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“Why I Live at the P.O.” Continuation

I should of started a palm reading business staying postmistress at China Grove because Stella-Ronda snuck on over to beg me forgiveness and get Mr. Whitaker to take her back with some letters she was carrying around, but she changed her mind, because she never knocked on the door. Just on peered from the window like a criminal. I was halfway through my pack of Hula Girl postcards that’s been piling higher than the dishes on Sundays when I spotted Stella-Rondo, but I didn’t let her see that I was missing people’s company. I looked pleased as a pauper with the conversation on those postcards and the proper voices on my radio, which sounds better now that I know Stella-Rondo wishes she didn’t make me as mad as to have it taken from her. Course I was getting tired of sitting in that room all day, but I couldn’t let Stella-Rondo know that , so I kept my eyes to my reading, and made myself give a good laugh with my belly jiggling like Santa Claus and everything. It looked like I was having a grand ball of a time in that room, or it must of because Stella-Rondo ran faster than I ever seen her run, and the P.O.’s at the bottom of a hill that makes me have to hold onto my breath when I dig my toes in the grass to get to the top.

Since she promised never to see me again, and she saw me for a good five minutes through that window I had just cleaned with a rag and the good strong soap from the grocery I figured I could go quiet as Shirley T. and make sure Uncle Rondo wasn’t using my bed to give a rest to his big feet after helping Mama rip out the cucumbers I helped her plant. But before I could even get to the front gate I spotted the baby looking at me with those Mr. Whittaker eyes of hers. She must of gotten Stella-Rondo’s sparkly charm because she fled like a ghost on fire and woke the whole house. Now I wonder if Uncle Rondo gone and shocked her ears with firecrackers for destroying his ‘peace.’ I suppose not, because they were too distracted by all their hollering through the window at me. Weren’t they supposed to be resting their tired heads?

“I ain’t coming home. Don’t you fret over *that*,” I says without having a plan other than to rip out some of those cucumbers from Mama’s perfect soil and run them back to the P.O. for a nighttime snack.

“Good BYE-eee,” yells out Shirley T.’s scraggly voice sharp as broken glass from the doorway. Now if the real Shirley Temple had a voice like that I doubt she’d of made it past the front gate of her house.

Mama sticks her head out the window and says, “Oh Sister, so you think you can walk all over my grass whenever you please? After you yelled at your mama and made Sister cry right through the night? We’ll be lucky if Shirley T. isn’t in shock after this whole thing. Why, you better pray she’s still got her senses about her in the morning.” We had a dog they treated more humanlike than me, and once he started messing up the grass and making it brown when he went on it Mama just gave him away to a girl who couldn’t even braid her own hair and no doubt couldn’t care if he came or went. Since then she became crazed about grass. Papa-Daddy was outside every summer morning watering it until it was shiny like rubber by noon.

And there was Uncle-Rondo naked down to the waist, except I couldn’t see where the window pane was blocking him a ways down south. Not wanting to miss out on anything where he could use his yelling voice he asks, “You must be happy seeing me without that robe you says I wore like some fool.” Now, he full knows that I didn’t say any such thing, that it was Stella-Rondo, but Uncle Rondo isn’t interested in the business of truth. He just likes his hollering and his prescription liquid.

Pappa-Daddy must be playing dumb too, because before Uncle-Rondo can even get his words out of his mouth Pappa-Daddy comes and asks out the next window, “Sister, have you reappeared so you can take all my hairs in the night , because you aren’t stepping anywhere near my beard you find so offensive.” Now maybe I wouldn’t of laughed if there wasn’t a sheet of chicken skin stuck to his hairs, but I did and they pounced on me like I was the last supper they were ever going to see that year, and little Shirley T. just stood squished up against the glass pane of the door, eyes wide like a creepy old Mr. Whitaker owl.

“Oh, you think you can laugh at me without harm coming to you? You’re going to be living at the China Grove P.O. until your skin starts drooping off your bones,” says Pappa-Daddy, which is funny because he’s older than all of us, but I don’t laugh this time. I want to get back into my own bed with my own scent, not that sour salty smell that rubs off that old cot from Uncle Rondo’s France days.

But I’m not going in there without them asking first, so I say, “Mr. Whitaker been sending letters like rain over to the P.O. He says he wants *his* Shirley T. back and that he needs to talk to you for something or another.” Of course none of these words is truth, but living with Stella-Rondo taught me I have to lie if I want to get myself respected.

“What?” asks Stella-Rondo so loud it makes her baby freeze like a robber that’s been caught on his neighbor’s farm with a pig under each arm.

“They’re not interesting, so don’t get your skirt in a bunch or anything like that,” I says. She’s always making a fuss so Mama and Papa-Daddy start scowling at me, but now they’re going to be giving Stella-Rondo dirty looks.

“Sister, you don’t tease your baby sister like that. Marriage is serious and unless you have serious things to say about Mr. Whitaker you can go on back to your new house,” says Mama.

“I have the letters right here,” I says patting my breast pocket stuffed with the packet of envelopes I licked closed last night. I even went and kicked them along the dusty floorboards to make them look like they were well-traveled.

I don’t know who got to me faster after that, Stella-Rondo or Mama, but it’s quicker than I’ve ever seen them run to me for anything else. “Mama, this is his signature, I’d know it in dim light. See there, he does that with his ‘t’s’,” Stella-Rondo says pointing to that thing Mr. Whittaker does with his ‘t’s.’

“My my, Sister, you are showing your sweet side for once. Go on into the kitchen. There’s some fresh apple pie by the bread box,” says Mama. But, of course apple is Stella-Rondo’s favorite, mine’s strawberry, especially when the seeds do a popping dance when you crunch them between your teeth. But it doesn’t matter. I walk into my house, past Uncle Rondo digging deep in the bathroom medicine cabinet for some more prescription, and Papa-Daddy tugging on his beard as if it was going to follow me upstairs. I open my windows wide and lie stretched out like a spider on my bed, smiling like it was still the Fourth of July.

“I have to go see him, Mama. I’m buying a train ticket tomorrow,” says Stella-Rondo.

You see, I’m a regular dimpled Cupid. If Mr. Whitaker was fool enough to marry Stella-Rondo he may not have his wits strong for denying her when she comes back with Shirley T, but that doesn’t matter to me. Stella-Rondo is going to come out of my hair, and you can bet nobody will catch me taking her back.