

## Chapter 24

She turned to Angela and me then said, "Come on you two, let's go look in the cupboard." We followed her back to a part of the house that I hadn't seen yet. There were two deep freezers, some various kitchen appliances and garden tools. In the back corner there was a tall shuttered closet. She pulled the shutters apart. The shelves were for the most part, empty, except for quite a few empty jars and lids.

"Oh, Good Lord," she exclaimed. "It's dreadful!!"

She paused and then spoke to us, "Listen you two, we've got lots to do here, so let's get busy!"

And then she rummages a bit around the room. She found two mopping buckets. She then handed one each to both Angela and me, "Take these. Run out to the barn, fill them with those Loring Peaches. Bring them back to me in the kitchen.

She looked at Angela and said, "You know which ones are Loring's don't you, child?"

"Yes, Mam, the yellowish large ones."

"Good girl," said her grandmother as she patted her on the head. "Now, hurry!"

We walked out the door and she was still muttering things to herself like "So much work to do", "It's just been too long.", "I don't know how Walter managed all by himself."

We raced down the red dirt road to the barn, stopped at the door to catch our breath and Angela unlatched the door. We walked in. The natural sun light was cutting through the roof rafters. Angela stopped walking.

"Listen, you..." And she paused.

"Yes?" I replied.

"Listen...Mister... You...whatever your name is. What is your name? She put her right hand on my shoulder and squeezed it. She squinted her eyes and peered intensely at me. "Who are you? Who the heck is you, Mister?"

I shrugged my shoulders and said, "I don't know. Who do you want me to be?"

She was taken aback, "Well, I've already told you that I'm not going to call you Johnny or Dad or Daddy or Father!" She shook her body as if ridding herself of an invisible chill and continued, "That just give me the... the...creeps."

"Your grandmother seems to think that I'm Johnny. I even think The Old Man is starting to believe it."

"Oh, maybe they've just gone crazy, "she said and threw up her arms.

"Maybe it's you and me that are crazy, "I replied.

"Answer my question then."

"Which question?"

"Who do you think you are then Mr. Smarty Pants. Who do you see when you look at yourself in the mirror?"

"I don't see anything anymore. I see a face I no longer recognize."

"Oh hush...you!" she cried.

"I think maybe I am your father reincarnated just like you said the other day. But I'm still me too. Me, David Oliver. Maybe somehow, your grandmother is the only person who can sense it."

Angela moved further away from me over towards the corner of the barn. She picked a peach from one of the baskets, looked at it a bit and placed it in her bucket, "No, you ain't. I don't think so. You ain't my daddy and you ain't no reincarnation. Your just old David Oliver, runaway from Church Camp just like you told me when I caught you stealing those peaches. You are David. Do you hear me?"

Her voice got louder and louder. She stamped her feet with each exclamation. She began crying and added, "Stop it, David, don't scare me anymore. I thought you were my friend. Quit all that talk!"

I shuffled close to her. "You are my friend, Angela. Do you want me to leave? I'll leave right now if that's what you want. If that will make you feel better and not be scared anymore." I put my bucket down and began to walk towards the door.

She stepped in front of me and said, "No, I don't want that. I don't want you to go. I need a friend now more than ever."

"So, then I'll stay then. I like it here. Like it better than any place I've ever been."

"Let's just be clear here, Mister, "she started. "You're David when we are alone. You are my friend and my pal. You ain't no ghost or my daddy re-born and reincarnated. I thought it was possible, but I just don't believe it now. OR maybe just not yet. I'm a girl, I can change my mind when I want to, if I want to without you questioning me. Are we clear?"

"We are clear, Angela."

"But when we are around them, we can play their game. You're their 'Johnny'. I just don't see any point to breaking my Granny's heart. She drew closer to me and looked at me in my eyes without blinking, "You're good with this masquerade then? You can play that game for her?"

I nodded my head, "I can Angela. It doesn't bother me at all. I just want you to be happy. I want your grandparents to be happy.

Three weeks ago at Church Camp all I could think about was getting back to my parents but in the last few days I could only come up with reasons that my real family was right here-Angela, The Old Man, and the Old Man's wife, Clarisse.

"Angela, "I said, "I feel like I belong here."

She shook her head violently to clear it out, "Oh enough of this going around and round talking." She picked another peach out of the basket, "Look, Mister. Look at this here peach. It's a Loring. Larger than a baseball. Almost grapefruit size. Slightly yellow. Fill your bucket with these. Chop Chop!" she commanded.

"Chop, Chop?" I asked.

"Yes, chop chop. Means right now, right away, hurry, Mister before I get cross with you."

"And what if I don't Chop chop?" I asked.

"I might just fetch the shotgun!" she blurted.

"You couldn't even lift it, "I said.

"Oh yes, I can. You ain't the only one who's been out on a racoon hunt in the middle of the night. The only difference is, I didn't fall on my ass like you did!"

I blushed and shuffled over to the peach crib and began loading the peaches into my bucket. She nudged up to me and gently hit me on the forearm with her fist, "Hey you, you know I was only joking." She said.

"I know, "I replied.

She began to laugh. We willed the buckets and hobbled back to the house only stopping once to each a peach, ourselves.