

*The Crew and Me, The Crew and I*

Daddy's not coming home again. Before I heard those words, we were the fabulous four from Ft. Knoxville, Mississippi. That's what Daddy used to call us. Now, we're just three, not the fabulous three, just three: Mama, my older brother Mitch, and me. Or is it Mitch and I? Daddy would correct me, but he's not coming home again.

I'm Malena. I just turned eight yesterday so I don't know a whole bunch of stuff yet. Except them telling me today, "Daddy's not coming home again." He called me Princess. Mama calls me hardheaded and Mitch just calls me whatever he wants when Mama's not around. I thought Daddy moved to another house with three other people. Mitch is just a year older than me, so he doesn't know where Daddy is either. Mama was crying too much to tell us anything else. She cried, so we cried, too. Even though, we still didn't know where Daddy was. We didn't have grandparents we could ask. Daddy said they all went to glory before Mitch and me, Mitch and I was even thought about. We just have Mrs. Mable or the praying woman most folk call her, from down the road. She told us we could call her Grandma if we wanted to. But, she just Mrs. Mable cause' she ain't went to glory yet.

Mrs. Mable used some small words when she talked about Daddy. Died...Dead...Death.

I wasn't fully sure what they meant, but I knew it wasn't good when all of Daddy's friends and some folks I didn't know showed up at our house. Most folks were crying like Mama had been earlier. I didn't know our little house could hold so many people. Probably why a lot of them went outside to sit and laugh. Seemed you had to go outside to laugh, cause crying was left for inside. Me and Mitch, Mitch and I still don't know what's going on. Old folks just keep hugging us saying they sorry to hear bout' our Daddy.

They said (the old people inside), "He was a good man."

I started to cry, because I didn't like what I was feeling. Where was my Daddy? I miss him right now this minute and he needs to come home. My Daddy more than a good man, he's the best man ever. He's tall and dark, like the color of ripe blackberries in the summertime. But smooth like my new patent leather shoes. He has little dimples on the side of his face that make his smile seem bigger than it is and pretty dark eyes like Bambi. They say I look just like him, except I got Mama's skin color. She's the color of the flaky skin on an onion. Ya'll know what I'm talking bout'? Mitch look just like Daddy though, skin color and everything-he got the dimples too. I guess Daddy couldn't give them to both of us and Mitch was first in line, so I didn't mind that much.

I was sitting there thinking about that when I overheard Mrs. Mable saying, "Death came knocking too early for Mitchell, po' man just thirty-five years old." I feel really bad now. I must have been sleeping something hard because I didn't hear a knock. I don't know about Mitch, but I would have made sure not to let death in, that way Daddy would still be here. He would be here to put these folks out because I'm getting pretty sleepy and Daddy wouldn't let us be up this late. I'm mad at Mama now. She must have opened the door for death because me and Mitch, Mitch and I wasn't allowed to answer the door. That's probably why she crying like she is. Serves her right.

The next couple of days didn't get any better. More folks, more food, more confusion...and I still don't know anymore about this death thing than I did before. That first night Daddy didn't come home, Mama tried to explain what was going on, but I shut my ears to her words because it didn't sound like anything I wanted to hear at the time. Her conversation didn't excite me so I hid my little emotions in a place that ignored the pain I heard in her voice.

Mrs. Mable prayed for us and asked God to give us the strength we need to endure the transition. She seemed scared for us (that makes me want Daddy even more, so I can hide behind his back), I say that because she wouldn't let us out of her embrace and kept anointing our head with oil and cried seemed more for us than Daddy. I'm alright, but if she wants to do something for me she can give me a personal pecan pie that I don't have to share with anybody. I figured I'd be pushing it to ask, Mama would say it's rude to be selfish and not willing to share. Daddy too, but not without shading a smile somewhere we couldn't see. So, next time Mrs. Mable prays for me I think I'll slide it into the conversation and see what happens. I didn't have to wait very long because Mrs. Mable asked Mama if she could take us to the church house that night. I was excited, figured if Daddy wasn't home that's where we could find him.

Daddy loved the church house and we spent a great deal of time there throughout the week. He went on days we didn't have service-I never fully understood why he went to check on the church house if nobody was there. Mama said it's because he loves the fact that he's blessed to pray in a house that God built. I don't ever remember hearing Daddy pray and ask God for His power, but for His heart. Daddy believed if he had the heart of God-everything else would flow with it, because power without the heart of God was like authority in the wrong hands. Most of the time I had no idea what Daddy was talking about, but that didn't stop him from telling us things.

Anyway, he takes me and Mitch, Mitch and I with him to the church house, and sometimes he goes by himself. When I was a little girl, around two, Daddy started taking me and Mitch, Mitch and I to prayer with him. I won't lie to you-I hated it. We would go to the altar and lay on those hardwood floors and Daddy and I would cry for hours, while Mitch rested in the presence of the Lord. You know what that means-he was sleeping but he'd always tell me that like I'm stupid or something. Now back to Daddy, I always knew he was crying because God allowed him to touch His heart. I was crying because those floors hurt my little bones and I knew I couldn't move until they were finished talking. So, I pressed my little face into the wood like I saw Daddy do and cried and asked the Lord not to keep Daddy, me and Mitch, Mitch and I out all night. Sometimes He heard me, most times He didn't.

By the way, I didn't see Daddy when Mrs. Mable and I went to the church house and didn't get a chance to ask about the pecan pie because she cried on the altar all night long, calling on the name of Jesus. I didn't know what was going on, so I did what my Father taught me to do-I waited in His presence.

