

## **Mama's Favorite Day**

Every Sunday, Mama would rise before the sun, pull on Papa's worn muck boots, and go to the hen house to collect eggs for the day. She'd softly scrub their fragile, brown spotted shells and place them in a stainless steel pot on the stove to boil. Like clockwork, Mama would climb the creaky wooden stairs to our rooms, her lavender slippers quietly scuffing against them. My little sister Jesse always got woken up first. Next was my big brother, Holt. Even if I was already awake, I'd wait for Mama to come to my room.

"Levi, baby. It's time to get ready for church," she'd whisper in her soothing southern drawl. Mama always looked a mess in the morning; her hair curlers were barely holding on, her face was covered in sleep lines, and yesterday's mascara was streaked down her cheeks. I never dared to tell her that she looked anything but beautiful. My favorite part of the morning was when she'd plant a warm kiss on my forehead before going to get herself ready. I never understood, but somehow Mama always had time to put on her best pair of blue jeans, her favorite flannel, her makeup, and her boots before the rest of us had even brushed our teeth. By the time we all stumbled down the stairs and were situated in our seats, breakfast was on the table.

I remember one Sunday in particular where Mama was running late; one of the hens had escaped the coop when she went to get eggs for breakfast. She spent so much time chasing the hen around the yard that she couldn't cook breakfast. Instead of the warm meal we had grown accustomed to, we were stuck with bowls of cornflakes. Jesse and Holt didn't seem to mind, but I refused to choke down the bland cereal. Mama begged me to eat - she even said I could put sugar on it. I responded by pushing the bowl away from me and crossing my arms. If Mama

knew the spiteful thoughts in my head she would have served me a bar of Papa's Irish Springs for breakfast.

Most Sundays, after we'd all shoveled Mama's homemade biscuits, sausage gravy, and hard boiled eggs down our throats to our greedy bellies, she'd herd us all into Papa's rusted red pickup. There weren't enough seats in the cab for us kids to ride with Mama and Papa, so we piled into the bed of the truck. Holt and I always claimed a wheel well while Jesse sat on an old hay bale. Mama's car had enough seats for all of us, but Papa refused to take anything but his truck to church; said his buddies would think he'd gone soft or something. Church was only a few minutes down the road anyhow.

The church building itself wasn't anything remarkable. It was a small, white building that resembled an indoor horse ring with a wooden cross over the front door. Surrounding the building was a covered porch full of handmade rocking chairs where the older folks liked to gather and gossip. Mama, Jesse, Holt, and I would spend the few minutes before service greeting all of the people rocking in the chairs and handing them each a slice of Mama's famous banana bread. Holt and I hated this part; the old ladies could never resist pinching our cheeks. By the start of Preacher Beaumont's sermon, our faces were red as tomatoes.

Once all the bread had been passed out, my siblings and I would follow Mama to the front pew. She said that the closer we were to the altar, the closer we were to God. I didn't like sitting in the front row because I never saw God and Preacher Beaumont spit a lot when he talked, but I did it because Mama told me to.

I don't remember everything that would happen at church, but I do remember how enthusiastic Mama would be. Throughout the day, Mama wore a smile from ear to ear. When the

church band started playing “Amazing Grace,” Mama would put her hands in the air above her head, sway to the beat, and sing along. By the time the last chord was struck, she’d have tears in her eyes. When Preacher Beaumont spoke, she listened intently and responded with a resounding, “Amen!” She never bowed her head to pray - she turned her face to the sky as if she could see something the rest of us couldn’t. If someone in the church was being baptized, Mama stood beside the water trough, towel in hand, ready to help the preacher however she could.

Although I grew up in the same church as Mama, I never understood her devotion to God. I believed in Him, but mostly because it’s what Mama wanted. I learned to love Sundays, but only because I got to see Mama so happy. I admired her determination, her faith, her kindness, her grace, and her perseverance in the face of doubt. I wished I could dole out, “Bless your heart’s,” as honey-dripped as her. Mama gave me life and love and I gave her grief and greed. I might not know much about her God, but I know that she’s with him now, looking down on me this Sunday as I watch my beautiful bride glide down the aisle towards me. I know in my heart she’s proud. My only hope is that I’m half as good as her.