

## Breaking Curfew

Emanuel carefully crept through the old door, trying to keep it from creaking as he entered the dark living room late at night, hours past his curfew. Incredibly, he had managed to get the door opened, and closed, without it emitting a single sound. Just as he began contemplating how he would navigate the noisy wooden floorboards, he heard a soft, gentle voice.

“Emanuel turn the lights on please.”

“Grandma?”

“Turn on the lights Emanuel.”

“Grandma why are you sitting here in the dark?”

Draped in an overcoat, the old woman sat quietly in a long flannel nightgown and house slippers, her, somewhat emaciated, wrinkled hands gently folded over the top of her purse resting on her lap. As Emanuel turned the lights on in the living room, she began swaying back and forth in her rocking chair, putting pressure on the aged wooden floorboards which caused them to sing out in a rhythmic agony: creak, creak, creak...

“Grandma...”

“Emanuel, curfew done passed a long time ago.”

“Grandma, we need to talk about this curfew stuff!”

“Naw, naw, naw boy... ain’t nuthin needs discussin. You s’posed to have your behind in this house and in your bed by the hour I done told you. Ain’t nuthin needs discussin other than that!”

“Grandma I’m a grown man now and “men” don’t have curfews!”

“Boy... 15 ain’t grown! Trust your granny, I done had my share of grown men over the years and I’m here to tell ya, 15 ain’t shit. Now go on over there and sit your “thinkin-ya-grown” ass down and listen to what I got to tell you.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Emanuel you know for far too long we ain’t had nobody but you and me?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“And when you was a baby shittin yourself, I was the one wiping that nasty ass, wasn’t I?”

“Uh... yes ma’am?”

“Well Emanuel, when you don’t falla the rules of this here house, you startin to shit again... but this time you shittin on me.”

“Grandma!”

“Hush now boy! Just hush and let a old woman testify.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Now you “know” I love you don’t ya?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“And you “know” I’d do just about anything for you don’t ya?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“And it’s because I love you that I’ma give you a choice you need to make tonight Emanuel.”

“Grandma please, I’m tired!”

“Boy I done taught you better than that! Don’t you raise your voice at me! Don’t you interrupt grown folks when they talkin!”

“Yes ma’am.”

“For the past year now you been peacocking round here talkin bout you’s a man and breakin all ma rules and so I went out and got a lil somethin for you.

The creaking of the rocking chair stops as grandma opens her purse.

“Jesus Christ grandma what are you doing with a gun?”

“Don’t you take the lord’s name in vain boy! Sit yourself back down in that chair and I’m gonn tell you what it’s for. Are you listening?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“I been thinking that If you willing to walk over an old woman like me who ain’t did nuthin but love you for your whole life then lord only knows what you gonna be willin to do to folks out in the world. Emanuel I love you too much to let you make a complete mess of your life.”

“Grandma, you scaring me.”

“Oh then that’s good grandbaby, real good cuz I was startin to think you had lost the good sense that god gave ya.”

“Grandma I’m listening, please stop pointing the gun at me. If you wanted to get my attention then you got it!”

“Shut up and sit still! As long as you sit still and listen to what your granny got to say, you ain’t got nuthin to be worry’n about.”

“Grandma your hands are shakin, you’re really scaring me.”

“Them hands shaking is just old age talking to me. You got a decision to make grandbaby, and if you make the right one you gonna get a chance for old age to talk to you to.”

“Whatever you want me to say is what I’m gonna say grandma, you just tell me what it is that you want me to say but please stop pointing that gun at me!”

“Ah I guess you ain’t a man no more huh? Look at you sittin there wettin yourself like when you was a baby. Boy you better straighten your back up in that chair and listen to what your granny got to tell you!”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Emanuel, you got a choice to make and I’m just the lord’s messenger here to help you make the right one is all. You can decide to follow the rules of this here house or... you can choose to make your walk through the Pearly Gates tonight. Now, stop all that shaking and sniffin and be the man you been struttin round here talkin about. Make your damn choice boy!”

“I... I... I... I choose to follow the rules of your house grandma.”

“Lord Jesus, lord Jesus... I prayed the lord would guide you to the right choice. That was some wise decision makin Emanuel and I’m proud of you for having the courage to make the “right” choice.” I’m gonna put this thing away now.

“Yes ma’am.”

“Don’t go getting too comfortable just yet. A house ain’t a home unless its’ got rules and me and my purse gonna be here sittin, waitin on you the next time time you choose to break curfew.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“I know you been out alley-cat’n and probably didn’t eat so I made you some of your favorite chilly and cornbread. It’s on the stove in the kitchen. Go ahead and have you some and then get to bed. I’ve got to go lay these tired old bones down for what’s left of this night. I love you grandbaby.”

“I love you too grandma.”

The end