

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/2

Alan Semrow

Get Home Soon

After I ask her to, Marjorie hands me my glass of sweet tea. We've been doing this same thing every afternoon for about twenty-two years, I'd say—sitting on the old wooden rocking chairs out the front porch. She pumps a paper fan at her face and tells me, "It's been a good day, Al."

"It has, my dear. It has."

"The sun's hot, but it's nice weather—all the same."

I tell her, "It is."

"And I have chicken on for dinner."

"It does smell gorgeous."

"Thank you, love."

We bought the house right before we married. There was a harmony to the whole situation—how she was in town when I was in town, when we first met. We had our first date at the old movie theater downtown. That was the night I proposed. I look out to the front gravel road. A couple cars pass by here and there. They're the same people. The same people day after day after day. And we wave at our neighbors. I ask Marjorie, "So, what time is the boy gettin' home tonight, then?"

"The same damn time he does every day, I'd presume."

I laugh. "Oh, Marjorie. You are a real smartass sometimes, you know."

"And I can also breathe underwater."

I look the poor woman in her eyes and shake my head. "I don't even know what in the hell to say to that, Marjorie."

"Then don't say a thing." She smiles, flips her fan back out, flutters it.

Mr. and Mrs. Frederick from a few farms down drive past in their old Ford truck. They wave and honk their horn and we wave back. The Shih Tzu, Marley, springs to the door and stands on his hind two feet. He barks like a baby at the road. "They've passed," I tell him.

Marjorie turns to the dog and grins. "I'd let you come out if you didn't run off like you do." She nods her pretty head at me and says, "I think it's time for dinner soon, regardless." Marjorie stands from the wooden rocker and opens the front screen door.

It's special sometimes to think about what we ended up creating. A little whim—she didn't say yes at first, but it happened within a few months. And, after that, the boy came. I shuffle up from my chair, grab my sweet tea, and enter the house. The Marley dog runs to me as if I've been gone all day. He leaps up onto my legs and wiggles his little ass. I put my hand out and he licks it. "You are a cute little shit, aren't you?" I make my way to the back of the house, to the kitchen, where Marjorie is removing the meal from the oven. "It smells great, baby," I say.

"When doesn't it?" she asks.

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I sit down at the kitchen table and unwrap my silverware from the napkin package she prepared this morning. I tell her, "Only when the Oklahoma sky falls over on us, dear."

Marjorie says nothing and plops the plate of chicken and rice on top a hot pad she's got planted in the middle of the kitchen table.

"It really does smell amazing."

She seats herself across from me at the table, takes apart her own silverware, and then puts her napkin on her lap. When I see it, I take my own crumpled napkin from the table and set it where it truly does belong. Marjorie does the sign of the cross and I follow. She says her typical grace and then I stand from my spot, take the plate from her hands, and begin cutting the chicken. As I pile on a slab and use a spoon to scoop a few ounces of rice onto her blue-etched plate, I hear the front door slam open. The Marley dog runs past us to the noise. He barks quietly. I look at Marjorie and she looks puzzled.

With the dog in hand, Jimmy enters the kitchen. "It's been a real bullshit day," he says.

Marjorie puts her hand to her breast and gasps. "What you doing home so early?"

"Need a cigarette."

He starts to pull a pack from his jean pocket when Marjorie speaks up, "Don't be smoking during dinner time, you son of a bitch!"

Jimmy laughs. "Smells good."

"Then have a seat."

As Jimmy jumps into the chair on the left side of me and the right side of his mother, I start to prepare him his dinner plate. He begins to laugh. "What in the hell is so funny, Jimmy?" Marjorie asks him, taking a small bite of her chicken.

"Mother," he chuckles. "I have to be truthful right now. I am incredibly drunk."

Marjorie stops mid-chew and glares at him. She shuffles the uneaten chicken around her mouth and says, "Where you been all day?"

"I been to California, Oregonia, and Oklahoma, Mother."

Across the table, Marjorie looks at me. I don't say a thing. "You know," Jimmy says. "The funny thing is... I'm drunk as all hell. And I'm still able to sit in this seat. Daddy, can you say a thing like that?"

I turn my head to him and then look to Marjorie. She slams her fork down on the table, scaring the hell out of me and Marley, who's currently curled up on the other side of the kitchen. Marjorie yells, "You do not talk to your father that way!"

"I feel kittens running down my backside right now. That is how I feel."

"That is very interesting, son," Marjorie mutters, picking her fork back up.

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"I feel like an Oompa Loompa is crawling around in my ears."

"Jesus Christ," I mutter.

Jimmy stands from his seat. "Yes, Father. *Jesus Christ.*"

"You be nice to your father!"

Jimmy takes a moment and laughs to himself. "As if he were," he says.

I jump up from my chair, run into the laundry room where I keep it pushed behind the bulk jugs of Tide. I take a pull, a long pull from the bottle. And all I can hear in the other room is fighting.