

Maudie anxiously greeted Cecil and Elmer with the news that Bethel was in labor and needed to get to the hospital. Cecil instantly forgot about being tired from the day's work and cold from the relentless rain. He knew he had to get Bethel out of there, and soon.

Bethel was beginning to have stronger and stronger contractions. The back pain was intense now, and she was sure it was not false labor. Cecil and Elmer made a packsaddle by locking their hands together and sitting Bethel between them. She held on with her arms around their shoulders. They went outdoors to find floodwaters were rising even higher than when they had come in from work. The access path to the highway was already under water. This was going to be no easy task. They carried Bethel through an alternate route to get to the car parked by the highway. Instead of going down the lawn, across a footbridge, and then up to the road, they had to backtrack around the ever-rising stream that surrounded them. Cecil and Elmer were both worried about the situation. They knew it would take a miracle for them to get Bethel to the hospital. They carried her in their handmade packsaddle up a hill, down a hill, over railroad tracks, up another hill, until finally they made their way to the car.

The men were exhausted. They were young and strong and were no strangers to hard work, but as they listened to Bethel's cries of pain and prayers for mercy, they worried that they might have to deliver the baby out there in the black night in the pouring down rain. Their determination to get her to the hospital went beyond human strength that night. It was as if some unseen force guided their path and gave them endurance to get her to the vehicle.

They drove the car to Holston Valley Community Hospital. Upon arrival, Dr. Honeycutt, Bethel's obstetrician, gave her medication to ease the pain, and as she was settling down from the excitement of the evening, she began to doze. The pains were still coming, but the intensity had lessened. To Cecil, she appeared to be resting well. He assumed it would be a long night and the baby would arrive sometime tomorrow. Bethel's first delivery had been a long, drawn-out process. He was sure this delivery would be the same.

Cecil and Elmer left the hospital around ten o'clock. The adrenaline was wearing off, and fatigue from the day's work and the evening's events took over. Cecil decided to go home and come back early the next morning and await the arrival of his second child. He would get a good night's sleep and be fresh in the morning.

Tomorrow would be too late, however. Two hours after he and Elmer left the hospital, at 12:26 a.m., Bethel gave birth to a six-pound, five-ounce baby boy. He was small ... he was beautiful ... he was perfect! Dark hair covered his tiny head. His back and arms too were covered with fine dark baby hair. This was something only a mother would notice as she examined every inch of her new baby. He looked to be a week old already. Bethel beamed with joy at the thought of a son. She loved Donna beyond words but secretly desired a son this time. This would make the perfect, happy family: Dad, Mom, Donna, and now this little boy. They would call him Billy Wayne. The name Billy would come from Cecil, whose full name was Billy Cecil, and the name Wayne came from Cecil's nephew, Wayne, whom both Cecil and Bethel were very fond of.

Cecil would be so proud when he heard. Perhaps now, with a son who would look up to him, he would want to stay home more.

*This is perfect*, thought Bethel. This would complete their lives, and they could become the perfect family. They could get their lives back on track and go forward from here.

With so much hope for the future and a good ending to all of the evening events, she fell into an exhausted sleep. She dreamed of a better way, of a better life with Cecil. She loved him beyond the boundaries of reason, and now, she hoped that their marriage could be what it was supposed to be.

Bethel slept soundly with her dreams. She was oblivious to the rains still coming down outside. The storms of that night were, in some prophetic sort of way, indicative of the storms that were brewing on the horizon of all of their lives. This new baby, Billy Wayne, born in the midst of a storm, would grow to see storms as a way of life. To him, there would come to be something magnificent about the Appalachian sky when it flashed with lightning and rumbled with thunder.

Change was definitely on the horizon of Bethel and Cecil's lives, but they had no way of knowing just how significant those changes would be, nor could they have slept as soundly that night had they known.