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TAPED

Minnie and Her Gun

3 1/2 pages

Gransallie never was what you might call "non-violent." After all, she had lived on the farm all her life, up until about 1950 when she went away to Florida to work as a practical nurse. She had shot possums caught stealing her chickens smack-dab between their black marble eyes; she had bashed the heads of diamondbacks in the briarberry thickets and left them for buzzards to peck the jewels from their hides. Come Sunday, she would wring the necks of chickens she had hatched from eggs and fry them for preachers she didn't have ^{even} ~~much use for~~ ^{like}; and while my daddy was away during World War II, Gransallie with her shotgun stood guard over my pregnant mother and my older sister. God help the tramp that stepped foot up the back doorsteps where Gransallie was feeding him from a tin pie plate.

But in the nineteen-sixties, after Gransallie retired from the Florida East Coast Hospital, in St. Augustine, and came back to live on the old homeplace, she seemed to have learned a thing or two about more civilized methods of gathering food, defending herself and settling disputes--mainly with her mouth--and couldn't abide guns. I mean, she might not say anything if she went to your house and saw your deer rifle behind the kitchen door, but she would sneer. Her nose, which could sniff out a dirty towel or sheet that looked perfectly clean to anybody else, would point straight up in the air and her lips would thin out in a line at the very sight of a gun. And

if you were guilty of keeping a pistol on hand for protection, look out. She would laugh in your face for being presumptuous enough to believe that you had something a robber or rapist might covet.

I don't know whether Gransallie was brave or ignorant, but she knew no fear. Maybe she believed that angels watched over her because she went to church and sent money to Oral Roberts. But I think she simply didn't notice what was going on around her, all those killing looks from drivers whose cars she caused to collide when she pulled out in front of them (she always had the right-of-way).

My grandmother's hall-divided farmhouse, built before the turn of the ~~twenty~~^{twentieth} century, had long since been torn down by my daddy, by the time she came home, and the seasoned heart pine had been recycled into a little white fifties house for my family in Statenville, two miles north of the old homeplace. Later still, while my grandmother was in St. Augustine, my daddy decided to build in the country again, where his uncles and cousins lived, died and got buried on true Staten land, and we moved back to the farm and planted the entire 300 acres in pines.

So, as I've said, when Gransallie retired from nursing, she moved back to Southeast Georgia to be near her only child--who she didn't even like--and his family. She hauled in a single-wide mobile home that looked like a banded blue Easter egg nestled in the pines on the southeast end of the property. But before she even got settled in, with her new Sears TV and toaster oven, my cousin Minnie, just up the highway, put in for Gransallie to stay nights with her. Minnie's husband Roy worked the graveyard shift at a pulpmill near Valdosta, and she was afraid to stay by herself. An edgy, frail woman, Minnie

had taken an early retirement from teaching school, and her only child Jimmie had married and left home earlier that year.

Every evening about dark, Gransallie, short, soft and square with silver hair, would begrudgingly bundle up her sleep-worn pink nightgown, a fresh changing of cotton panties that looked like parachutes on her clothesline during the day, and the special squat glass for her false teeth to soak in overnight, and off she would go to Minnie's house in her blue Chevrolet that had been wrecked so many times it looked like a display at a county fair--DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOU.

Minnie's contemporary brick house with blocks of glass bricks had three bedrooms, but she insisted that Gransallie sleep with her. Gransallie had raised Minnie and her brother Wilmur after both their parents had died, and Minnie was like a daughter to Gransallie. But being as Gransallie never was the sentimental, sweet type, and she was a realist to boot, she liked to keep some distance in relationships. Duty was duty, and blood was blood, but blood thinned out to water the farther down it ran on the family tree. Besides, Minnie was exquisitely sensitive, which I suppose made Gransallie insensitive. Never had two people of such distinctly different dispositions shared a bed.

At daybreak, each morning, Gransallie would be in her car, hell-bent on getting home. Which must have insulted Minnie, who liked to linger over coffee with Gransallie. While sunfares crept through the glass bricks and danced on the polished oak floors, the two women could discuss how they had slept the night before, what they had heard outside the windows of the air-conditioned, locked-down house. Maybe have their daily Bible devotion together.

One week, two weeks, three weeks passed that summer, and then one night Gransallie got up to go to the bathroom across the hall, where Minnie kept a light burning from sundown to sunup. Starting back to the bedroom, Gransallie stumbled on a throwrug in the hall and fell against the bedroom door, framing it against the blue plaster wall like a shutter in a storm.

When she looked up, Minnie was sitting bolt-upright in the bed with a pistol aimed at Gransallie's head.

Knowing my grandmother, I doubt she was silent, just kneeling there helpless, at the mercy of Minnie and her gun. Neither ever told exactly what was said, but from that day on Gransallie visited Minnie in broad daylight and stayed home at night with her new Sears TV and toaster oven.