

Short Story

Approx. 2,500 words

Contest Winner
"Guild" 87

"Mama"

no punctuation for
your own title

Much as anything, I expect I dread seeing Ora Lee and Sister and them dressed up again in their funeral dresses, smelling like mothballs in spite of the airing. Looks to me like it's gonna be a reg'lar thing: Ora Lee's Mama's casket afloatin' up ever'time we git her buried good. Three times, counting this'un. And ever-last time, they're fit to be tied.

Got to where I don't expect no different. Same as her dragging up and down the hall at the house, aframming on that blasted pan with the spoon Ora Lee give her to make a racket with in case she needed something. That was after we brung her home from the hospital last time.

I says to myself - to Ora Lee, too, and Sister - "Yall don't pay her no 'tention and she'll quit that ordering yall around."

They'd set a spell and make like they was watching the news on the television set, all the time listening to that racket drownd' out Hugh Downs.

Wadn't long, though, before they was up amoving, toting egnogs and liquor off'n beefsteak boiled in a jar for her to suck on with a straw. Her jaws was wired shut from gitting broke when a tree



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2 (1" top margin)

I was sawing in the backyard come down on her head. She got pretty busted up.

Ora Lee and them didn't say nothing, but I could tell they thought I'd done it apurpose cause she kept hollering "weasel" at me. That's what she called me.

My name's Ira T. Dupree, and I'm proud of it!

"They ain't nothing no prettier than a straight-legged baby!" Mama'd say. "All MY babies had straight legs. Scooter looked like he was leaning toward being bowlegged, so I give him a lamming dose of codliver oil, morning and night."

Her old speckledy eyes would settle on my legs ever'time.

1/2" left margin. But they ain't no way I'd th'ow a tree on that pore ole lady's head and her already laid up from a stroke.

"Mama's living on borrowed time, Sugar," I heard Sister say to Ora Lee, ten times if she said it one, while they was washing supper dishes.

The leaders in Ora Lee's neck would git tight as banjo strings, and her big, wrinkledy lips would clamp shut, like she couldn't bear to dwell on it. She'd fold the sopping dishrag, neat as a pen, and flatten it out on the counter. Then she'd shake it out and put it in the dishpan with Clorox.

cl. Dialect must have clarity

"Mama's seen a sight of woes, Sister," she'd say. "Since before Daddy passed away she's been fading. Got the pneumonia in 1954 and pleur'sy right behind it. Cancer of the tongue in 1979. Not to mention that bout with the flu when she had the hysterectomy in May,

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right on top of it. And, Lord, if they wadn't enough, she come down with a stroke in 1980. I won't never forget us all just a setting out on the porch after supper that night, August 16th, 1980, and suddenly as you please, she quit what she was saying. Crickets ain't never sounded no louder! Mama's been through the mill!"

When she got hit by the tree in eighty-one they figgered it was over. Called up Scooter to come. He must've knowed something the rest of us didn't, 'cause he didn't git in no hurry. Got to Val'osta Hospital two days later, bringing some lil ole shirt-tail gal he called Dawn from Orlando to slobber over while we set drinking coffee and waiting.

Well, long about midnight the third day, the doctor comes out looking bushed and sends one of us at a time in to say goodbye. ^{check spelling} Ora Lee and Sister had to pull theirselves together, hugging on each other, balling their handkerchiefs under their eyes, adabbing tears.

Scooter got up and stuffed his shirt in, turning that lil ole gal's hand aloose long enough to git decent.

I got a little tore up my ownself watching all of them bawling, smelling alcohol and listening to the late night shuffling of nurse feet. I hadn't never set foot in no hospital before, much less in the middle of the night. I'd agive a pretty to a been back in my own bed and it be over, listening to the crickets. But I figgered to see it through, and when it was over I'd have some peace.

When it come my time, I went in; kind've dreading it, though. Wadn't nothing showing but her eyes - mean as a snakes'. I come up close to the bed and looked down at her all wropped up in white from head to foot, like a ha'int.

I just looks down at her and nods. And her eyes gits wild. I nod's my head and she sets in to groaning - don't have ary mouth. I looks back at the door where Ora Lee and Sister's acarrying on, look back at Mama. And I swannee if she ion't look like she's afixing to git up and slap the fire out've me.

I knowed she wadn't done for, right then. I says to myself, she wouldn't give me the satisfaction!

Shore 'nuf, she was up and about and rearing to go home in lessen two weeks. A miracle, the doctors called it. And Ora Lee and Sister set in to praising the Lord and putting bouquets of marigolds all over the place. You'd athought it was big meeting.

They run back and fo till they was plum wore out. Had me mowing grass and hoeing the garden, setting the headboard of her bed up on blocks in front of the winder, so she could see out, and running back and to, to town for bedpans and hotwater bottles and stuff. I couldn't hardly find the time to lay the corn by.

"Mama loves a clean garden," Sister said. "Mama loves smelling mowed grass."

Little Sister didn't have no place else to go since Mama left

Brunswick and come to live with us in her last days. So we took her in. And she was just as happy as she could be h'olping out in another woman's kitchen.

They *AIN'T* none of'em nothing to look at. The older they g^ot the more they g^ot to looking like Mama.

Round as a biscuit,
busy as a bee,
prettiest little thing
you ever did see.

No clear lead in
→ Center

That ^o was what I says to myself when I met up with Ora Lee at church, twenty years back. Fount out our names matched up when they called the roll in Sunday school: Ora Lee and Ira T. Had a pretty ring to it! Head over heels! Well, sir, that turnt on me. She plum dried up awaiting on her mama, lil ole wormy looking thing! Big faced just like her Ma, too, where her hair slid back off'n her face. Went slap grayheaded from worry, I expect. And hard to git ^{Be} consistent. along with! If I *SAY* howdy-do at the breakfast table, she ^o bows up and practi'cly th'ows hot grits in my face!

Sister took after'em, but she was sweeter. Course she's a sight younger'n Ora Lee. She's coloring up just like'em now, but she didn't bother me none back then.

Scooter'd abeen another matter, now. He *AIN'T* worth the salt in his bread!

"Scooter's the manager of the Holiday Inn in Orlando," Mama'd say. "Ain't no hick farmer. No siree! He ain't the kind. Smart as a whip. Never was the kind to settle for the first thing come along. I told..."

"Mama" / le

te

Y, he come to me for a handout a many atime. Toted off sausage ^{cl} after ever hogkilling we had. Cane syrup. Peas and beans. I wish I had a nickle for ever bushel of peanuts he snuck off the place. A deadbeat's what he is! Living off'n the gov'munt, moren likely! Or stealing! First'un lasts, he'll git caught! I done and had a bait of him away back before he growed his hair out long like a hippie. He took off right after he seen Mama at the hospital and them atelling him she could go anytime.

Like I said, he 'bout knowed something we didn't, though.

I come up the hard way, working out a living with my hands for me and Mommer after Popper[?] died. And me nothing but a boy. Same old ^{Be} consistent homeplace in Duran County, but a sight improved. Tore down Mommer's big ole house and built Ora Lee a lil ole doll house to keep up. After they all come to beg off'n us, ten years later, I wished a many atime, I'd akept the big one.

If I took a notion to have things to do with Ora Lee, long about midnight some nights, Mama'd clear her throat if the bedsprings squeaked ary bit.

And me and Ora Lee ain't no old folks yet! Going on foarty, the both of us.

Yeah, I reckon I spent the better part of my life figgering life was waiting on me just around the co'ner. By the second funeral, I done knowed it wadn't.

I'd done give up smoking cause Mama couldn't breathe good. Give up my fishing, too. She broke out in a rash ever'time she looked at ary thing with fins.

Wellsir, first thing I done after that second funeral was to git my can of Prince Albert and a cane pole; got me some cata'ver worms off'n the tree and lit out with Ora Lee bawling like a baby.

But that's gitting ahead of myself. Mama didn't die from the tree falling on her head. Hung on five years ~~five~~ five blessed years to the day, they said ~~after~~ after that. Inbetween, she had herself a heart attack, another stroke, fell out the back doorsteps and broke ~~her~~ her hipbone, ~~run~~ run over my shoes, and broke her jaw again; and ever time she'd snap back. Going on eighty! Doctor's up yonder in Val'osta said it was the beatingest thing they ever seen.

Didn't die of nothing. Sister just found her one morning looking up at the ceiling, like she was waiting for signs of first light.

Ora Lee and Sister hollered and carried on, knocking over furniture, and me trying to figger out if a snake got in the house. Took the ^{Dialect} ~~error~~ better part of the next day to git things straightened up for comp'ny bringing in food and setting around.

That was a sight of food! Got some of it still put up in the freezer after four months of eating reg'lar off'n it.

The pears was just aturning by the third go round, and Miss Louella, down the road apiece, scrapped up enough for a pearpie to bring over.

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And it some wet! Ever'time I got the tractor to the fields, it'd bog down. Ora Lee and them bet a pretty Mama's casket would've stayed down if we'd aburied her at Wayfare on the hill stead of Riverside in Sowell. I knowed better. It was wet ever'wheres. Besides that, I knowed nothing wadn't never gonna keep that old lady down. She was too orn'ry!

Got to where it's reg'lar as prayer meeting at Sowell Baptist Church.

"Miss Vashti's gonna be buried again thi'safternoon," Brother Travis says ever'time you turn around at a church. Folk's ^{is} got to where they just kind've yawn, but they come anyhow.

And, I swanee, Ora Lee and them takes on like they done the first time: dragging out them old gray-blue garberdine dresses and pertening up the veils on their lil ole silly hats.

"Sister, run go hang'em back out on the line," Ora Lee says, bawling all the while, standing in the door with her stomach pooching out, looking, for all the world, like her Ma.

That's when I knowed if her mommer did stay down, she'd still ^{Be} consistent. be dragging around the house in Ora Lee till I laid down and died. And I wadn't never one to try to change nothing. Just took'em like they come. Till that second funeral.

Shurf Hudson come all the way out from Sowell to the house that Friday Morning to tell us she'd done riz again. When he got out've the car, I figgered it was something to do with some of Scboter's

meanness.

"Nosir," he says. "I don't hardly know how to tell yall, but Miss Vashti's casket's done riz from all this rain."

Well, Ora Lee and Sister was astanding on the porch, fretting Before he got it out good. Then they set in to wailing like the first time.

"Tell'em to go on and bury her again," I says, standing there with my slop bucket, hogs asnorting around my feet. And it raining some hard!

"Ira T. Dupree! How dare you?" hollers Ora Lee.

"Well, Sugar, what you want me to do?" I hollers back.

"We'll have a proper funeral for Mama if she comes back up twenty times, or else! Sunday evening, three o'clock p.m., ^{JUNE 10,} 1986," she lets loose, to the day. Sister's just as screaming, nodding her balled-up head.

"Okay'sum," I says.

Well, they set in to fixin' up for comp'ny again. And pretty soon ever'body come back, hugging necks and toting food. Two days that went on, just like the first time.

I took off from work - it still too wet to git in the fields, anyhow - and set in to entertaining the menfolks on the front porch while the womenfolks hung around the kitchen. I was a easy going man to put up with it.

Ever'time - just like it was the last - Ora Lee and Sister'd set in and air out the house after the funeral. They'd put out a washing like you ain't never seen, scrub out the house, toothpick

the stove, and put up the food. Then they'd set around looking at old pi'tures and talk about old times. They'd sort out her clothes they'd done boxed up to give away, and dry up just in time for the next one.

Had to git out and out new pallbear'yers for this one. If the rain don't let up, we'll be going out've the county for folks to bring in food and flowers. I can tell they're gitting plum wore out and disgusted with giving up their Sunday rest to come to the same old funeral, again and again. Got to where some of'em's staying on for night church to keep from having to load up and go all the way back to the house and turn around and come all the way back. Come to think of it, they wadn't all that many come up to review the remains this afternoon. Yessir, I'll allow by the next go around, they won't be a tear shed, exceptin' Ora Lee and Sister's. They's a limit to what folks can take! It wouldn't surprise me at all if they didn't ask me to start putting a little extre' in the offering plate, if this keeps up. From using so much 'lectricity in the church - the preacher, too. He's bout run out of stuff to say that'll fit in.

You think Scooter's put out ary dime for one of them funerals? Nosir! Not a red cent! Didn't show up but for two of'em. I'm the mister put the cashmoney up. Took it out of my life savings. *THIS* time the undertaker did it for free, though. ~~It~~ told him if he'd adone it proper the first time, she wouldn't ariz. He didn't like it

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none, but I reckon he figgered it being the first time that ever happened in South Georgia, he'd make it good.

First time! That oughta tell you something about Mama!

Soon as ever'body took off, late that Sunday after the ^{SECOND} funeral, I took off afishing, *LIKE I SAID*.

Me and Ora Lee ain't hardly spoke to ^{Omis} yet.

Not even during this go round when I put my foot down and took off fishing again. A man's gotta put his foot down, now and again, I always say:

Come on, fish, and bite!

*Pleasant shades
of Jesse Stuart*

Errors:

Omis
p

Omission
punctuation
{ Review rules
for dashes.
Clarity

cl

Daugharty - 2

no hand to write. But I got your letter and they wadn't
nothing blacked out. I bet you didn't hear them ~~right~~ ^{right}.
Listen to Rosavelt real good next time. You never was good
at that . He's a good man and won't stir you wrong.

Things is real hard hear and that money help out a
lot. Your Aunt Lottie says to tell you to wear your cap
when you go outside cause she knows you're in Holland, England
and it gets right cold there.

Clementine's been ~~doing bad~~ ^{down with} cause she's got the flu.
Her and Cutchin both's got it. And don't ~~never~~ ^{never} say he ain't
got nary heart murmur cause the United States can't be wrong.
That's how come they couldn't use him. By the way, they
say "~~hey~~"

Like I say, I ain't no hand to write.

Mama

December 19, 1942

Dear Mama,

Looks like you could've told me ~~whether~~ ^{where or not} Cutchin got the corn in.
I reckon it don't mean much to y'all. I'm the one done the plowing
and put it out. And I reckon y'all done forgot I ain't done bad
for myself the past few years. Who was it got us on our feet? ~~and~~ ^{and saved} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~place~~ ^{place}.
If I could've got a ride home, I'd ~~of~~ got the corn in my ownself.

Don't y'all mess around and not pay the taxes on the place, for
we don't want to lose it and you know what Uncle Sam's like -
that's what we call the United States over here.

Listen to the radio at Uncle Cranford's or Uncle Wilton's
and maybe you can figger out what's going on and where I'm at.
It ain't Holland, England, that's for shore. Cause that ain't no
place, and Aunt Lottie ain't got no sense. Tell her that. And
Clementine and Cutchin neither one ain't got no flu. Don't let'em
pull that on you. And Roseavelt is the biggest asshole I ever seen.
If it wadn't for him I wouldn't be in _____. They ain't

Daugharty - 3

no doubt they'll black that out, but at least I got to write it down. They all saying Mery Christmas here in _____ and that's a bunch of hogwash. I ain't never in all my born days run up on such a bunch of sissy yankees! Scared of their own shadows. I ain't no more.

Write to me when you get the chance and hold down the place with the money I send you. Don't let Cutchin get hold of it and drink it up. Reckon I'll close.

Wess

January 14, 1943

Dear Mama,

I still ain't had no hearing from you. Let me know how everything's holding up there cause I'm real worried.

Wess

January 15, 1943

Dear Mama,

I still ain't had no hearing from you. Let me know how everything's holding up there cause I'm worried to death.

Wess

Dear Wess,

How are you? Fine I hope. We're doing fine. I got three letters ~~from you~~ ^{from you} right in a row. Two of'em said the same thing. Are you shell-shot, or what? I ain't no hand to write.

We had a puny Christmas, but I never was one as you know for decorating and such. Clementine had a big time singing about Santy Claus, and her full-grown.

Daugharty - 4

About the corn, we got the better part of it in. And ^{SO} ~~SO~~ ^{FAIR} been able to feed up and grind up enough for grits and cornmeal.

I brung you up better than to say stuff like that about Roseavelt. If you was home, I'd wash your mouth out with soap suds for saying that nasty word. I got that much. And they did black out where you was at. I ain't so shore and certain you ain't in New York, for that's where I mail off your letters to. I mail'em air mail and they take'em by airplanes and a airplane ain't gone make it ^{CLEAR} overseas from Valdosta.

How come you wanting to know about the place? I couldn't figger than out. Your Aunt Lottie says you're crying for home. She says she seen men do that in ~~the~~ last war. Cry like babies. Be a big boy and don't worry about the taxes, cause I'm walking to ^{Stateville} ~~Sowell~~ thi's morning to take care of business.

Mama

March 22, 1943

Dear Mama,

I got your letter today and I was real glad. I been stuck out in the middle of nowheres, ass-deep in snow for the longest. If Clementine was here she wouldn't never wish she could see none no more. I can't even hardly recollect what home looks like. We just today got back to civilization

- that's what we call the post at _____
and it ain't much of a place. Just muddy snow and dead
trees that won't never make no shade, can't nobody make
me believe they will.

I'm glad you paid the taxes on the place. Did you
get the last money I sent home?

Mama, I know things is real hard on you and I ain't
never been one to say sweet stuff to you, but I'm shore
sorry you got to walk two miles to get stuff and pay taxes.
You been a mighty good mama, real smart, and I love you.
I love you more than anything. I'm sorry I ain't told you
that before like I ought to. But neither one of us ain't
never been much for sweetness and light. I been thinking
about the Lord-above and praying a right smart and if I
don't make it back, don't worry cause I feel like I might
go to heaven. I don't think I'll make it back, for them
damn Germans is picking us off. I shot more than I want
to count my ownself. Seen one've my buddies get his brains
blowed out going up under a bobwire fence. I wished I could
go home and walk around the place and hear the crickets
and all. Georgia's the best place in the world. And they
ain't no place like ours. My head hurts real bad from all
the racket from the guns and mines going off all around
me. I reckon it's hard for you to picture where I'm at
cause we ain't never had no snow back home. I'll be glad
when this war gets over. Churchill is a good man and maybe
he can get us out. Tell Cutchin to get off his sorry backend
and plant the corn and all with the money I sent yall.
And Clementine ain't a bit above getting out there and planting
a garden and saving you some work. She could've walked
the two miles to pay the taxes if it did take her two days
and save your feet. (over)

Are you feeling good? I keep thinking about you getting old and sick and not feeling good, but I can't picture it cause you ain't never been took sick, except with bad teeth. Do you need to go to the doctor? Tell one of Cranford's bunch to take you. How many of his boys ended up having to go to war? I ain't had no hearing, but I reckon Cooley and Neely got off, being sickly and all.

Mama, I'm having to think real hard to remember stuff, cause I'm sick and swimmy-headed all the time. I ain't never been sick neither, but I am now and it don't make no difference when they put you out there.

It's raining right now and I dread pulling out again. It ain't cold there like it is here. Everything stays froze up. I feel like I been froze in water all the time. When you write back tell me how things looks there, for I can't hardly remember. It's such a long ways off from here. I hate this place. Nobody don't like it. Is Uncle Wilton still a-living? I think about him sometimes.

I reckon I'll close for now so I can get some shut-eye. Pray for me. And Cutchin ain't got no heart murmur; he put a bar of Octagon soap under his stinking arm to raise his blood pressure.

Wess

P.S. Yall be shore to plant the corn north to south, not east to west.

June 2, 1943

Dear Wess,

How are you? Fine I hope. We're doing fine.

Seeing as how you give up writing, I figgered I'd better check up on you. I ain't had no hearing from you

striplings

since them two twin letters this past January. So I wrote to the Red Cross and they wrote back that you weren't on what they call their casualty list. I figgered that meant they didn't know of nothing bad could've happened to you. I hope you're not dead. I been praying down beside my bed that you wadn't.

If that bunch of sorry gentlemen in charge of the war would send in the Air Force, instead of messing around shooting one or two on foot, they could stop Hitler and his bunch. Tell'em that. I don't know how come you to get in the Army, no how. If you'd a-gone in the Air Force, like I told you, you could fly and get to come home some and that's who's gone save us over here at home. The Air Force. Sammy's in the Air Force and looks like he's gone make a career out've it. He's a leutenant already and moving up. Course, he might not be nothing, seeing as how Jaylee pumped it up like she does everything else.

Lord, we're having some hot weather here! Flies is already starting up. At night, we set around listening to a lil ole piece of a radio Cranford got us and me and your Aunt Lottie and Clementine figgered out where you was. They figgered at first you was in Spain. I said no you was in Belguim because you said that about the snow and all. I know it's the European Theatre cause that's how the Red Cross put it. Is that Belguim? We get real mixed up and get to fighting amongst ourselfs. We can't picture you nowheres but back've a mule. Are you eating all right?

Mama

P.S. You behave youself! I know about how you are with women and all. I heard from Clementine, who got it from one of Aunt Mae's girls, that you been knowed to hang out with trash. I wouldn't be surprized if they was a warrant

out for you when you get back for knocking the fire out've that old Flowers gal. Her pa's gone be after you, or my name ain't Nancy! You want to come down with the sifflus or something - that's a disease that makes you go blind as a bat and crazy to boot. And I hope you didn't have things to do with that gal, cause she's your fourth cousin on the Tuten side.

September 9, 1943

Dear Mama,

If I didn't get mail from you, I wouldn't get none from nobody and I might be better off. When I come from

_____ I found a pile of letters that didn't amount to nothing but some more of the "How are you? Fine I hope" business. A bunch of my buddies has to look back at their letters ⁴⁵ from home to answer everything. I reckon I'm lucky, for what you say sticks in my craw and I don't have to.

You always could get on the back track. Them fly-boys in the Air Force ain't nothing but a bunch of show-offs. Us paratroopers is the ones dying for our country.

You must not've got my last letter. If you get it don't pay it no mind, cause I didn't mean too much of it. I don't know how you got by with saying that about B. and all. I reckon the government figgered you didn't have good sense and was just guessing. But you guessed right about B. But I'm pulling out. Not about the Air Force.

Yall stick to cooking and crocheting from now on. I was glad you took the time to tell me about the flies and hot weather. That's real good news. What about the crops? Did yall have any? Did it rain? Did Cutchin lazy away? Did Uncle Wilton take the place over again? I'm looking for some answers back! I reckon I'll close. We're pulling out. I can't believe you went to the Red Cross.

I'm eating real good, if you can call K-rations good. Tell Clementine I hate her and she better keep her mouth

Striplings

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out've my business. I ain't knocked nobody out or up, and anybody says different's a liar.

Wess

January, 1944

Dear Wess,

How are you? Fine I hope. We're doing fine.

I wrote ^{rite} right back to you and it come ^{rite} right back to me. So I'm doing it again. Whatever was in the last letter don't matter now, no how. It's been such a long time.

How's the war coming? We hear real good. I still say the Air Force'll get rid've Hitler and his bunch. But I didn't mean the Army wadn't helping out. You always was touchess. ⁹At least, you're finally making some money, but, Son, I know it's hard on you. I think about you when I get the chance to lay down for a few minutes. Your Aunt ~~Cal~~Lottie says she bets you've got the disynteria. Boil you some brier roots and ~~drunk~~ tea,

It's cold here now, but we ain't gone be cold long as I can chop and tote fire wood. We got the crosscut saw and went down back've the branch and got some live-oak. I never did like to burn pine in my cookstove. Which reminds me, Clementine set the kitchen a-fire while me and Cutchin and your Aunt ~~Cal~~Lottie was gone. Don't worry, we got it out.

I shot me another you-know-what stealing my chickens last night. Don't worry, we buried him in a different place in the garden. Your aunt ~~Cal~~Lottie said we might ought to think about saving him to eat, things being hard like they are. If the war don't get over soon, I don't know what's gone come of us all.

Clementine just come through and said to say ^{"HA"} ~~hey~~ to you. Her constitution's still ^{mittee} ~~awful~~ weak and I have to watch out for her. She gets too excited when Aunt Mae comes

with her silly girls.

We're getting too much rain, ^{it's} running in the lot. My old milk cow bogged down. Don't worry, we got her out, all've us pitching in. I bet by the time you get this it'll be spring up there.

Pray before you go to sleep.

Love,

Mama

P.S. I hope you ~~haven't~~ ^{ain't} been drinking ^{again}.

March 6, 1944

Dear Mama,

I got your letter finally and they ain't no spring here ever, just dead stuff and winter. They lying when they say the war's coming along fine; it ain't. Me and you could do better than that damn Rosevelt and my son've-a-bitching leutenant. He's gone get us all killed. I got to where I don't pay him no ^{mind} tention. I look out for my ownself. He ~~made~~ ^{had} us hole up in a cellar in _____ eating apples ^{for} two weeks ^{when} a bunch of Germans come by. I heard ^{them} coming and I got out've there, dodging through the apple orchards. Next thing I knowed, they'd done hauled off and throwed a grenade in that place and blowed it to kingdom come. They wadn't nobody left but me out've my company. How's that? I kept running in the woods, playing dead sometimes if they come up on me, until I could get ⁱⁿ back with another company. It's bad and I ain't shaking no more. I done come too close to dying and gone back the other way.

Was that a possum or a nigger you shot stealing your chickens? I wished I'd a-been there to help out. Did anybody ever find that other one we buried? The nigger. It won't do to tell MY Aunt ~~sa~~ Lottie or none of them ^(you-know) who } about everything. They're liable to land us in jail.

Stirplings

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Here, a nigger's well thought of, gets treated as good or better'n the rest of us. They're color blind. Not the niggers. Write me, for I want to know about what you shot and all.

I'm glad we're getting rain. Or yall are. I feel like I can hear it in this blasted tomb of a building. It's too late and ain't no need for me to tell you to tell Cutchin to plant. He either did or he didn't. I bet I know which one.

I reckon I better close.

Love,
Wess

P.S. Clementine needs the shit beat out've her. *And I hope you & Aunt ~~Wess~~ ^{Wess} been slugging paragon & asphidity again.*

July 27, 1944

Dear Wess,

How are you? Fine I hope. We're doing just fine.

It quit raining ^{right} after I ^{wrote} you and ain't hardly rained since. I guess it just rained out. The crops didn't come up and I went right by the Farmers' Almanac, planted my ownself.

Cutchin's been laying up with some old gal around Sowell.

I reckon Webb Holmes is got it made. A bunch of German prisoners is working on his farm. I wouldn't have'em on this place if the corn didn't never get planted, sneaking bunch of murdering scandrels.

That war would be over by now if they'd send the Air Force in to blow up the Ruhr Valley dam, instead of messing around with one or two of them lil ole factories. Tell'em that. Tell'em too that I want my boy back home. I need him. Not that I can't manage without you. But tell'em I love my baby boy and I want to see him before I go blind

with old age. Tell'em Hitler's a son've-a-bitch, and I said so. We ain't all crazy here in Georgia. You ^{right} about them yankees. Your Uncle Wilton says so too and asks about you ^{right} along. I told him about what you said about the Army and the cellar and about how smart you was getting out before they blowed up the place. And I told him how you wanted to know about the possum or the nigger. He laughed till he couldn't hardly stand up. He's getting old and wore out, like me. I hadn't never told a living soul about me and you and that nigger till then and I felt like God had done forgive me for it and so much time had passed since then that it didn't count no more. Not with a war going on. I reckon I better close and get my chickens in before dark.

Love,
Mama

September, 1944

Dear Mama,

It don't matter how you get the crop in, get it in. If Cutchin ain't got the get-up-and-go to do it, get the Germans from Webb Holmes. Get Hitler, if you have to.

I don't know, Mama, how you come up with that stuff about R.V., or how it got a-past the government. But, God, you're something else! I ain't never give you enough credit. How did you find out?

Love,
Wess

November 6, 1944

Dear Wess,

A little bird told me. I got to get in the clothes, so I reckon I better close. Look out for Hitler and his