

# The Good Son

*by Paul de Denus*

My mother Edie still lives here. She won't let go, even after all these years. Senior services from the county keep a wayward eye on the situation, sometimes bringing food and house cleaning help, at least for the inside. The property is in such neglect but there's still running water and a useable fireplace. Clark's Market lingers three miles down the crossroad.

The county says she has a right to stay, live where she wants. My mother says she doesn't want anyone to come. She puts on a good act. They've deduced she's still of sound mind and body. What do they know? My father Walter is long gone. He ran off in '53 to Oklahoma somewhere, started a new life in hiding.

My mother wants to be with her babies. She wants to make it right. In her heart, she knows that's impossible. You can't bring back the dead. At least, not in the sense she wants. What my father did back in '53 was unforgivable, why he ran. My mother said he'd run off with the kids after an argument to 'who knows where', she didn't know. She did know. She convinced them all we'd be back. No one in the overwhelmed system seemed to take much interest in keeping tabs, just another domestic dispute and separation.

I come down and see her often. She talks, her lone voice echoing across the walls, about the past, about regret. I stand apart, the silent horror, absorb her pain, her rotting guilt. It's driving her insane. She asks about Megan, if she's going to come visit too. I whisper the truth; no, she is still very much afraid. I tell her I'm taking good care of Meg the proper way. That's what big brothers do.

Someday our mother will die and I can promise it will be of a natural cause. I will have no hand in it. I'm not like my father or my

mother. I'm not like them at all. I have forgiven them and made peace with the past. I can live with that.

The house is never quiet. The old bones groan. The wind shuffles my memory. This is the only home I know. It's why I stay, where we'll stay long after our mother is gone.

