**The Last Sunday Supper**

Deron Eckert

“Sit down for a spell,” Nana says, breaking a mess of beans into a five-gallon bucket faster than I can count them.

“Need any help?”

“No, baby. I’m alright. Suppose your mommy told you.”

I nod, unable to look her in the eyes. Instead, I scan the porch, the one papaw built before I was born, and try to imagine how we’d even begin to pack up the decades of their lives. And not just on the porch and in the house, but also all the rusty tools and scrap out back and broken-down cars at the end of the road.

“Wants you to talk me out of it?”

“I reckon.”

“Well, get on with it, but you ain’t going to say nothing she and your uncle haven’t already said.”

“I know. Just want to make sure you’re sure.”

“Wouldn’t have done it if I wasn’t.”

“What about the garden and all the trees you planted? You’re not going to miss it?” I ask, glancing over at the formerly endless rows of vegetables and remembering how Nana and I used to crawl around on our hands and knees plucking weeds and Papaw riding me around on his tractor while he prepared the beds for season. But that was long before Nana’s hip replacement. Since her fall and Papaw’s passing, the garden has been nothing more than a mounded-up grave, reminding us of what used to be. After a couple harsh winters, even the dead foliage of their final harvest had turned to mulch.

“No garden left to miss, and those trees will be there long after I’m gone. They’re no more mine than the hills. You’ll see that one day, especially now with my little grand baby. When you put down roots that’ll outlast you, they’ll cease being yours someday. Hard to let things go, but I can’t cling to this place forever. Besides, it’s got as many bad memories as good.” Nana doesn’t bother looking over at the grown-up trail where they found her brother after he flipped his four-wheeler or the window to the bedroom where Mom’s baby sister didn’t wake up.

“Well, if you’re ready to move on, I’m not one to stop you. It’s your place.”

“Wish your mommy felt that way. Don’t know what she and your uncle want anyway. Not like either of them are hankering to move back here, and nobody’s opened a mine since before you went away to college. Land’s worth as much as it’ll ever be.”

“Can’t speak for Uncle Clark, but I think Mom’s just worried you’re giving up. She probably wouldn’t mind so much if you’d at least move in with her instead of going to that place.”

“That place is as good as any, and your mommy doesn’t need to be taking care of hers. Could be good for me to get away from here. Your mommy spends as much time over here with me as any child could, but it hasn’t been the same since your papaw.” Nana’s eyes stay down, and she pauses her fingers on the edge of a bean before she snaps it back. “And you know I do love the beach.”

“Have since the first time you and Mom took me down there.”

“Be nice not to deal with the cold anymore, and you all can come visit anytime. Your mommy talks like I’m going to some home, but I’ll have my own condo right on the beach with a guestroom and balcony and pool and everything. Can put some little floaties on that baby of yours and watch her go. She sure is a sight.”

“That she is. Can already tell she’s going to be as much trouble as I was.”

“Good Lord let’s hope not,” Nana says, laughing as she throws the last bean into the bucket then stands up so slowly that I put my sunglasses on just so she doesn’t see the tears coming on. “Let me clean this up then I’ll go inside and make you some macaroni and tomatoes.”

“I sure would love some, but you go on in. I’ll get this put away,” I say, holding the door for her and making sure she doesn’t trip over the lip of the door frame as she shuffles on in. I follow her in with the bucket of broken beans and lay it on the kitchen counter, so she won’t have to bend down to pick it up when she cans them later. I can hear that she’s already got the water boiling as I head back outside.

Nana’s been tossing the ends and strings of the beans into a grocery bag, so all I must do is tie it off and take it down to the burn pile. I make my way down the driveway to the little recess in the bushes by the creek and drop the bag next to some empty cartons of pop. Through the trees and shrubs, I can see the cattails lining what I used to consider my ocean and imagine myself floating atop that brown water until I hear Nana call that the food’s about ready.

“Sit on down,” Nana says, placing a heaping bowl of pasta before me. “Don’t want it to get cold as kraut.”

I take one bite then another. I let me eyes close for just a second. I’m five-years-old again, and Nana is moving back and forth between the stove and fridge, like the young woman I remember. When I open my eyes, that same woman I love is sitting next to me with the weight of time on her face and her hand on mine and asking, “How do you like it, baby?”

“Still the best thing I’ve ever had.”

“Don’t try to butter my biscuit,” Nana says, slapping my hand then returning to the stove to fetch herself a bowl. She’s slow-moving, but it’s as fast I’ll ever see her.