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# Rainbow's End

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# 1

IT WAS THE SAME old Saturday night Mom and I had been having off and on since my father died—or at least the man I Rainbow's End had thought was my father. Here lately, the evening got started earlier than it had been starting, as the filling station where I worked was closed, with the sign hung on the pump: "Sorry, No Gas." So there I'd be, home with Mom. But don't get the idea that things were slow or that time dragged. Plenty was going on, a little too much, for my taste, and too lively. The first part—in the early evening—wasn't too bad, just screwy, which, of course, there's no law against. She'd begin talking about how rich we would be by and by, pretty soon, one of these days, and tonight was extra special on account of the rainbow she'd seen late in the afternoon, after the rain when the sun came out.

"And you know, Dave," she whispered, "what's under the end of that bow—a pot of gold, that's what. It's waiting for us, I can feel it—if we just show some gump. If we take the car next week, go out there and get it."

"There's a road to the end of that bow?"

"You know what I mean."

"No, I don't."

Because she'd meant so many things at one time or another, I'd more or less lost track. Like for a while she meant oil, insisting it ought to be drilled for on our land, and then we'd get royalties on it, "thousands and thousands." Rainbow's End I told her southern Ohio was all drilled out. "They used to have oil here," I explained, "but that was years ago, and there's no more to be had—on our land or any other." Then for a while she meant Marriott. She'd read about Marriott in the papers, that he should locate a park on our land, with roller coasters, ferris wheels, and on the river a steamboat ride.

Our place is on the Muskingum, ten miles up from Marietta, or two places, actually—small farms next to each other that we grew produce on, she doing most of the work, me helping her when I could, with hired labor when we needed it. It's true that steamers once ran on the river, but I didn't know any way of getting Marriott up here. She'd meant other things too, each one

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goofier than the last, so what she meant now I didn't exactly know, but I let her tell me; I knew I'd have no peace till Rainbow's End she did.

"OK, what is it?" I asked.

"Well," she began, drawing a long, trembling breath, "this time it can be done—by us. We don't have to ask nobody. We just up and go—drive over in our car when we get good and ready to Rainbow's End take advantage."

"Of what?"

"Because this time we can—"

"Will you for God's sake say it?"

"It's in Maryland. We drive over to Cumberland, which is less than a day's trip, and—"

"Yeah? And what?"

"Buy us lottery tickets."

So, all that puffing and poofing, and she come up with this. But she was small and young and pretty in her freckle-faced mountain way, and I knew by then that she lived in a world of dreams. So I kissed her and told her: "Fine, we'll drive over to Cumberland—that's the place?—next month when the roads dry off. Right now, everything's flooded, and we'd be up to our hubcaps in water. But soon as it goes down we'll go and buy ourself a ticket."

"More than one, Dave—we have to buy a bunch. That way, you're bound to win."

That wasn't the way Rainbow's End I'd heard it, but I went along Rainbow's End and for a while kept her company pretending. Then after a while I asked: "So OK, we cash a ticket—then what?"

"Well, we'll be rich."

"I asked you: *and then what?*"

"Then...with all that money we could sell this place, sell the other place too, and sit back and—"

"And what?"