

Blue Earth County

In Blue Earth County, the winters are bitter, but the summers that yield bad crops are even harder to reconcile with.

Mary Anne has the broadest shoulders in all of Southern Minnesota. She wakes up and begins work before dawn even has a chance to introduce itself to the sky. After feeding the chickens, milking the cows, and making sure the tractors are ready to go for the day, she comes back with enough time to make breakfast for her son Rudy.

There's still some sticky spots of raspberry jam on the white kitchen cupboards leftover from the same day that Mary Anne's husband Don got swept away in the big tornado. Don leaving jam on the cupboards when having his morning toast was always her biggest pet peeve. Now, she just wishes he was here to do it again.

Rudy rushes down the creaky stairs, rubbing the morning out of his eyes. "Hi mom," he says.

Mary Anne sets a frying pan on the stove. "Hey sleepy."

"I want chocolate for breakfast," Rudy says.

"Eggs it is," Mary Anne says.

After scarfing down his eggs, Rudy washes his plate in the sink and attempts to wipe off the jam spots from the cupboard with a wet rag.

"Wait," Mary Anne says. "I'll take care of that."

"I can do it," says Rudy.

"You need to get ready for school," Mary Anne says. "I'm not letting you miss the bus again."

“Fine,” Rudy says as he darts up stairs.

Mary Anne and Rudy stroll down the long dirt road toward the bus stop. At the end sits a rusty mailbox where good news doesn't usually arrive.

Mary Anne kisses Rudy on the cheek. “No spitballs or fights today,” Mary Anne says.

“Mom?” Rudy asks. “When are you going to clean the kitchen cupboards?”

“I'll clean them whenever my work is done,” she says.