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Wild West
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WILD WEST

But after they rode into the sunset, she started to wonder. Shouldn't she get a horse of her own? What did his mother think of her? How many children would they have? She made him remove his boots on the porch, clean his dishes after eating, scrape the manure from his fingernails. He wasn't allowed to bring his lariat to bed. Sometimes he beat her while he was drunk, but apologized with wildflowers the next day. After she missed her period, she asked him to add a room to the cabin, only to watch the wind whip the prairie grass at his feet. At first, he left for just a week at a time. "There's rustlers in Reno," he'd say, strapping on his gun. "There's bandits in Bozeman."

She learned to work the farm by herself, milking, slopping, digging. In the end he brought her an Indian's scalp and told her how squaws had sung lamentations over the corpse. Laying his head against her belly, he said, "Name my boy for me, okay?"—then fled during the night. She almost felt sorry for him. In the months that followed, she watched the sun rise out of the mountains at dawn like an old miner from a sickbed. And at night she watched it set again, surprised not to find herself moving toward it. In the cries of her newborn daughter, she heard hoofbeats and gunfire, pierced flesh, choruses of Native women singing (like only women could) painted dirges for the honored dead.