

Chapter 15

I woke up gradually the next morning, only aware that I had slept well and deeply. I wasn't immediately aware of where I was or could I remember what had happened in the last few days. The sun was up, and I could hear all sorts of birds greeting the morning outside. I kept my eyes closed and took deep breathes. Oxygen began rushing to my brain in ample supply and the drama of the last few days began to play upon the backs of my eyelids like a movie upon the screen. All the players and scenes were there in full color; The Hooligans, the Spaced-Out Counselor, the truck I stowed away in, getting caught in the barn by Angela and the saw weary kind eyes of her grandfather the night before.

I opened my eyes and looked across the room. Angela was still asleep with her book cradled in her hand at her side. I immediately became aware of the smell of bacon, eggs and bread. I rose to my feet, stretched and put my newly found glasses on. I shuffled quietly out of the bedroom towards the kitchen.

Her grandfather was sitting at the dining table already in his work clothes. The table was set with plates full of biscuits and eggs. There were pitchers of milk and orange juice between the plates. I looked at the old man. He looked at me. Neither of us spoke. He stared at me intensely like he was analyzing every square inch of my body.

At last, he smiled and said "Been on a long trip, son. Bet you're hungry. Sit down and have some breakfast."

My stomach grumbled as the wonderful savory aroma filled my nasal passages and warmed my lungs. "Thank you, sir" I said. I sat down next to him and took a plate. He piled it high with scrambled eggs, bacon slices and two puffy steaming biscuits. I devoured the bacon and eggs, cut open the biscuits, slathered them with butter and poured can syrup on them from a small ceramic pitcher that was on the table.

He filled a large glass with milk and a small cup with orange juice. I grabbed each of them and gulped them down promptly. The old man smiled and nibbled the food from his plate. "Nothing like a good breakfast, is there, boy?"

I nodded my head at him.

Angela wandered into the kitchen, took a place at the table and started to serve herself, "Morning, Paw-Paw, how ya doing this morning?"

"Just fine and dandy, dear. Your young friend here has a quite and appetite this morning. Guess he's had a long journey."

She started laughing. "Oh, you should have seen him in the barn. He was eating all your peaches from the peach crib."

My heart began to race. I took a glance at the shotgun hanging on the wall. The old man chuckled and said, "Yes, indeed. I do like me a good peach now and again. And once you eat one, you just can't stop there." His eyes grew larger. He leaned over to me and whispered, "Did she tell you that I'd get the shotgun after you?"

I nodded my head.

"Oh, don't pay that granddaughter of mine no never mind. She tells that to all her classmates at school. She tries to make me out to be some kind of crazy old fart. I haven't shot that thing since way back in '64 or '65. Right before Johnny got drafted and ended up in that mess in The Vietnam. Right before they shipped him out, he and I went duck hunting one morning his senior year in high school. Bought back the limit, filled the freezer. Roasted duck. Fried duck. Duck gumbo that summer, all summer long."

His voice trailed off, he seemed to lose his train of thought. He quickly picked up the empty plate, took it to the kitchen sink. He stared out of the kitchen window lost in thought. There was a gentle morning breeze that pushed the tire swing back and forth like a pendulum.

Angela looked at me, picked up her plate, took mine and carried them to sink. She placed them next to the old man, "Paw-Paw?" she interjected.

The old man took deep long sighs of air, turned away from the window and said, "Better go wash up, son. You've got a lot of miles on you and probably haven't had a bath for days. There's an old green chest of drawers at the end of the hallway there. You might find some clean clothes in there that will fit you."

I found the chest. I picked pair of jeans and a shirt that nearly fit me. I made my way to the bathroom and washed the dirt and grime off me from my journey. I then walked back into their living room, took a brief look the telephone and looked away. The old man walked toward me, patted my head and said, "There, now, feel better to be clean, son?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you." I said.

He smiled and said "good to have you here, boy. If there's anything you need, let me know." And with that he put his straw hat on and walked out the door.

Angela began to follow him. I turned to her and said, "Where's he off to?"

"We gotta pick the daily peaches and get them to market before they get too ripe and rot. And we gotta do it before it gets too hot out there!" She smiled at me, gave me a friendly little punch on my shoulder, "C'mon sill boy. It'll be fun." She smiled again and I got a funny feeling inside that I had never had before.

Part of me wanted to beg and plead to ask her to use the phone again but there was another part of me deep down somewhere in my soul that was becoming comfortable in the moment I found myself in. And at this moment, for some strange reason I felt I needed to follow this girl wherever she wanted me to go. I shrugged my shoulders and walked through the door with her, almost as if it was the perfectly normal thing to do.

