

Golden Griddle Lament

“Ma, did Aunt Jemima really kill Grandma?”

“No, it was an-gina.”

It sounds to me like she’s saying Aunt Jemima but it’s really hard to understand her because the sticky fingers of Mrs. Butterworth are clutching her throat from inside out and isn’t it just like Mama to mumble when she’s got a mouthful. She hasn’t moved far from the feed trough since Daddy was found lying face down beneath his pancaked deer stand, amid crumpled sacks of Archer Farms produce. A gut-shot, out of season ten-point whitetail lay bloated forty yards from Daddy, stinking to high heaven.

In the course of his investigating, Sheriff Hardscrabble mentioned the buck is having a rough go of it, given today’s economy, and we need to cut Mother Nature some slack. Then he turns toward the county coroner and whispers if he were hung with a name like my daddy’s; Hungry Jack, he’d use a spotlight and a high power with some serious kick to it and poach a tender yearling doe to satisfy his hunger. Hell, he might even risk sneaking onto the Harris Ranch and cut a choice steer or two from their herd.

Aunt Clarissa waltzes into the kitchen demanding to know if we'd be interested in ham hocks for dinner. Christ, breakfast isn't even over and we're already planning our next feast. Clarissa's girlfriend, Dagmar, has been boycotting our meals on account of being Jewish and our Gentile diet is really off-putting.

Auntie's been waffling between male and female lovers ever since her Earl expired while sopping up Log Cabin Syrup at fish camp. A bunch of the boys found him lying gut down with a whole skillet of Jimmy Dean sausages squealing in the cast iron pan that had never been washed since the day it was new. It was plain to those fellows, who were taking regular menthol-scented hits from cigarettes marketed to make them look cool, that the little porkers in the pan were burned up about their situation and they just knew they'd get tossed right through one of the holes in the two-seater—why two people would share an outhouse is beyond my comprehension.

Clarissa's been shacking with Dagmar right under Mother's nose, well, actually out on the driveway in plain view of the neighbors. I don't know how long it will be before Mama's Catholic upbringing kicks in bringing a violent end to her sister's budding romance.

I already missed the school bus so I'm probably late as usual for class beings I got to hoof it to town on my own. As I'm walking past Clarissa's camper van with the license plate that spells out the color PURPLE right below the spare tire that has a cover over it saying VANGINA, all in capital letters so as you can't miss it, Dagmar sticks her head out the side door and asks if I need a lift. Right, like it would be another excuse for her to grope me, just like Uncle Earl did before he up and croaks. Am I suppose to be some sort

of equal opportunity squeeze for grownups whose libidos are too grand for the small minds that marshal them through their pathetic little lives?

Dagmar is really pissed Clarissa's license plate doesn't spell out RAINBOW. Give me a break, like Auntie needs to boldly advertise her latest sexual proclivities? Clarissa told Mama she couldn't decide between hanging a plate that read red or one that spelled out blue so she combined the colors and come up with PURPLE. Every time she thinks about the men in her life she sees red, but living without a man definitely makes her blue and she's just taking Dagmar out for a test spin, so to speak. I can't for the life of me see either of them motoring around our city, especially in the VANGINA.

Usually after school I walk home with my cousins Sydney and Ethyl. We don't take the bus because of the teasing we get from the boys on account of our names. Mine is Florence Flap-Jack but the guys all call me dough girl. I'll admit I could stand to lose a couple of pounds, especially when they tease about rolling me in Bisquick to find the wet spot—like I'd ever consider putting out for any of them. They refer to Sydney as sticky fingers and Ethyl is of course the town pump. They earned their reputations as they've been dating since the sixth grade. Ethyl, the uppity one, prefers the backseats of Chryslers, while Sydney will put out in any vehicle except a pickup truck.

Nearly all week I let Walter Odekirk walk me home because my load of books is too much to handle and he's a brawny sort of fellow. Walter doesn't mind me being a little overweight because his older brothers told him it was right smart to pick a gal with more cushion for the pushing. I told him those sick bastards in his family were too worthless to do anything other than lay around with drool running out the corners of their mouths. Why is everything always about sex?

I get home and the VANGINA is nowhere to be seen and Mama is sitting out front of the TV watching Billy Graham dazzle a stadium full of Christians. She's inhaling the last piece of a better-than-sex chocolate confection my aunt laid claim to after she pushed some scrawny dude off his chair during a gay-lesbian cakewalk.

"Where'd Auntie go?" I ask.

"I run her and the girlfriend off."

"Why?"

"They're poor role models. Now go into the kitchen and fix yourself one of those ham hocks in the Frigidaire—you'll probably have to nuke it but save room for supper."

Mama seems intent on scaling the mountain called obesity and she's dragging me along. However, I'm clinging to the edge and digging my heels in. I'm planning to make a run for low-cal Southern Cal, first chance I get.

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