

"Mama" Vashiti

Much as anything, I expect I dreaded seeing Ora See & Sister & them dressed up again in their funeral dresses, smelling like mothballs in spite of the airing. I looked for a while there like it was gonna be a reg'lar thing: ^{Ora See's} Mama's casket afloatin' up ever time we got her buried good. Three times, counting this one. And everlast time, ~~one~~ ^{they was} fit to be tied.

Got to where I didn't expect no different. Same as ~~was~~ ^{was} draggin' up & down the halls at the house ^{beatin'} that blasted ^{pan with a spoon} ~~pan~~ ^{that was} give her ^{to make a racket with} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ case she needed something ^{after} we bring her home from the hospital last time. It says to myself - to Ora See too, & sister - "Y'all don't pay her no 'tention & she'll quit that orderin' ^{of that} ~~hollerin'~~. They'd set there a spell make like they was watchin' the news ^{on the television,} all the time listenin' to that ~~beat~~ ^{pan} ~~drownin'~~ ^{pan} out ~~that~~ ^{Blue Downs} ~~filler~~ ^{pan} Wash & long though before they was up & off, totokin' egg nog & ~~beef~~ ^{beef} broth off'n beefsteak booted in a jar, for her to suck on with a straw. Her jaws was wired shut from gettin' broke when a tree ~~it~~ was sawin' in the back yard come down on her head. She got pretty busted up. ^{pan} Ora See & them didn't say nothin', but I could tell they thought I'd done it a purpose cause she kept hollerin' "Weard 'at ~~me~~ ^{me} that's what she called me. My name's Ora T. Deysee, and I'm proud of it!"

"They ain't nothin' no prettier than a straight legged baby!" ~~Mama~~ said. "All my babies had straight legs. Scooter looked like he was ~~born~~ leaning toward being bowlegged, so I give him a ~~laxative~~ dose of cod liver oil morning & night."

Her old speckled eyes would settle on my ~~legs~~ legs ever time.

But they ain't no way it'd th'ow a tree on that pore ole lady's head & her already ~~be~~ laid up ^{from} a stroke!

"Mama's livin' on borrowed time, Sugar," ~~Sister~~ ~~told~~ ~~me~~ I heard sister say to Bra Lee, ten times if she said it one while they was washin' supper dishes. ^{para} The ~~leather~~ ^{leather} in Bra Lee's neck ^{would} ^{get} ~~it~~ ~~up~~ ~~to~~ ~~his~~ ~~neck~~ ~~like~~ ~~she~~ ~~couldn't~~ ~~hear~~ ~~to~~ ~~think~~ ~~dwelt~~ ~~on~~ ~~it~~. She'd fold the ^{soaping} ~~soaping~~ dish towel neat as a pin & flatten it out the counter. Then she'd shake it out & put it in the ~~pan~~ ^{dishpan} with Clorox.

"Mama's seen a sight & woe, sister," she'd say. "Since before Daddy died she's been fading, ~~leadin' up to it~~ ^{(exact date) - 1960} ¹⁹⁶² ~~1960~~ ^{pleurisy} ^{conced} ^{of} ^{the} ^{hospice} ⁽¹⁹⁷⁰⁾ ^{not to mention} head, golds, worse than any I'd ever seen ^{when she had hyperstretomy. 14} ^{and then on top} of that - a stroke in ¹⁹⁸⁰ ~~1980~~ Lord amercy! Mama's been through the mill!"

When she got hit by the tree ^{in '81} they figured it was only, called up Scooter to come. He must've knowed somethin' the rest of us didn't,

cause he didn't get in no hurry. Got to
Valport Hospital two days later, bringin'
some lil de shirt-tail gal he called ~~Deen~~ from
~~Orlando~~ to slobber over while we set drinkin' coffee &
waitin'.

Well, long about ~~mid night~~ ^{mid night} the third day,
the doctor comes out lookin' busted & send
one of ~~us~~ ^{me} at ~~the~~ time in to say good-bye.
Drafter & sister had to pull their selfs together,
huggin' on each other, wadda ballin' their
handkerchiefs under their eyes, adabbin' tears.
Scooter got up & stuffed his shirt in,
turnin' loose of that gal hands long enough
to git decent.

I got a little tore up my ^{own} self watchin'
all of them ~~be~~ bawlin' smellin' alcohol &
the late night shufflin' of nurse feet. ~~It d a give~~ ^{It d a give}
a pretty to aheen back in my own bed & if he
over, listenin' to the crickets. But I figured to
see it through, and when it was over I'd have some
peace.

When it come my time ~~to go~~ I went in;
kind 'ne dreading it, though. Wadda & nothin'
showin' but her eyes ~~meant~~ ^{meant} as a snakes -
I come up close to the bed & looked down
at her all wropped up in ^{white} ~~gauze~~ from head to
foot, like a ~~phantom~~ ^{phantom}.

"Breathe," she says, wreatin' tea.
"Bressum," I says.
"You done & tilt me."
I wanted a minute to bigger out what I
oughta say.
"Bressum," I says.

setting the headboard of her bed up on
blocks ~~so she is~~ in front of
the window so she could see
out & ~~run back~~ running back
& ~~fast~~ to town for bed pans
and hot water bottles & stuff.

clear her
throat when
she heard
red springs

And she ~~little sister~~ was just as pleased as
she could be ~~helping~~ out in ~~another woman's kitchen~~ ^(over)
~~father's name~~ ^(over) Scooter'd a been
another matter, now. He wash &
with the salt in his head!

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

He come to me for a handout a
many time. Toted off sausage after
ever hog killing we had. None spray. Pear
& beans. I'd wash ad had a mickle for
ever bushel of peanuts he snuck off the
place. A Dead beat is what he is! Living
off the gov'nunt & more'n likely! A
stealer! First 'un lasts, he'll get
caught! I done had a bait & trap
away back before he growed his hair out
long like a hippie. He took off right after
he seen Mama at the hospital and then
atellin' her she could go anytime.
^{para} Like I said, he 'bout knowed something
we did, though.

I come up the hard way, working out ~~at~~
a ~~low~~ living with my ~~hard~~ hands for me &
Mommer after Pa died. And me nothing but
a boy. Same ~~old~~ ^{old} money place in ^{Cuney Co.} but a sight improved. Tore
down Mommer's big ole house & built Ora Lee
a lil ole doll home to keep up. After they

They wadn't none of 'em nothing to look at.
The older they ~~get~~ the more they got to
looking like Mama.

Round as a ^{big exit} ~~beaver~~ bush as a
bee, prettiest little thing you ever
did see.

That's was what it says to my self when
I met up with Ora Lee at church. ^{20 yrs} I ^{thought} ^{but} our names ^{mashed} ^{up}
Well sir, that turnt on me! She plun dried up
awaiting on her mama, ^{where} ^{they} ^{called} ^{the} ^{roll} ⁱⁿ
Big faced, just like her Ma too, where her hair
come ^{slide} ^{back} ^{off} ^{her} ^{face}. ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{school} ^{on} ^{Sunday} ^{at} ^{Ora} ^{Lee} ^{T.} ^{Kido} ^{pretty} ^{the} ^{it!}
Went off ray headed ^{too} from worry, I expect, And hard to git along
with! If I said ~~"Mamma"~~ ^{"Mamma"} howdy-do at the
breakfast table, she'd bow up & precti'ly th'ow
her into in my face.

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

all come to ~~the~~ ~~big~~ ~~one~~ ^(ten years later) } I wished a
many a time I'd a kept the big one.

If I took a notion to have things to
do with Ora See, long about mid night some
nights, Mama'd clear her throat if the bed springs
sprung a bit.

And me & Ora See ain't no old folks yet!
Going on forty, the both of us.

Yeah, I reckon I spent the better part of
my life fiddling life was waiting on me just
around the corner. ~~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 ~~any~~ anything with fire.

Well in first thing I done after that
second funeral was to get my ~~can~~ of Prince Albert
& a cane pole. ~~dog me some~~ got me
some catfish worms off the tree & lit
out with Ora See crawling like a baby.

But that's sitting ahead of myself. Mama
didn't die ~~from~~ the tree falling on her head. Being
on fire year - ~~to the day~~ - five blessed years
to the day, they said - after that, ~~unbetween~~
she had herself a heart attack, another stroke,
fell out the ~~back~~ door steps & ~~broke~~ broke her hip bone,
run over my shoe & broke her jaw again
and ever time she'd enaspade. Going
on ~~seventy~~ ^{eighty}. Doctor's ^{upponder in} Val'osta said it
was the beatigest thing they ever seen.

Didn't die of nothing. ~~She~~ ^{Sister} just found her one morning looking up at the ceiling like she was waiting for ~~light~~ ^{light}. ~~for~~ Ora Lee & Sister hollered & carried a) knocking over furniture, and me trying to figger out if a snake got in the house. Took the better part of the next day to get things straightened up for ~~for~~ ^{collecting} bringing in food & setting around.

That was a sight of food! Got some of it still put up in the freezer after ~~the~~ ^{months} of eating regular ~~of~~ ^{of} it.

The pear was just ~~at~~ ^{at} turning by the third go round, and ~~Miss~~ ^{Miss} ~~scraped~~ ^{scraped} up enough for a peepie to bring over.

And it come wet! Ever time I got the tractor to the fields it'd bog down. Ora Lee & then them bet a pretty Mamee's cof casket would've stayed down if we'd ~~abur~~ ^{aburied} her at Way fare ~~stead~~ ^{stead} on the hill, ~~stead~~ ^{side} of River ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~it~~ ⁱⁿ ~~known~~ ^{known} better. It was wet ever where. Besides that, I knowed that old lady ~~was~~ ^{was} nothing, ~~was~~ ^{was} & never gonna keep that old lady down. She was too ~~contary~~ ^{contary} orn'ry!

Got to where it was regular on
prayer meeting at ~~Woodson~~ ^{Bowell} Baptist Church
that ~~summer~~ ^{spring} & ~~first~~ ^{first} summer.

"Miss ^{Corrie's} ~~Vahtie's~~ gonna be buried ^{at} this afternoon"
Bro. Travis ud say ever time you turned around
of church. Folks got to where they'd just
kind 'pe yawn, but they come anyhow.

And il ~~Swanee~~ ^{Swanee}, Ora Lee & them'd
take on like they done the first time; drag
out them old gray-blue caberlike dresses &
perten up the viels on their lil ole silly
hats.

Sister, run go hang 'em back out on the
line," Ora Lee 'd say, bawling all the ^{the} psyching out,
while standing in the door ^{with her} ~~looking~~ ^{looking} for
all the world like her Ma.

That's when il knowed if her
mummer did stay down, she'd still be
dragging around the house ⁱⁿ ~~still~~ ^{paid down} ~~il did~~.

And il woad & never one to try change ~~by~~
nothing. Just took 'em lika they come.
* Jill that second funeral.

Shurf ~~Wudson~~ ^{Wudson} come all the way out ^{from} ~~the~~
~~Friday~~ ^{Friday} mornin to tell us she'd done riz again.

When he got out 'me the car, il figgered it
was something to do, with ^{some} Scooter's meanness.

"Ma sir," he says, "il don't hardly know
how to tell yall, but Miss ^{Corrie's} ~~Vahtie's~~ casket's
done riz from all this rain."

Well, Ora Lee & sister was a standing
on the porch, fretting before he got it out
good. Then they set in to weeping like

the first time.
"Tell 'em to go on & bury her again," 'l
says, standing there with my slop bucket,
hogs assorting around my feet. And it raining ^{some} hard!

"Ora T. Dupree! How dere you?"
hollers Ora Su!
"Well, Sugar, what you want me to
do?" 'l hollers back.

"Will have ^{sa proper funeral for} ~~the~~ ^{April 20th}
Mama, or else, ^{sunrise} ~~the~~ ^{3:00 PM} ~~the~~ ¹⁹⁸⁴ ~~the~~ ^{lets} ~~the~~ ^{hoose} to
the day, Sister, just as screaming, nodding her
balled up head.

"Okay, son," 'l says.
Well, they 'ret in to fixin' up for.
^{camp my again} pretty soon ever body come back haggery
necks & totin' food. Two days that
went on, just like the ^{first} time.

I took off from work - it still too
wet to get in the fields anyhow -
& set in to entertainin' the men folks
on the front porch while the women
folks ~~stuck to~~ ^{hang around} the kitchen. 'l was
a ~~easy~~ ^{easy} ~~thing~~ ^{thing} ~~to~~ ^{to} put up with it (over
(over) you think Scooter's put out any
time for ~~any~~ ^{one} of them funerals? Niser!
Not a red cent! ^{Didn't show up but for two of 'em. 'l on the mister}
^{put the cash my way up.} ~~took~~ ^{my} ~~at~~ ^{life} ~~out~~ ^{savings.} Last time the
undertaker did it for free, though. 'l told

Ever time, just like it was the last, ~~they~~
Ara Lu & Sister'd set in & air out the
house ~~for next stay~~ after the funeral; They'd put out a washing
like you air / never seen, scrub out the
house, tooth pick the stove, and put up
the food. Then they'd set around looking
at old pi' ~~times~~ & talk about old times
~~dry up~~. They'd sort out her clothes
they'd done boxed up to give away &
~~set in~~ ~~dry up~~ out (just in time for
the next one.

Had to get out & out ~~get~~ new pallbearers
for this one. If the rain don't let up we'll
be going out 've the county for folks to bring food
& flowers, I ~~can't~~ tell they're getting plain wore out
I disgusted with giving up their Sun. rest to ~~come~~
the same old funeral, again & again. Got to where
some of em stayed on for the night service ~~instead of packing~~
~~up~~ having to ~~pack~~ load up & go all the way home ~~to come~~ all
the way back. Come to think of it, they wouldn't all that
many come up to view the remains this afternoon. Yes, yes
I'll allow by the next go around they won't be a then shed,
except on Ara Lu & Sister's. They's a limit to what folks
can take! It wouldn't surprise me none if they didn't
ask me to put a little extra in the offering plate,
if this keeps up, from using the 'lectricity in the church.
The preacher, too. He's but run out of stuff to say that'll
fit in.

him if he'd adone it ~~right~~ ^{proper} the first
time, she wouldn't ariz. He didn't
like it ^{at none}, but it reckon he figgered
it being the first time that ever happened
in S. Ga., he'd make it good.

Just time! That oughta tell you
something about Mama.

Soon or ever'body took off late that
~~was~~ ^{sun.} after the funeral, I took off
afishin'.

Me & Bra Lee ain't hardly
spoke ~~to~~ to yet.

Not even during ~~the~~ ^{this} ~~last~~ funeral
go round when I put my foot down
I took off ^{fishin'} again. A man's gotta
put his foot down, now & again,
I always say.

Come on, fish, and bite!