

GRANDPA, A HULA DOLL, AND THE BOOGERMAN

I guess I've always had a good memory. I can remember things that happened when I was two or two and a half years old since that was my age when grandpa came to live with us. That time was very special for my Grandpa, my mother's father, was my "reason to be".

When I arose on winter mornings Grandpa put my shoes and socks on me and then taking my hand we went to breakfast together.

"Here Honey. Try a little of this," was Grandpa's daily temptation. So I always ate whatever Grandpa ate, without the sugar. He put sugar on and in everything he ate or drank but regardless of his urging I just could not like sweetened buttermilk and sweet soup beans.

During the day Grandpa who was then 90, talked to me, told stories, napped with me, and took me to the store with him. Any phenomena of nature that bothered me became very ordinary when Grandpa explained it, and my come back was always, "Are you sure, Grandpa?"

"To the best of my knowledge Honey," he always replied and I was satisfied.

The only store on Bradshaw Mountain was about 2 miles up the ridge from our house. We had to go to the highway which was not paved at that

time. I remember holding to Grandpa's little finger as we walked and even at that young age I sometimes had to stop to let Grandpa rest.

One day, when I was a little past 4 years old Grandpa and I walked to the store. At that time an old man named Greer ran the store. He had white hair, was chubby, and shook when he laughed.

"Is that Santa Claus?" I asked the first time I met Mr. Greer. Our "wish book" which I later learned was a Sears and Roebuck catalog had a man in a red suit called Santa Claus that looked a lot like Mr. Greer.

Grandpa had stopped to rest and paused before saying, "Well, he may be but I reckon we'll have to wait until Christmas to find out."

Since Grandpa visited the store at least once each week he must have bragged about how many songs I knew or my singing, or something. I don't remember why but I do remember being lifted onto the store counter and asked to sing.

"What do you want me to sing?" I asked.

"Just sing whatever you know best," encouraged Mr. Greer. He and Grandpa stood patiently waiting and so I sang, "Froggie Went A Courting."

Mr. Greer clapped his hands and his belly bounced up and down as he laughed. "Well, it ain't Christmas yet but I've got a little something for a girl who can sing like that." He turned and looked along the shelf behind the

counter and I looked too. I was looking at a beautiful golden haired doll on the top shelf.

Mr. Greer bent down and from beneath the shelf he pulled out a box and handed it to me.

“Most people around here don’t want this doll. I just know a girl that can sing like you has a kind heart. This little doll needs somebody to love her,” he said as he opened the box and lifted out a black-faced, key-wound Hula doll whose grass skirt swayed to the Hawaiian music it played.

My eyes were round as saucers. “Oh yes. I do have a kind heart and I will love her,” I said as I cradled her in my arms. I left the box and held her very close all the way home.

“Grandpa, I guess that man was Santa Claus. He just forgot it wasn’t Christmas, I’ll bet.” Grandpa just smiled and nodded as he made his slow way back down the ridge.

New toys were hard to come by and I had never seen a doll like her. I loved her even though I knew my sister would make fun of me and her. I think, her being black, made me love her more since I'd never seen a black person at that time. All the way home I was constantly stopping to see if she was all right.

My joy was short lived however, for as soon as my sister saw my doll she began to laugh and pluck at her hair which was very curly. “I wouldn’t have an old black doll. I bet he couldn’t sell it. He wanted rid of it and he give it to you,” she jeered.

When I ignored her she finally said, “Let me hold her.”

“No. You’ll tear her up. Anyway, you don’t like her. You said you wouldn’t have a doll like her,” I said as I turned away.

That was a mistake. She became very upset and grabbed at my doll. I lost my grasp on it and it fell crashing to the floor where it broke into many pieces. The music box played a short and final tune.

Like so many other things of mine that my sister had wanted, it was broken. There were so many pieces lying all over the puncheon board floor that it could not be put back together. Some of the pieces had gone down through the wide cracks between some of the boards, anyway.

I had already learned that crying did no good. Mama would not spank her, but even if she had, my doll was gone and could not be brought back. That night, however, when the wind whistled and moaned around the chimney and through the cracks in the old log house I got a little of my own back.

It was a pitch black night but I wasn't afraid of these noises since they had been explained to me by Grandpa. "The wind just wants to come in where it is safe and warm and it can't get in," said Grandpa and I always felt sorry for it.

I lay thinking about my broken doll and when my sister snuggled closer to me in fear I said, "You should be afraid. I'll bet that the "boogerman" is coming to get you. I hear it saying your name. Can't you hear your name? Just listen!"

"What's he saying my name for?" asked Mary. "Maybe he's saying your name." she whispered in terror.

"No he's not. He's saying, 'Maa-ree'. Can't you hear him?" I was whispering as if, I too, was afraid.

I lay still but Mary shivered every time she heard a moan. "Does the "boogerman" just want bad people, you reckon?" whispered Mary.

"I guess so. He's probably wanting you cause you broke my doll. He'd want a mean little girl, I guess. Remember, Grandpa told you today that the "boogerman" was going to come and get you for being so mean."

Mary wrapped her arms tightly around me as she cried. "Tell him, I'm sorry. I swear I won't break no more of your stuff."

I was enjoying this immensely. My sister, who was two and a half years older than me, wanted me to help her. This was the sister that gave me a good thumping almost every day unless Grandpa caught her before she got a chance.

Mary was crying so piteously that I was almost ready to tell her I was only trying to scare her when the wind gave a mighty shriek and we heard a loud crash. Mary let out a howl and jumped from the bed since the loud crash was the door banging back against the wall.

Mary wasn't the only one screaming now. I had joined her since the "boogerman" had ready access right through the open door.

When a large silhouette appeared in the entrance Mary went limp beside me and slumped to the floor just as I let out another banshee scream.

"What's the matter with you younguns? The wind blowed the door open. The boogerman ain't come to get you'ns," said Daddy as he started to pull the door closed but I stopped him. "Daddy, you need to come get Mary up... I think maybe she got scared to death."

Dad struck a match to light the lamp and saw Mary lying crumpled up in the floor. "Lord a' mercy, what happened to her?" Dad scooped her up and ran from the room out onto the porch.

It had begun to rain and since the wind was still blowing the rain blew into the porch and sprayed Dad and Mary. Mary awoke but since it was still dark and she couldn't see who had her she screamed and fell silent again.

Mom had awakened and opened the front room door where she and Dad slept just as Dad pushed through the door with Mary in his arms and me right behind him. "Light the lamp, hurry. This youngun is sick or something." Mom lit the lamp and Dad lay Mary down on their bed. They were both standing over her when her eyes fluttered open and she said, "Boogerman...I won't do it no more." Then she recognized Mom and grabbed her around the neck and started bawling, but this time in relief.

"Poor little thing. You scared her purt nigh to death when you went in to shut the door. She thought you was the "boogerman. I'll have to tell Papa to quit telling the younguns that the "boogerman" will get them if they do something wrong. Fact is, this evening I heard him tell her the "boogerman" was going to get her when she broke that little Hula Doll that Mr. Greer give Debby but she ain't never acted scared before.

I never said a word. I had got my revenge but to be honest, I was scared too, especially when the door came open. That, however, was the last thing of mine that Mary broke. I didn't have my Hula Doll but neither of us

ever forgot since Mary is still afraid of the dark especially when the wind moans around the house.