

William J. Moore

### The Chronicles of Wire Will: Chapter 3

The cow was bellowing at the angry bear as the wine glass flew across the room forming a slow moving cloud of wine across the kitchen. The bear ducked and the glass shattered the window, sending shards out into the yard. The cold air rushing in did little to cool things down, if anything it only made things worse. Billy's mom closed in on her target, raising her hand to slap her spouse. Billy backed out of the kitchen and took refuge in his bedroom, the screaming and yelling dulled only by distance and walls.

Billy sat on the bed, the tears drying on his cheeks. His stomach tied up in knots. It hurt. His mind turned to the one thing that he wanted most: a friend. Reaching under his bed he pulled out the twisted wire coat hanger that he stowed away there and sat bending it in his small hands.

"Oh, hi Billy-eee" came the slow drawl of Billy's only true friend. "Uh, hi Wire Willy." Billy felt calm. He was not alone now, he fell asleep.

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On his way home from kindergarten, Billy found a nickel on the street. A whole nickel. He could not wait to put it into his jar at home, he was saving for a new truck that ran on batteries. Stuffing it into his good pocket so it would not be lost, he then noticed the big boys playing baseball in the empty lot next to the house nobody lived in. They never invited him to play, even though he had a nice baseball mitt that his cousin Bob had given him. No, Billy went home. Taking off his coat and tossing it on the couch, he went in and found his mitt and ball in the toy chest and ran outside to play. He threw the ball and then ran after it, imagining that he was playing catch with a friend. Soon, Billy was sitting on the steps. He was unhappy. Standing up, he dashed into the house leaving the door open. Ignoring the bellowing of his mother, he ran into his room tossing the mitt and ball on the bed. Seeing the wire coat hanger on

the floor, he picked it up. Flitting out to the couch, he wriggled into his coat, out the door he went, slamming it behind.

Around the house he ran, into the backyard with its high six foot board fence penetrated by an old wooden house door with a lock that was locked and a door knob in it. Billy picked up a stick and began tapping, playing a giant upright xylophone.

"Hi Billy-eee. What do you want to do, Billy-eee?", Wire Willy had come back to visit, this made Billy less unhappy.

"Uh, I want to play with the big boys but they won't let me and I can't leave the yard."

"Hmmm... Billy-ee, we can go into the woodshed and climb the wood pile and crawl out the loading window onto the pile of wood in the alley."

This sounded good, but Billy raised his objections, "Well Wire Willy, I'm not supposed to leave the yard and there are spiders in the wood pile."

"Billy-eee, yes the spiders will see you but they might only say you are throwing the wood in through loading window. You better squash as many as you can."

Tossing aside the stick, Billy set forth on his mission with great relish. Opening the door to the workshop, which was just a small room filled with odds and ends and his fathers workbench covered with tools. There was a single light bulb suspended from an extension cord on a nail pounded part way in the wooden ceiling. Billy picked up the plug laying on the floor and plugged it into the extension cord that ran from the workshop under a wooden sidewalk into the basement of the house where it was plugged into a light fixture there. Billy stepped through the narrow doorway into the woodshed lined with neatly stacked cedar, a big pile split pine lay under the loading window; which was in the upper half of the wall covered with a small barn door. Billy looked for the little eight legged spies and stomped them out of existence. Not

finding anymore, Billy climbed the woodpile to the loading window and turned the crude wooden latch that allowed the door to swing inside. Billy looked out the window at the alley, he had done nothing wrong, yet.

"Billy-eee, let's go, the big boys are playing down the alley in the empty lot!"

"But I don't want to get in trouble, Wire Willy, one of the spiders might tell, you never get all of them."

"Billy-eee", Wire Willy was perturbed at Billy's resistance, "when we get into the alley, just throw a chunk or two of wood in the window and the spiders will think you are piling wood into the shed."

Billy giggled at this idea and crawled through the window onto the outer wood pile and onto the hard packed dirt, rocks and gravel that was the alley. Looking first to make sure that nobody was looking at him, he ran off up the alley, not even slowing down to stomp in the mud puddles. It was nearly two whole blocks to the vacant lot, but Billy did not make it to the vacant lot. Just before the impromptu baseball field was the vacant house that was between the fire break and the alley. Two naked apple trees stood in the front yard inside the white picket fence. Outside of the fence was the congregation of the big boys. They were picking up rocks out of the alley and hurling them at the defenseless house, which screamed a shattering cry when a piece of the alley would pierce one of its many eyes. Billy moved closer to the boys, he knew that breaking windows was wrong.

"Billy-eee, those boys are playing a game, whoever breaks the most windows wins. You can play too. Just pick up a rock and throw it, like they are doing."

Billy thought this over. He wanted the big boys to like him. Scratching a rock out the hard packed surface, he took aim and threw. The rock landed far short of the house but Billy

became determined. This time he found as many rocks as his little hands could hold and he began chucking them at the house as hard as he could. Some of the big boys looked at him and smiled and even laughed.

"They like me, Wire Willy!", hurling another ineffectual stone.

"Billy-eee, I know they do, I told you they would."

The siren would have been something that Billy liked; except that some of the big boys started to run away. Billy turned and looked at the police car. It was the Sheriff's car. Everyone just stood still. That is when he heard that awful mooing of his mother storming down the alley with a switch in her hand, screaming at him, "William blah blah blah moo moo moo, I am going to beat you until moo moo moo..."

She dragged him down the alley the willow switch punctuating the end of each sentence flowing out of her bovine mouth. It did not matter that he had not actually broken a window or even hit the house.

Billy sat on a chair in his room waiting for his father to come home from work. The light was turned off, only the grey of the window filled the room. He hated the willow out in the yard and he hated the spiders even more. The five o'clock whistle blew sinking Billy's heart ever deeper because his father would be home soon. Too soon. He was more alone now than ever.

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The sound of boots on the front porch caused Billy to rock back and forth on the chair. He wondered whether it would be a belt or a willow switch today, not that it really mattered much. The loud lowing of his mother's voice mixed with the bellowing of his father seemed to drag on for eternity, each second a lifetime. Billy's stomach began to hurt again, he wished he could be a bird and fly away out the window, not that it would matter because the spiders would

tell and they would find him anyway. Billy listened for the sound of the door slamming, as this meant that his father went to cut a switch or two from the willow.

Slam.

Billy reviewed his options. He could try to hide somewhere but that only made things worse. Begging only worked for his oldest sister; when he tried it he got more licks. What to do?

"Billy-eee, all you have to do is cry. Wait until the third lick then start crying." Wire Willy made a good point.

Slam, the boots getting louder on the pine floors and stopped. The door opened, warm smoky air filled the room. The executioner filled the doorway, several switches in his left hand "C'mon bud, you know what to do."

Billy rose in slow motion. He did know what to do. Crossing the room, his father backed out of his way, the smell of his fathers labor etched itself into Billy's mind as Billy turned the corner and stepped into the bathroom. The clinking sound of the single light bulb going on when his father pulled the string dangling from the ceiling.

"Drop'em and bend over the tub. Every time you bend your knees we are going to start over. Every time you lift your hands we are going to start over."

Billy pushed his patched corduroy trousers down around his ankles then pushed his underwear down also. He bent over the old high sided bathtub and put both hands flat on the bottom, keeping his knees as straight as he could. There was a tug as one of his father's boots planted itself on his pants, to prevent squirming and flight.

"Bud, did ya break a window with a rock?", his father asked.

"No."

His father let out a bit of a sigh followed by what might have been a chuckle.

"But your mother told you not to go outta the yard, right?"

"Yes sir."

"You count, nice and loud.", he commanded the child.

"Yes sir."

The first stroke was always the worst, as soon as it landed the anticipation evaporated leaving only the stinging pain. The hard part was the counting, it was easy to be distracted. Billy nearly forgot to cry.

"Twenty!" Billy sobbed, and his father walked away. Billy pulled up the elastic around his waist covering the welts striping his bottom down to his knees. Washing his face in the sink Billy returned to his room. He hoped it would not be long until dinner.

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"Billy! Dinner!", was the roar of the cow all the way from the kitchen. Billy rolled off the bed and went to the bathroom to wash his hands, he did not want another infraction today. Wiping his hands on his pants he jetted down the short hallway to the dining room table. His father was seated at the head of the table already. His two sisters were seated to side of the table at his father's left, his mother at the opposite end nearest the kitchen. Billy took his place to the right of his father. Billy looked up at his two sisters. They knew he was on the pecking list. Their compassion far surpassed by their joy of not being on that list. Billy looked down in his lap and waited for prayer so he could eat. He was very hungry, fresh baked bread and homemade soup wafted into dining room. Billy just wanted to avoid any trouble, eat, and go to his room to play, alone. His mother brought in the large pot of hot soup and put it in the center of the table, then stepped away to get the bread. Putting the bread on the table made it all

complete. His father gave the look that signaled the participants to bow their heads for the prayer. His father began to speak, his self inflicted ignorance apparent to all that heard him, ignorance that his father was proud of. Billy asked that he not have any of the stewed tomatoes in his bowl, his request was ignored. His mother plopped not one, but two in his bowl and set it in front of him. He reached out and took a big piece of bread and put it on the table next to his bowl. Reaching into the his bowl with a spoon, Billy looked at the macaroni, peas, beans and potatoes that swam around the nasty tomatoes.

"Girls, did your mother tell you what your brother done today?"

Billy slid down in his chair, picking his soup.

Taking a cue, Billy's mother began to tell: "Your brother found a bunch of hoodlums down the street vandalizing that empty house and he decided to he wanted to be hoodlum too." Turning to Billy with shaming eyes sighting down a long bony finger indicating the small boy, she preached, "You want to be a hoodlum, do you? A window breaker? Somebody had to pay for them windows you broke. Well now, you are going to have to pay for them windows, aren't you?"

Billy's mind tumbled. He wondered what she was talking about now. His father furrowed his forehead while stuffing soup soaked bread into his mouth. His oldest sister scowled at him and parroted his mother, "YOU are a hoodlum!" The contempt struck him hard. Billy stuffed the last morsel of his bread slice into his mouth and looked into his bowl. All that was left was the two vile tomatoes. Billy tried to eat tomatoes, he just couldn't. They made him gag. If he ate them his stomach would knot up until they would hurl themselves free, leaving the stench of his guts far up in his nose.

"Your mother and me talked this over. Tomorrow your mother is goin' ta take you over

ta talk ta Mr. Galwright so you can pay fer them windows. Now finish up your soup.", his father took another slice of bread and dipped it into his now full bowl of soup.

Billy stared at the red blobs in his own bowl, "Mother, can I have some more bread please?"

His father answered, "No seconds 'til you finish up what you got, boy".

Looking at his father, Billy asked, "May I be excused, please?"

"No. Not 'til your bowl is cleaned up. You just sit there 'til you finish it up."

Billy sat there alone, spooning the slimy masses back and forth.

"Billy-eee, just stuff them down and then you can go barf them up.", Wire Willy advised him.

Billy did not want to. Finally he acquiesced, plunging his spoon into the tomato, he plugged his nose and shoved it into his mouth. Ignoring the gag reflex he choked it down, his stomach already rebelling at the forced entry. Taking a drink of water to clear the taste from his mouth, he prepared the second one. Looking at his Martian adversary fixed upon his spoon, its pulsing veins and leaking seeds, he plugged his nose again and began to swallow it down. The taste burned in his mouth, the texture horrified him but he forced it burning down his throat; pushing it down with water. His bowl was empty.

"May I be excused NOW?", Sitting up hoping for release, stomach rumbling volcanically.

"Is that bowl cleaned up?", His father growled from the couch.

"Honey, I will check his bowl", His mother coming from the kitchen to check compliance. "It's clean."



"You can go, bud. Go get some wood out' the wood shed, then go to your room."

Billy jumped up and headed out the back door to get the wood. The nausea doubled him over. With a single violent wretch he expelled his dinner onto the ground. Every time this happened, Billy had to spit, trying to remove the taste and the disgusting seeds from his mouth, now that stench was up in his nose. Sigh. He could carry one chunk of wood at a time, which he stacked next to the short pot bellied stove in the kitchen. He brought in five pieces and went to his room. Pulling out the bottom drawer, he reached in and pulled out two cookies and stuffed them under his pillow. Putting the drawer back as quietly as he could, he stood up and went to the bathroom. He washed his hands then let the cold icy water fall into his palms, filling his hands, Billy drank, refraining from using the cup on the back of the sink. Billy knew that his sister sometimes put terrible things in that cup, sometimes it was spit, sometimes it was something worse. Filling his hands again, he plunged his nose into the water and snorted the water up into his sinuses, trying to wash the stink out. Violently sneezing the water back into his hands, repudiating the burning water, he rinsed his hands again. Turning off the flow, he wiped his hands on his shirt and walked exhaustedly back to his room. He stood at the door deciding between relative safety of a closed door and sleeping in a warm room. If his door were closed, no heat from the wood stove could circulate in. He closed the door and undressed, he put his pants back in his dresser and he stuffed his shirt into a pile in his closet, turned off his light and crawled into bed. Retrieving a single cookie from under the pillow he gnawed on it. He wondered about Mr. Galwright. He wondered how much a window cost. He wondered if he would ever get that new battery operated truck. Probably not.

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"Billy, Billy get up!", his mother was standing in the hallway bony fingers wrapped

around the doorknob on the half open door, head partially leaning into his room. Billy rubbed his eyes, it was cold, but warmth was spilling into the room. Stretching, he sat up on the side of the bed and put his feet on the cold painted floor.

"I am up.", Billy blinked at the room.

"You go in and run yourself a bath and hurry up, we don't have a lot of time." She spun about and trundled away. Billy went to his closet and gathered the dirty clothes he had there: two shirts and some socks and a pair underwear; and went into the bathroom. Stuffing his load into the wicker hamper he then put the rubber stopper into the drain of the deep bathtub. Then he turned on the hot water and removed his underwear from the day before. He put his underwear into the hamper then climbed into sitting on the toilet to perform his morning constitutional, feet dangling. Upon successful completion, he plunged his hand into the water in the tub, the water was nice. Crawling over the side, he slipped into the water. In a moment, the bar of soap became a boat speeding about the tub and the wash cloth was an octopus trying to attack the boat.

"Billy, Billy!! Did you wash your ears? Did you wash behind your ears? Did you wash your popo? God, Billy, your filthy."

Billy looked up at his mother from the tub of grey water. She took the wash cloth from him and scrubbed his ears and neck, then she poured water over his head and rubbed soap in his hair. Billy squeezed his eyes shut. Then she poured more water over his head.

"Billy, Billy, did you wash your popo?", grabbing him by the shoulder and turning him over onto his belly, not waiting for a response, she applied the wash cloth to the offending area, grinding away. Then she snatched the stopper from the drain, her fingers snagged his upper arm and wrenched him out of the tub and started sanding the water off of him with a coarse towel.

"Brush your teeth and comb your hair and go get dressed and hurry up, NOW!" She stormed off.

Billy brushed his teeth and walked back to his room with a towel around his waist. He took out the pants he wore the day before and put them on, the nickel was still in his good pocket. Taking out a shirt he put it on and tried to tuck it in, failing miserably. Sitting on the bed, Billy put on his socks and shoes, then stands up.

"Billy-eee, they are going to take all of your money for the truck.", warned Wire Willy.

Billy had not thought of this, he was glad that his friend was there to help him.

"Billy-eee, take half the money out of the jar and hide it, so they can't take all of it."

Billy thought about that. What a great idea. Billy went to get the jar from the dresser. It was not there. He knew where it was. She had taken it. The cow had put her hoofs on his truck money. It was not fair. All he had now was one nickel. Kneeling down, he pulled out the bottom drawer and put his last nickel with the last four cookies. Replacing the drawer, he wondered if he might get pancakes for breakfast.

Billy went to the kitchen and stood next to the still warm wood stove. His mother hands him a bowl of homemade granola rocks with homemade plain yogurt spooned over it. She was dressed in her green Sunday dress, hat and gloves. Billy did not think it was Sunday, he took his bowl and sat down at the table. Billy sat and tried to chew the little bricks of grain that his mother had fired in the oven, covered in the sour bite of plain yogurt. She sneaked up behind him and began raking his hair into place.

"C'mon, let's go.", She tugged him away from the table and shoved his coat at him. Billy put it on and followed her out the door.

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The building where Mr. Galwright worked was a square, white three story building across the street from the drug store. There was big double doors in the entrance. Once inside, Billy ascended up the stairs behind his mother, tethered to her by gloved hand, seeking absolution from Mr. Galwright.

"This is your fault, Billy, if you had been a good boy we would not have to be doing this. You will not do this to me ever again.", stopping at the top landing in front of the closed doors with the frosted glass and gold letters on the door.

"You see that Billy? That is Mr. Galwright's name. He is a very important man. He manages the whole town for the company. He does not like little boys that break his things. You are going to apologize to him and pay him for trying to break his windows. Do you understand?"

Billy sighed and nodded yes.

Pushing the door out of the way, Billy's mother spoke to the secretary sitting behind the desk, "I am Mrs. Pasture and we are here to speak to Mr. Galwright."

"Just a moment, please." The secretary smiled at Billy and lifted the phone and pressed a button, "Mr. Galwright, Mrs. Pasture and her son are here to see you." The secretary smiled and indicated the door to Mr. Galwright.

Billy looked at the secretary, who looked Billy straight in the eye with a smile and winked. Billy started to giggle when his mother jerked his arm, pulling him into Mr. Galwright's office.

Mr. Galwright sat behind a huge wooden desk, he was looking down at papers that were there when he looked up to look down at Billy through thick black square frames. Billy's mother sat down in one of the chairs and with a small air of indignation cross her ankles.

Billy walked around the desk right up to Mr. Galwright and spoke "Mr. Galwright, my name is Bill. I threw rocks at your house. I just wanted to be friends with the big boys. I am real sorry Mr. Galwright."

Mr. Galwright leaned forward in his chair, pushing up his glasses and pushed his necktie straight. "Bill, what do you think would happen if everybody threw rocks at windows?"

"Everybody would have fun", whispered Wire Willy into Billy's ear.

Billy tried not to smile. Shoving his hands into his pockets Billy thought about this question and answered with seriousness, "I think that people might get cut on all the broken glass, Mr. Galwright."

Mr. Galwright seemed satisfied with this answer. He and Billy continued to discuss the social and economic ramifications of window breaking. Mr. Galwright seemed to like Billy. When he was fully content with Billy's repentance he pronounced, "Billy, since you did not break any windows, you don't have to pay for any."

Billy's mother stood up and strongly voiced her opinion, "NO! Even though he did not actually break the window, he has to pay for it. Here, take this. He has to learn." She walked up to the desk and spilled all of the truck money onto the desk.

Mr. Galwright quit smiling. He glared at the angry cow in his office. Billy's heart fell, but he had expected something like this to happen. It always did.

"Billy-eee, listen to me... Billy-eee", rasped Wire Willy. Billy listened as Wire Willy whispered into Billy's ear.

Billy halted his mother before she could drag him out of Mr. Galwright's office and said, "Mother, aren't you going to tell Mr. Galwright about the window you broke when you threw the wine glass at father?"

The cow's face froze with her mouth half open, her cheeks turning red and her eyes froze over with glaze. She was truly speechless. Mr. Galwright sat back in his chair, his hand strategically placed over his mouth but his laughing eyes spoke volumes to Billy. The cow recovered quickly and shoved Billy back into the room with the secretary, "Wait in here while I talk to Mr. Galwright."

She closed the door. Billy was learning just how powerful his friend Wire Willy really was.