



ENRICHED
CLASSIC

BLESS THE BEASTS & CHILDREN

GLENDON SWARTHOUT

Includes detailed explanatory notes,
an overview of key themes, and more



IN THAT PLACE the wind prevailed. There was always sound. The throat of the canyon was hoarse with wind. It heaved through pines and passed and was collected by the cliffs. There was a phenomenon of pines in such a place. When wind died in a box canyon and in its wake the air was still and taut, the trees were not. The passing trembled in them, and a sough of loss. They grieved. They seemed to mourn a memory of wind.

Cotton dreamed.

Six of them waited in early morning, held in a kind of enclosure behind thick posts and planks and bunched up not because they were afraid but because, unused to being penned, they were excited and, close together, they could communicate by odor. They snuffed one another. Through dilated

nostrils they drew in the hot, animal odor of their excitement.

Then men came, horsemen. A gate was opened. Shouted at, they tried to stampede out together, but the gate was slammed after the lead three, Teft and Shecker and Lally 1, were through. The others waited. Soon the air was split by riflefire. It spooked the three remaining. They milled in circles, bending planks and sideswiping posts, unafraid yet more excited than ever, since it was a stimulus in the ear which they could not identify. In the after-silence they waited again.

The horsemen returned. The gate was opened and the last three, Cotton and Goodenow and Lally 2, were let out down a lane of wire fencing. It was good to be unpenned and free in the vivid morning. But when they paused to drink from a pond the horsemen harried them on, waving hats and shouting.

In an open field they made a stand. One hundred yards away a line of vehicles confronted them, and before the vehicles, a line of humans. Released earlier, Teft and Shecker and Lally 1 were nowhere to be seen. This puzzled them, as did the gunshot and Goodenow's going down, first to his knees, then folding his hindquarters, then heavily upon one side. He did not move. Cotton and Lally 2 snuffed the new strange odor emanating from the carcass.

At the next report Lally 2 leaped up and came down stifflegged, and at the other violences in the ear shook his head and toppled, his eyes glazed, his

limbs doubling and extending convulsively and brilliant red blowing from his mouth and nose. Cotton snuffed the blood. This smell he knew.

One lunge sent him into top speed, running this way only to be turned by vehicles, running that way only to be hemmed in by horsemen. Snorting, he tried another, battering head down into a wire fence and recoiling upon his haunches. He bounded up, maddened by the obstacle of steel which must give way before him.

Raging, he stood. Omnipotent, glaring at the line of humans, he centered on the muzzle of a rifle and down the barrel and into the half-face of a woman seated on a tarpaulin sighting him. She fired. He recognized her. The microsecond's recognition shattered his heart even as her bullet broke his brain. It was the face of his mother.

Cotton woke with a cry.

His forehead, palms, and inner thighs seeped sweat. He disgusted himself. He was fifteen, the oldest, too old to have bad dreams.

He checked the time. It was five of eleven. He had been asleep less than half an hour. Hoisting himself on an elbow, out of habit he checked his personnel. Goodenow, Teft, Shecker, Lally 1—where was his brother? Then he remembered: Lally 2 had moved pillow and sleeping bag under his bed at lights out. In the seventh bed, Wheaties, their counselor, about whom no one gave a damn anyway, snored. All present, sir, and accounted for.

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ISBN-13: 978-0-7434-9369-7

ISBN-10: 0-7434-9369-9

\$6.99 U.S.

\$7.99 Can.



9 780743 493697



50699



PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.