

The Beautiful City of Tirzah

HARRISON FLETCHER

Animals arrive after my father dies. Dogs. Cats. Ducks. Geese. A goat. A peacock. They wander into our yard several years into his absence, appearing on our doorstep, or catching our eye from feed store cages. Always, we take them in. We line our laundry room with bath towels, bed sheets and blankets. We fill cereal bowls with tap water, corn scratch and table scraps. We dab cut skin, comb matted fur and smooth broken feathers. Then we flick off the light and watch them sleep. Strays make the best pets, my mother tells the five of us kids. They won't leave.



Beggar's night, 1970. My big brother is late. Again. Our mother has given him permission to play on the ditch behind our house and to see if the neighbors will give him Halloween candy a day early, but when I peek out the back window to check on him, the sun has already set and the shadows drip like ink from the cottonwoods. I don't say anything to our mother, who sits stiffly in her antique rocker chair, tapping a Russian olive switch on the floor. I scoot across the living room on my knees and take my place in

front of the TV, where my three sisters are watching *Dr. No*. It's a school night. We've changed into our flannel pajamas. Our hair is damp from the bath.

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