

Cornfield – Alex Allen. Xaverian College.

The Coroner read aloud the title of today's newspaper to me 'Body found in Swamp Car'.  
"What happened over the weekend, Jonas," he said.

I scratched my chin and began-

Sunny days in the rural Kansas heat are always tough. You know that. Friday was no different, the ranch was busy as ever filled with the sounds of Father yelling at James or Betsy, the eldest, to get up out of bed and get on with bringing in the corn. Whilst at the same time us young uns was running round all of the silos, chasing the others in a game of tiggy tag.

I recall Mother was sat on the porch reading the Good Book at the top of her voice as if she had an audience that had never before heard the Holy Word. I was crouched down, hiding beside the house when I heard a rumbling sound in the distance.

It was a loud gurgle, loud enough almost to drown out Mother's impassioned reading of Corinthians 13, 'Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.' I recognized the other noise as an automobile. We never really see no automobiles, hardly in the town and only scarcely when once a year we travel up to Kansas.

I was confused as to what an automobile was doing this far out of town, so I popped my head out of the hiding spot only for my sister Emily to tag me with a thump to the side of the head. The others came running up.

The automobile rumbled to a stop and settled itself. Now with an audience of spectators, the door groaned and a foot emerged stomped onto the dirt. A man announced himself: "My name is Peters. I am the Kansas State farm inspector." He smelt of travel and cologne.

Then mother's voice. 'Well, that's no bother Sir, come inside I'll fetch you a coffee'. She cooed warmly at him, as she led him indoors and told us to go get Father and our brother and sister. Father and James and Betsy was already halfway back from the field, their footsteps labouring with weight of sacks of corn. I could hear father grit his teeth. "Those meddlers from the state" he said. "Best behaviour all of you, this idiot could get us shut down if he's a mind to"

Inside, Mother offered to show him to his room accompanied by Betsy carrying his bags. I was told I'd be sleeping with my brothers. They disappeared off with a creak up the rickety wooden stairs.

Anyhow after this excitement for the day, we just got on with our business about the farm milking the bellowing cows, mucking out the neighing horses, feeding the grunt grunting pigs, getting things ready for market as you do. I heard Mr. Peters come out and he asked Betsy to show him around the cornfields. They were gone for some time. In fact, I didn't hear him again until after I had been sent to bed, when I heard him laughing downstairs that everything was to his satisfaction, "Yes, siree."

But all hell broke loose that night. I was asleep when I heard a terrific bang from Betsy's room and a scream and a male curse accompanying it. It was loud enough to wake up the whole house and Father banged open his door and stamped down the corridor. There was shouting, sobbing, a thump, a shriek, a thud.

I felt my way into Betsy's room sore afraid and stepped in something sticky. "Get back to your room Jonas" Father sighed. I did as I\* was told. .I lay in the dark listening to fast whispering, choked

sobbing and then footsteps clomping downstairs. Soon afterwards I heard the coughing rumble of Mr. Peters' car fading off into the distance.

"Mr. Peters took it in mind to sleep in Betsy's bed and it broke", explained James the next morning. "Father had to throw him out."

"And that's all I heard that happened", I told the Coroner who was interviewing me. "I wish I could say I saw something."

"Well, that's plenty enough of detail, Jonas my boy. James and Betsy aren't talking, but I think we can figure out what's happened," replied the coroner with real warmth in his voice.

"You can go now, thank you for your time" he added, helping me up by the shoulder, handing me my cane and guiding me to the door.