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If for any reason you wish to contact the author (Mr. Fritz) you may send an e-mail to fanzivino@sc.rr.com. I hope you enjoy my story.



HANNAH, AGE 10

“Jenny”

By

TJ Fritz

“Jenny, wake up!”

Oh, no, Jenny thought. It was already Saturday morning. Dad was shaking her.

“Come on, Jenn. Rise and shine! We have to get going.”

Jenny peaked out from under the blanket. She wondered how anybody could be so bright and cheerful this early in the morning.

“Jenny? Are you awake?”

Jenny rolled over slowly, propped up on one elbow and squinted at the window.

“Dad? Is it still dark outside?”

“Yeah, but the sun will be up soon. Hurry up and get dressed. We’ll leave in a half hour. I’ll take you to Waffle Willie’s for breakfast.”

Dad walked quietly down the stairs so he wouldn’t wake mom. Jenny could smell fresh coffee brewing in the kitchen.

As she brushed her teeth she looked at her reflection in the mirror. “How did you get yourself into this, Jenny Simpson?” she mumbled. “It’s still the middle of the night and you’re going to spend four hours riding in a pickup truck to visit a crazy old woman! *You’re* the one who’s crazy!”

Dad had talked Jenny into going with him to visit Granny Simpson, her great grandmother. Granny was 88-years-old and lived alone on a farm. There were only two weeks left of summer vacation before Jenny started sixth grade. She’d much rather spend this precious Saturday at home with her friends in Warren, Ohio than drive to the middle of Nowhere, West Virginia.

* * *

“Steak and eggs and hot coffee,” Dad told the waitress.

“And what will you have?” the waitress asked Jenny.

“A Belgian waffle with strawberries and whipped cream, and hot chocolate, please.”

“Okay.” The waitress scribbled on her pad, smiled and wiggled away.

Jenny knew that Dad’s taking her to Waffle Willie’s was a bribe because he knew that Jenny dreaded visiting Granny Simpson. Dad had said repeatedly, “You should get to know your great grandmother. She’s not a crazy old recluse like you’ve heard the relatives say. She’s really a great old lady. It’s just that she has her own way of living in her little piece of paradise. You’ll see.”

Sure, Jenny thought. She doesn’t remember ever meeting Granny. Jenny had seen some pictures once. Everybody says Granny’s a crazy old woman. She’s 88, lives alone on a hundred-acre farm with her dog and shotgun. Jenny also heard that Granny chews tobacco and has to use an outhouse. How disgusting, Jenny thought. The floors in her house are probably covered with tobacco spit.

The waitress returned and served their breakfasts. Jenny attacked her waffle.

“I talked with Granny on the phone last night,” Dad said. Jenny wanted to say something stupid like, “They have phones in the mountains of West Virginia?” But she didn’t. “She’s really looking forward to seeing you,” Dad continued. Jenny kept quiet. She didn’t want to sound interested or excited.

Dad went on. “Not too many ten-year-olds ever get to meet their great grandmothers.”

She thought she’d better say something agreeable. “I know, Dad.” Then she quickly filled her mouth with a chunk of waffle so she wouldn’t have to say any more.

By the time they finished breakfast. The sun was shining. They climbed into Dad’s old pickup and began the long journey.

* * *

Jenny got woozy and soon drifted off to sleep. Long rides always did that to her. Dad would wake her whenever they passed famous landmarks or interesting sites. The incredible bridge that spanned the Ohio River near Steubenville was worth it. But when Dad woke her to point out the Moundsville prison in West Virginia, Jenny would have preferred sleeping.

After a couple of hours of driving on smooth highways and wide streets through small towns, Dad turned onto a narrow gravel road that led into dense woods, wound in every direction and went up and down steep, bumpy mountainsides. The road became rough and turned into a single-lane dirt path.

“Dad? Are we lost?”

“Well, um . . .” he hesitated. “It looks familiar . . .” Jenny could tell from his goofy expression that he was teasing her.

“Come on, Dad. “

”Don’t worry, Jenn. We’ll be there in ten minutes.”

The dirt path became so narrow that tree branches touched the sides of the truck.

“Dad? Are you sure?”

He smiled. “Look, Jenny.”

She turned forward and couldn’t believe her eyes. The road opened into the most beautiful valley she had ever seen. On either side majestic mountains reached almost to the fluffy clouds. A crystal blue river divided the lush green valley that spread between the mountains. In the distance an even taller mountain reached into the clouds.

As they got closer Jenny saw a humble-looking, two-story white house surrounded by ancient pines and oaks. There were flowing pastures, manicured fields, millions of wild flowers, a giant vegetable garden, and several carefully-pruned orchards with trees whose branches were drooping with fruit. The fresh,

stirring breeze blended countless sweet fragrances from grasses, flowers and fruits. So this is Granny's piece of paradise, Jenny thought. It must have been just like this for Adam and Eve.

Dad stopped the pickup at the end of the cobblestone walkway that lead to the front door. Jenny noticed a barely legible address on the rusty mailbox that read, "Sarah Simpson, RD #1, Silver River, WV." The old wooden front screen door creaked open, and Granny stepped out onto the front porch to greet them. As Jenny and her dad got out of the truck, dad took a large box from the truck bed and carried it toward the house.

"Hi there, Larry!" Granny smiled and gave a big wave. "Oh good, you brought Jenny." Jenny was amazed Granny even remembered her name.

As Jenny and her dad approached the house, Jenny was surprised at how small and frail her great grandmother looked. Granny wore a brightly colored floral print dress that was faded from years of washing, and a green plaid flannel shirt, unbuttoned with the sleeves rolled up. Her blue eyes sparkled with excitement, and her short wavy hair was as white as the new sneakers on her feet.

As Jenny and her dad walked toward the porch, the screen door burst open and Granny's big dog charged at them at full speed. The old scruffy hound's loud,

ferocious barking was frightful and deafening. Jenny instinctively drew close to her dad.

“Maxie!” Granny yelled. “Stop!” The dog halted immediately and melted to the cobblestone walkway. He drooped his head, wagged his tail and looked at his master as if to say, “I’m just doing my job.”

“It’s okay, Maxie,” Granny told him. “They’re family. Now go back into the house.” As she held open the door, Maxie darted up the steps and disappeared in a flash. “Come on in,” Granny invited. “I have a little snack waiting for you.”

“Pam put together a care package for you, Granny,” dad said, referring to the box. “I’ll bring it in.”

“Thanks, Larry. You’re married to a good woman there. You are blessed.”

“I know, Granny. She’s the best.” Jenny’s mom had filled the box the night before. Jenny had no idea what was in it, but it looked heavy. What do you give an old woman who lives alone on a farm, Jenny thought, shotgun shells and chewing tobacco?

They entered Granny’s home and Jenny looked around. There was a large livingroom with a fireplace, two bedrooms and a kitchen. The wooden floors were bare. The livingroom furniture was well-worn and sagging. Jenny peeked into

Granny's bedroom as she passed and saw a brass-rail bed and an old chest of drawers. An oval mirror hanging on the wall was so faded that it could barely reflect an image. Leaning against a corner, within reach of the bed, was a double-barreled shotgun. Granny's home looked like a spotless museum. Jenny didn't see tobacco spit anywhere. And she was happy to pass a real bathroom which meant she wouldn't have to use an outhouse.

“Make yourselves at home,” Granny said as they entered the kitchen. Granny's kitchen was warm and inviting. The air was filled with invisible currents of fresh-baked bread and pies. There were four old unmatched chairs around the large antique oak table. Three place settings were neatly arranged with colorful vintage Fiestaware, ancient, mismatched silverware, and neatly-folded linen napkins. The display was homey and made Jenny feel welcomed.

In minutes the table was covered with muffins, bread, butter, jams, juices and hot coffee. “This'll keep you 'til lunch,” Granny told them. “I have a turkey in the oven that'll be done in an hour.” As Granny joined them at the table, Jenny noticed that Granny was wearing a tiny gold and silver cross that hung from a silver chain.

* * *

After the snack Dad took Jenny for a tour of Granny's farm. He pointed out the fruit orchard where peaches, plums, pears and apples grew. Granny's huge garden contained every vegetable Jenny had ever heard of.

"What does Granny do with all this stuff, Dad?"

"Oh, she cans and freezes enough to get her to next year. She gives the rest to her church, friends and neighbors."

"Dad? I noticed a cross on her neck."

"Yeah. Your great grandfather actually made that for her a long time ago. He was a handy guy. He even built the house she lives in. Did you notice that the porch goes all the way around it?"

"Uh-huh."

"He said he did that so he'd be able to watch every sunrise and sunset throughout the year. He was an amazing man. He took good care of Granny. He died before you were born."

Jenny took a deep breath and tried to lock into her mind the incredible beauty and magnificence of Granny's paradise. The rustling of the leaves from the steady breeze, countless fresh sweet smells, the sound of birds singing in the trees,

lush green fields, the noise from the flowing river all filled Jenny's senses to the brim. She looked up and saw a small plane, but it was so high she couldn't hear it. It simply floated high above this astonishing heaven on earth. They passed a hillside where a herd of sheep were grazing.

"Those belong to Granny too," dad said pointing to the sheep.

"Dad? I'm confused. Is Granny rich or poor?"

Dad smiled. "I once heard Granny say that a rich person is not the one who has the most, but who needs the least. I don't think Granny needs anything, do you?" Jenny had never known anyone like Granny, and she wasn't sure what to think.

* * *

As Jenny and her dad entered the kitchen, Granny was still busy preparing lunch.

"Ten minutes," Granny said. "I hope you two are good and hungry."

"I sure am," Dad said. "How about you, Jenn?"

"I'm starved!"

"Ten minutes, huh Granny? Good! I wanted to show Jenny the attic."

“Oh, you and that attic,” Granny said. “Go ahead.”

* * *

Jenny followed her dad up the steep narrow stairway that led to the attic. Jenny was curious. She wondered what the fascination was that interested her dad. The door to the attic creaked loudly but opened easily and they entered a large, single, square room, the top of Granny’s home.

There were neat little piles of old clothes, kitchen utensils, and dozens of boxes filled with a variety of odds and ends. A faded Confederate flag hung on a wall. Several Civil War-vintage rifles were leaning in a corner.

“Oh, there it is. Over here, Jenn. I want to show you something.” Dad led Jenny to a stack of framed pictures that were leaning against the wall. Jenny looked at each one as her dad flipped them forward so she could see photos of old relatives. Then one picture caught Jenny’s eye.

“Dad, stop! Who is that?” Jenny stared at an old photo of a beautiful young girl in a white lace dress. She had long brown hair, sparkling eyes and a friendly smile. Though the photo looked a century old, for Jenny it was almost like looking into a mirror. “Who is she, Dad?”

“That’s Granny, Jenn. When she was your age.”

* * *

As the three sat at the table for lunch, Granny asked Dad to say the blessing. As they prayed, Jenny watched Granny close her eyes and hold her tiny cross close to her chest.

Jenny had never seen a more magnificent meal. The table was covered with steaming bowls of baked potatoes, jumbo green and yellow string beans, foot-long carrots, beets the size of baseballs, bright red sliced tomatoes and hot homemade bread. In the center was a platter with the fresh-baked turkey. For desert Granny served her famous peach cobbler. Jenny had never tasted anything so delicious. Granny's brunch was better than a Thanksgiving Dinner.

"Oh Granny, this is awesome!" dad said. "Jenny? Do you know what's so special about this meal?"

Jenny wasn't sure what he was getting at, but she was curious. "No dad. What?"

"Everything here is from Granny's farm?"

Jenny took her tall glass of cold milk. "Even this?"

“Oh, you can thank Nancy for that,” Granny said. Jenny assumed Nancy was Granny’s cow.

* * *

As Jenny and her dad walked toward the pickup to head back home, dad noticed some boxes

“Granny? What did you do? What’s in the boxes?”

“Oh, I thought you’d like some fresh fruits and vegetables. I also included a peach cobbler for Jenny.”

“Oh, Granny, thank you!” dad said.

Jenny was already in the truck and watched as her dad hugged Granny goodbye.

“Bye, Jenny,” Granny said to Jenny as she gave a tiny wave. “It was good to see you.”

Jenny looked at her great grandmother then jumped out of the truck and rushed into her Granny’s open arms.

“Bye Granny. Thank you for everything!” As they embraced, Jenny thought of the photo she had seen in the attic.

“God bless you, Little One,” Granny said.

in the truck bed.

After Jenny had been back to school for several weeks, one evening while she was doing her home work the phone rang and her dad answered it. He listened quietly for a moment then said, “Thanks for the call.” He hung up the phone gently and turned to Jenny.

“Honey? Granny passed away in her sleep last night. I’m sure she’s in heaven right now waiting for us.” He was quiet for a moment. “Are you okay, Jenn?”

Jenny didn’t know what to say. She didn’t know how she should feel but she answered, “I’m okay, dad.”

A few days later when Jenny came home from school, her mother said, “Jenny, something came in the mail for you today.”

* * *

Jenny loved getting mail. She ran to the kitchen and found a small package with her name on it. The return address read West Virginia. She ripped it open and found a note that said,

Dear Jenny,

Granny wanted you to have this.

It was signed by someone named Uncle John.

She carefully opened a small envelope and found Granny's cross and chain.

The End