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Evie

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible

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Dedication

To my darling husband, Jim and our precious daughters, Keri, Aimee, and Amber. Thank you for your love and encouragement.

Chapter 1

*I*t was 1946, after the war. Times were hard for everybody. We didn't have it as hard as some though. We only had three mouths to feed: Daddy, Mama, and me.

We had a little farm in Mt. Vernon, Illinois. Daddy worked hard to put food on the table. Everything was going just fine for us, until that dreadful day in May.

May 17 to be exact.

Daddy was out plowing the fields. He figured all fear of frost was over for the year, and he was eager to get started on the crops. Trouble was, Daddy didn't come home for dinner like he always did. Mama had cooked up a pot of purple-hulled peas, cornbread, and fried potatoes. I was anxious for Daddy to come home. I was hungry, but more than anything I wanted some of the Johnny cakes Mama had made up for dessert.

I was only 14 years old, but something told me something just wasn't right. Mama must have felt it too because she kept wringing her hands, looking out the window.

Finally, she decided to find Daddy and tell him dinner was ready. So, she set out to the fields. I waited on the porch, eager for

the uneasy feeling to go away, but it got a million times worse because I heard Mama scream—a scream I’m sure could be heard all the way up to heaven.

I saw Mama running back to the house. She threw herself on the ground and cried the most pitiful cry anyone could imagine. This behavior was so unnatural for Mama. She was usually so prim and proper. It scared me something awful to see Mama carrying on like that. I ran over and put my arms around her. She looked at me and cried harder. I was tempted to go to Daddy, but even my young mind reasoned that Daddy was the reason Mama was crying so.

Finally, Mama spoke, but her words didn’t sound like her normal voice.

“Run on down to Leonard Smith’s house!” Mama demanded in a strained, sad voice. “Tell him your mama needs help! Tell him it is very important that he comes soon.”

I opened my mouth to ask Mama a question, but she held up her hand and cut me off before I could say a word. “Please, Evie! Don’t ask me any questions, just go!”

I was never asked to do anything like this before. I wasn’t even sure in which direction Leonard Smith lived. All of our neighbors lived so far apart from each other. But I knew I had to find his house for Mama and Daddy. I took off running in the direction I thought best, and I guess I was right because Mama didn’t call me back.

I ran as fast as my shaky legs could go. I have never felt so scared in all my life. Why did Mama need help? Something awful must have happened. Finally, I spotted the house, but it was still quite a way down the road. I had to stop and rest a bit. My lungs burned so bad I felt like they were going to burst wide open. I bent over and put my hands on my knees. I was breathing so hard I felt my whole body shaking. I stood up and noticed a truck coming down the road. Could it be? Yes, it looked to be Leonard Smith himself. He drove on past me but must have noticed that it was unusual for me to be all the way down the road by myself.

He pulled the truck over, got out, and asked, “Missy, what are you doing all the way up here?”

I could barely get the words out. I was still plum out of breath. “Mama sent me! She needs your help. She said it was real important!”

Leonard’s face grew worried. He was a kind old man. His wife’s name was Opal. They were a funny couple. He was tall and skinny, and she was short and fat. I told Mama that once and she scolded me. But then I caught her smiling and figured she thought they were funny too.

“Climb on up here. Let’s go see what your mama needs,” Leonard said in a strong voice. As we drove down the road, he asked me if Mama and Daddy were sick.

“I don’t know,” I answered. “Daddy didn’t come in from the fields, so Mama went after him. She came back by herself crying.”

Leonard stepped on the gas hard. We were going about as fast as the truck could go. Gravel was flying everywhere. I had to hold on to the seat to keep from falling into the floorboard.

Leonard drove right up into our yard. He jumped out of the truck. Mama was sitting on the porch step with her face in her hands.

“What’s wrong, Laura?” Leonard asked with concern in his voice.

Mama fell into his arms and cried. She started saying something over and over, but I couldn’t understand what she was saying. I realized later I did hear some of what she said. I just couldn’t accept what she was saying. It was easier to pretend that I couldn’t understand her because then maybe her words would not be true. Leonard took Mama by the arm and motioned for me to follow. He helped us both into his old truck and drove off to his house.

As we pulled up into Leonard’s yard, Opal opened the screen door. She had a puzzled look on her face. Leonard told us to wait here because he would be right back. He ran over to Opal whispered something in her ear. She let out a gasp and then ran over to the truck. Leonard was by her side. He opened the door and helped Mama and me out of the truck. Opal pulled Mama into her chest and Mama just cried and cried.

Opal looked at me and said, “Come on, sweet thing.” She pulled me into her chest.

Miss Opal's chest was big enough for both Mama and me. Finally, I guess everything caught up to me—the fast winded run, realizing that Daddy was probably dead. I let myself cry into Miss Opal's chest too. As she rubbed my back, she kept saying over and over, “You poor dear; you poor dear.”

Leonard cleared his throat and said, “I'm going to go into town and fetch Doc. Hamilton and the sheriff. “Opal, why don't you take Laura and Evie on in the house and let them get cleaned up and rest a bit.”

He then turned and left with a stern look on his face.

Mama then looked at me and asked Opal if she could have a little time alone with me. Miss Opal said sure, and she told us just to let ourselves in the house whenever we got ready. She gave us another sympathetic look, rubbed Mama's arm, and walked slowly through the screen door. I felt that once Miss Opal was inside of the house, she would peer at us through the window, and I was right. There she was, right in the picture window, looking at us and wiping her eyes.

Mama guided me over to the Smith's porch. She pulled me down on her lap like I was a little girl again. She held my face to look square into hers. Even though I knew Mama was getting ready to tell me something awful, I couldn't help thinking that Mama had the prettiest blue eyes in the world. Daddy always told her that. Only now those beautiful blue eyes were filled with tears.

“Evie,” Mama began, “something has happened to your daddy, something bad. Your daddy has died. He is in the arms of Jesus now.”

When Mama said those words, I nodded my head in agreement, letting Mama know I already knew that information. What I didn’t know, and what I wanted to know, was *how* Daddy died, but I just couldn’t bring myself to ask. I just held Mama’s hand and let my tears fall with her tears.