streamed down his cheeks. He turned his head quickly to see if they were watching. But they weren't.

His mother had tears in her eyes as she handed him some food rolled up in a paper bag. The food consisted of sandwiches, fruits and a chocolate bar. She knew how he loved chocolate. His father turned away from him after pointing toward the door. At fourteen, the year had been a hard one, food sparse. The electricity had been turned off twice. The heat came from an old pot belly stove that sat in the middle of the living room.

Switches and blades of grass ripped at his face as he ran not knowing where he was headed. The tears stuck the blades of grass to his already reddened cheeks. He knew he shouldn't cry. He had to be a man now. But he couldn't seem to help it. He felt sick. He suddenly stopped dry heaving on the side of the road. The cold fall air started to rip through him as he looked around the darkened sky.

"The lights out here sure glow bright," his father would say.

Warren stared out to the open sky. He thought about how he used to lay out on the grass and try and count the stars that lit up their small farm. Too many, he would always think. He would stop as soon as he realized he was counting some of them twice.

"Just can't afford to feed you anymore, Boy," his father said as he held open the door. Warren looked at his mother with a blank stare.

She looked away toward his father. She began to walk toward Warren, but his father grabbed her arm. His mother struggled to get past him as his father stepped in front of her blocking her way. He grabbed her tighter, giving her a stern look. She covered her eyes. Whimpering, she fell to the floor. He then turned to Warren.

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

"Sir?" Warren responded as he had been taught, year after year, crop after crop.

"You best get goin'. It'll be dark soon."

"But where will I go?"

"You're a man now, Son. You'll have to make your way like the rest of us."

Warren ran faster as he thought about the coldness in his father's voice. He ran down the rock road and fell into a pasture. Hidden from the light of the stars he fell into the darkness. There he wept and wept until the tears would no longer come. He felt a rage building inside him. He pulled at the remnants of the crop he had helped his father harvest. He picked up the dirt heaving it into the wind. He screamed hoping that they would hear him. He screamed hoping that they would come. But they didn't.

He and his sister Sarah would get up early in the morning completing their chores before heading off to school. Sarah wasn't there when he left. They had sent her to their grandmothers. Sarah would have let him stay. She would have snuck him in after they had all gone to bed. He thought about waiting around until Sarah got home, but he hadn't the strength to head back. He had already run so far.

The wind picked up and he began to shiver. He looked around and screamed out into the silence of the night. An owl hooted. Warren picked up a rock and threw it as hard as he could toward the sound. It only made the owl hoot louder.

"Shut up!" Warren screamed out. "Shut up, shut up."