

On 4/26/13 Alanna Lytle Alter wrote:

My mother, Bobbie Cox Lytle, and I will not attend this year's reunion. She just turned 96 and is still in excellent health and driving her car!

I am sending you a short story, not for a contest, just for fun. This is creative non-fiction based on a few facts: Bobbie's sister Nadean Cox Myers Spinks worked as a butcher, she met returned WWII veteran Aubrey Spinks at a dance, and what happened with the letters and the incident at the farm actually occurred. The rest is fiction. Details of Aubrey's family are invented. This story is currently being published in the 2013 edition of The Porter Gulch Review of Cabrillo Community College in Aptos, CA.

West Texas Encounter

Customers lined up three deep at the glass counters. "Next," Nadean called as she wiped her hands on her apron and straightened her white cap. She'd weighed countless roasts and wrapped a hundred pork chops today. She longed for a cigarette. Nadean chuckled when her next customer passed ration coupons over the counter out of habit. "Sorry, Mrs. Shackelford, we only take good old American money now."

The woman grinned and placed three quarters on the counter. "I just cain't believe that World War II is finally over. My Leroy is due home any day now and that's why I'm gettin' ground sirloin, to make his favorite meatloaf."

"That's great news, Mrs. Shackelford. Here's your change," Nadean replied as she handed back two dimes and a penny. "Next, please."

"How y'all doin'?" Nadean greeted a grimacing woman in a floral shirtwaist. Matching lavender flowers decorated her straw hat. Her little boy in a once-tucked shirt yanked on her arm, abbreviating what patience she had left.

"Billy Dean, behave!" She forced a smile at Nadean. "I'll take a fryer, please. How much for that there chicken?" the exasperated mother managed before the child slipped free of her hand and fled for freedom. "Billy Dean Crumpler, you come back here this instant!" A jingle of coins added to the woman's plight as her purse spilled out onto the linoleum floor.

A tall man in a navy suit reached out a long arm. "Whoa there, pardner. Where do you think you're agoin'?"

"To the candy store, mister," The little boy said as he tried to edge past the lanky stranger.

The man bent down with his hands on his knees, eye-level with the child. "You better help your mama pick up her money, young man." The boy shrugged in defeat and slunk back to his mother. He picked up a dime and a nickel and handed them to her.

The man strode over and handed a few coins to the woman. "Thank you, sir," the flustered mother managed. "Much obliged."

"Twaren't nothin', ma'am," the stranger replied, tipping his hat. "Happy to help."

Nadean hardly noticed the episode as she weighed, wrapped and marked the customer's package. "That'll be eighty-three cents, ma'am." Billy Dean's mother paid for her purchase and left.

The man approached the counter and smiled at the lady butcher in her little white cap. Nadean took a sharp breath when she look up and faced the man in the navy suit. "Howdy, darlin'! I didn't know you worked here," he said.

Nadean blushed to her auburn-dyed roots. "Well, we was mostly dancin', not talkin' the other night. I didn't recognize you out of uniform. What can I get for you?"

"How about a date for the dance Friday night?" Navy Suit asked. "I'm Aubrey, by the way." She stared into his twinkling grey eyes, suddenly lost and then found. "I'm Nadean."

“I’m not so sure about this,” Nadean murmured. She adjusted her scarlet fedora and patted the velvet rose on the side, a fresh cigarette between her Really Ruby-tipped fingers.

Aubrey guided his two-toned Oldsmobile down the rutted road and assured Nadean that his family would love to meet her. “I like you and I know that they’ll take to you just fine.”

“Well, I’m as riled up as a jackrabbit at a coyote convention. I mean, my divorce and all. And what about my son?”

“Honey, my folks is understandin’ about life. They know that divorce is sometimes preferable to a miserable marriage. Your husband’s girlfriend puttin’ his love letters in your mailbox was the biggest favor anyone ever done for you.” Aubrey patted her hand. “Besides, they like little tykes. They had thirteen of us. Don’t you worry none. They’ll take to Stormy like butter to bread.”

Nadean fretted, “But we’ve only been seein’ each other for a month. This is so sudden.” She puffed on her Pall Mall and tossed it out the open window.

“Life is precious, sweetheart. What I seen over in Europe makes you want to grab the people you love and hold on tight. I’ve got lead in my belly and the scars to prove it. If it wasn’t for that little feller in my unit who carried me to the medics, I woulda died over there in Germany.”

“Oh, Aubrey, I had no idea. It all seemed so far away. We just had the newspapers and radio reports. The rationing was so dang inconvenient. I guess it’s different if you’re gettin’ shot at,” Nadean sighed.

Aubrey grasped her hand this time. “When I laid on that cot in a tent with my guts stitched back together, I done a lot of thinkin’.” He shook his head. “If I ever make it back home, I’m gonna find me a fine lady and I’m gonna treat her good, I thought. And I found you.”

With tears edging her eyes, Nadean said, “Well then, I think I’m ready to meet the family.” She opened her red purse, pulled out a silver compact and a tube of her favorite lipstick.

They stirred up a cloud of dust as the Olds crawled the mile of dirt road up to a wooden farmhouse. A leaning barn and animal pens stood a short distance away. Aubrey helped Nadean and her crimson high heels climb the steps to the stoop. He knocked on the door, then opened it and hollered, “Is anybody home? It sure smells good in here!”

A woman with her grey hair up in a bun and a flour-covered apron over her faded dress scuttled out of the kitchen. “Well, son, if you ain’t a sight for these tired eyes! And you’ve done brought company! Elmer, come see what the cat drug in.”

An older replica of Aubrey strolled in, all long legs and arms, a shy grin on his lips. “Well, tarnation, son, it’s about time you brung a young lady around to meet us. But ain’t she a bit too high class for the likes of you all gussied up in them fancy duds?”

Nadean blurted out before she thought, “I work hard every day so I can dress good and take care of my son, sir.” She lifted her chin, “He’s seven. I call him Stormy.”

“Mama, Dad, this here’s Nadean,” Aubrey declared. “If I can sweet talk her, she’s gonna marry me.” Nadean gasped. “Elmer and Phoebe Spinks, meet Nadean, my future wife.”

Elmer hooked his thumbs on the straps of his overalls and curtly replied, “If y’all will excuse me, I was about to butcher a hog.”

“Now, Daddy, mind your manners,” Phoebe hissed through tight lips.

Nadean spoke up as she began pulling off her gloves and her hat, “Hold on a second and get me an apron. I’d be honored to do that for y’all! I’m a butcher.”

That day Nadean filleted a pig and won her in-laws’ hearts.

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