

The Road a Scripture

by Marsha McSpadden

Granny says Jesus works quiet and curious but mama leaving with the UPS man weren't no great mystery. Says if mama took an interest in her salvation like she did fornicating, well then. Her mouth pinches, wrinkly and sour, and she putters off, muttering how we are two jars of spilt milk.

Granny's big on Jesus and washing regular and combing through life looking for signs. Says it isn't everybody can study their toast and see the Savior staring right back at them.

She's got Scooter and me searching for them too but she don't like the ones we find. Says we've been living sinful so long it's twisted our vision.

There's a sickness roaming out there but granny don't like to talk about it. She thinks mama's got a different kind of sickness though she don't say what exactly. Only that Jesus will keep us safe from germs and all the things we can't see so long as we turn loose of our wicked ways, say our prayers, and stop tracking dirt into her house.

Filth, granny says, is what brung that sickness around to begin with.

The sickness is like water, is like soap, washing the wicked from this world.

School let out to save people from it but there's only one kind of person who can really save you. You Know Who.

Even if there was school, granny wouldn't let us go. She's teaching us the old ways. How to witch for water and read clouds. Which flowers to take for a bellyache and how to skin a squirrel. Mama let us grow soft by letting us pick whatever we wanted off the grocery shelves. It's alright I guess but I miss cheez ums and my best friend Amanda and the dog next door. Scooter just misses

mama. Sometimes he cries about it in his sleep. But we try not to dwell because granny will snatch our tongues out.

Granny says Jesus knows where you lay your head and all the thoughts inside it. He whispers to her in the night about the end times drawing near. But it's the devil you gotta watch out for. When he gets lonely he goes ear to ear hawking all the mischief he's got planned.

Granny says that's what happened to mama. She took the devil up on his offer.

We'd only been there a couple of days when they said sit tight, stop talking to strangers. But mama don't care for rules much. That road out front, a scripture only she could read. That truck her one chance at salvation.

Water or road. It don't matter how you go.

So, we're living with granny, I guess, where the trees have teeth and the crows sit on the roof talking to one another. There's great big prayer spiders that weave words into their webs that only granny understands. You don't want to find your name in their thread.

Scooter likes to lay down in the front yard, ear flat to dirt, listening for the grind of the gravel, hoping that truck will deliver mama back to us. He's too young to know any better.

When we're riding granny's patience, she shoos us off to play in the woods where vines drape the trees like they're wearing ghosts for clothes. Out where the creek sings and red mud blooms. I try and talk the creek into rising so it can float me far far away. Scooter hunts for feathers so he can make his own set of wings. Just like mama, we are looking for ways outta here.

The calendar keeps flipping and the sickness keeps growing. Soon it's Easter even though it don't feel right without mama.

The sickness swiped the service but granny makes us dress up anyway. Two frilly outfits that smell like attic. We sit like sticks in the special room where the furniture creaks and the busted springs poke our bones.

Granny fiddles around with the radio trying to act like it's as shiny as church but she huffs and puffs about her rights being thieved. The preacher gets his feathers raised about how the end is inching nearer every day, and granny perks right up. When they start singing about blood, she jumps up, swaying side to side, waving to Jesus like he's sitting right there. Scooter stares so hard he forgets to blink.

And then there's a great clapping only it ain't coming from Scooter or me. It's coming from outside. And it's not clapping but thunder where the clouds have stolen the sun. Scooter's eyes get as big as biscuits. The radio makes a horrible racket and then the weatherman takes over, saying we gotta hightail it to our safe spot.

A test, granny says, hopping around trying to scare us out the backdoor. Bigger than eating poke weed. Bigger than juggling snakes. Says that great big storm's coming to see if we're filled with as much evil as she reckons.

It's beautiful, that storm. The light's gone green and the lighting pops purple straight to the ground. But it makes Scooter stutter.

Granny says, Go on child, don't be afraid.

She pushes me out into the yard where the wind is busy bending trees, blowing the new green down the road, like it wants to clean every little thing.

Her voice turns weird, the words tripping off her tongue. The only thing I can shake out: try and catch the lightning.

So, I do. I run out into the yard and stretch my hand out. Thinking once I snag that lightning, I'll tuck it in my pocket.

The rain splashes against my feet until there ain't a stitch of me dry. I see that cloud coming down like a hand from heaven and I think maybe granny is right—it's come to scrape the meanness from

my insides and that's the kind of clean that just might bring mama
back.

