

Layers of my kin

Katherine stood in the bedroom trying to convince her husband to at least bathe while her granddaughter sat in the living room with the McKinney's and their grandson staring out of the window as the snow continued to build around the cabin.

"Kate, I have told you once already, I will not nor will I ever bathe after that colored man or his kinfolk."

"Nathan Warren Epstein, you will keep your voice down and not speak like that about Mr. McKinney, his family nor his people in such a way in my presence. I was not raised that way and neither were you. If you wish to speak like that you should live in a hogs pin."

"Perhaps I was not raised that way but that still does not change the fact that I stand by my previous statement one hundred percent. I said it and I am not about to take it back."

"Stan now, Mr. McKinney and his family are guest in this cabin and snowed in just as we are with nowhere to go. The least you can do is bathe, something in which you have not done in two days so, I'm asking, for all of our sake, mainly mine, would you please bathe yourself? You are beginning to smell just like the hogs you speak like."

"Kate, for once and for all, it will not happen this day nor any other day that I step inside of a bathtub after a colored man. Now, I expect this desolate snowstorm to ease any day now and we can withdraw ourselves from this retched place and leave it to those colored people if that's what they wish. We can rejoin our family and friends in our close nit environment."

"Ok, fine then Stan but just for your records, you do not have any friends close enough to nit a sweater, outside of your brother who, unfortunately, has a crummy attitude just like you and you certainly do not have any social network, nor do I, why? because you are just not a social person. You are not and that not only hurts you but it also hurts me. Now, if you insist on continuing in your ways then fine. You continue to do so but I cleaned the tub and since you refuse to bathe, perhaps I will enjoy a bath myself."

"Excuse me Kate, I, my dear, am going to shave and have a nice bath," Nathan said as he gathered his shaving kit for the job. His wife smiled, knowing she still had some influence on her husband. She should, they have been married for thirty years. She just knew she knew him in and out. "I will not have my wife or my granddaughter subjected to any possible misfortune. Something may happen in there and I will be responsible, besides, it was my idea to come here in the first place. I just did not know they would be here too."

"Stop it Stan. Go. I cleaned and sanitized the entire bathroom, now go on."

"I shall but only because it has been a few ours since my very last excursion in a shower and not because you forced me to do so. I do not even wish to sit in the same room as those people so, if I am gone long, it is only because I am taking my time."

No sooner did the bathroom door close, did the phone ring. HattieMae called out to Katherine from the living room. Katherine hesitated before picking up the bedroom phone. HattieMae thought it was strange that Katherine would hesitate about picking up



the phone. She had opened the bedroom door when HattieMae called her but left it open when she went and stood next to the phone. She also thought it was strange that a man would be calling Katherine, especially during dinner hour. She glanced over at her grandson and the Epstein's granddaughter, as they watched Mr. McKinney through the window.

Katherine eased the bedroom door closed before she lifted the phone from its cradle, pulled it to her ear then waited for HattieMae to hang up her end. "Yes, this is Kate.

HattieMae slid the phone down on its cradle just as her husband walked in the cabin with an arm full of firewood.

"Whew, it's colder than Vermont out there. It's not even fit for old possum butt out there. Boy, I know one thing, I would hate to be out there any longer than I have to and I hope I do not have to venture out there again. In fact, the next time we need fire wood, let Epstein go get it."

"I'll get some pop."

"No you wont either. We had our turn now it's his turn."

"Don't be like that pop, it aint nothing to get firewood, besides I like the snow myself. I'm sort of glad I did come."

"Boy, you didn't have a choice. I was not about to leave you running amuck in my house now here, help me with this wood. Put it over there by the fireplace. We can put some more on the fire in a minute."

Darryl took the logs, tossed one on the fire then laid the rest next to the fireplace in the wood spine. Then he and Kim stepped outside. Lester rubbed his hands as he moved closer to the fireplace. "Ah, yeah now, that's better. He finally looked over at his wife and noticed the concerned look on her face. He pulled his coat off then hung it on the rack while his wife closed her eyes for a second before opening them again.

The cabin was a two bedroom with a large living room and loft above. It was modestly furnished with simple furniture, two couches, one chair and a large chandelier stood in the living room. A Moose's head stood still over the fireplace.

"What is wrong with you HattieMae, you all right? Why are you looking like you do not want to be here? I hope you're not still blaming me for getting snowed in and having to hike a mile up here. Look, had I known that Epstein and his family booked the cabin on the same weekend; I would have chosen a different one. But you should know that was on the people who run the place plus, I spoke to the manager while we were down at the office and he promised we could have an extra weekend free. He actually told me to tell Epstein but I don't think so. He just may try to be funny and pick the same weekend as we do again. So, no, I'm not telling him anything. Just tell me when you want to come back and it's done. HattieMae, you hear me?"

Mr. McKinney walked over to his wife then asked her again. "What's happened, HattieMae, did that old coon hound disrespect you?" Mr. McKinney stormed over to the bedroom door and banged on it. His wife was on his heels.

"I have just about had enough of this foolishness and ignorance and it is going to stop right here right now. Come on out here you old bastard. This is it, you and me, right here right now. Come on out of that bedroom." Mrs. McKinney tried to get her husband to lower his voice and stop acting like a raven maniac. "No man will disrespect my wife while I'm still breathing, no man. Just when he stepped back and was about to kick the door in, it flung open.



Mr. McKinney drew back with his fist and was about to punch Mr. Epstein when he came up behind him and shouted. "What in the world, were you about to assault my wife? I knew it. You people are alike."

Mr. Epstein asked his question at the same time Darryl and Kim stepped inside and asked what was going on.

"I'll tell you what's going on."

"No. I asked if you were about to strike my wife."

"You, you bastard, what the hell did you say to my wife?" Mr. McKinney spun around pointing his finger as he stepped closer to Mr. Epstein.

Darryl grabbed his grandfather by the arm while Kim stepped between the two men. "Just stop it you two. Ever since we got here, you have been disrespecting one another. It is not anybody's fault we got snowed in unless you blame Mother Nature. If you're not blaming her, stop blaming one another."

"Stop it. Darryl and I are sick of it, sick, sick, sick." Kim stormed over then plopped down on one of the couches.

"What does she mean *we*, son?" Mr. McKinney turned then focused his attention on his grandson.

"No, describe *we* to me, break that word down for me because as far as I know the meaning of that word *we* means more than one person. We have been in this cabin for less than a week, young lady, thank heavens, now you're using words like *we* and *sick*, explain yourself young lady." Mr. Epstein walked over to where his granddaughter sat on the couch and stood over her, with a towel draped around his neck, his shaving kit in one hand.

Mrs. Epstein finally pulled the door all the way open then said, "What in the world is all this racket out here?"

Mr. Epstein grabbed his granddaughter by the arm then pulled her in the bedroom and closed the door at the same time Mr. McKinney walked off with his grandson to the other bedroom and closed the door. Mrs. McKinney looked at Mrs. Epstein. Both women had tears in their eyes but Mrs. Epstein lowered her head.

"I'm sorry Kate."

"You shouldn't have. You had no right to listen in on my private concerns." Mrs. Epstein raised her head. Both women dressed in warm sweaters and thick socks.

"You are right, Kate. I had no right and I apologize. I did not mean to listen in as I did. I...just that...I'm sorry. I really am sorry Kate."

The two women embraced as a flood of tears left Mrs. Epstein's eyes. Mrs. McKinney held Mrs. Epstein tighter. She finally pulled back out of the embrace and dabbed Mrs. Epstein's eyes with the end of her sweater before they walked over and sat on the couch. Mrs. McKinney left the room, returning shortly with two cups of hot coffee and sat a tray on the table in front of Mrs. Epstein, sat down next to her and took one of her hands in her own and placed it in her lap.

"You know I'm here for you should you need to talk, Kate. I know our husband's are not exactly what we would describe as friends but that is no reason for the two of us not to be friendly and social, if you were considering it, or not."

Mrs. Epstein pulled a tissue from her pocket then wiped her nose. "I appreciate what you're trying to do, HattieMae and I honestly do not mind being friends, you are such a sweet woman but there is no time to wallow in any kind of new friendship, not now."



Mrs. McKinney was taken back a bit, caught off guard. "Oh then, is there anything I can do for you?" she eased her hand away so it would not be that noticeable.

"Yes, mind your own business." Mrs. Epstein got to her feet. Mrs. McKinney stood as well, undeterred.

"You are my business, Kate, you and everyone here, as long as we are here together. Your husband, your granddaughter, my husband and my grandson are all my business and whether you like it or not, I am also yours. We are family because we have to be, whether you like it or not. That is what one does in tough times like this, become a better and closer family."

Mrs. Epstein digested the words, her immediate reality then sat back down with Mrs. McKinney. "I apologize. It's just..."

"No, Kate, you do not have to apologize." Mrs. McKinney patted Mrs. Epstein's arm. "I understand, Kate, I really do. I just want to know what I can do to help you."

"Mrs. Epstein took up her cup of coffee then took a small sip. "Um, wow, this is a great cup of coffee. I would not have thought you could make such a good cup."

Mrs. McKinney chuckled. "Don't insult me now Kate. It doesn't take much to boil hot water and add pretreated coffee grounds to it."

"No, I'm sorry. I did not mean it that way. What I meant was, how did you know how I like my coffee? You brought the exact amount of every ingredient."

"Lucky guess I suppose."

"Well, it was a damn good one."

"Tell me what's wrong, Kate. Have you told Stan?" Mrs. McKinney dabbed Mrs. Epstein's eyes with a tissue as she took the cup away and placed it back on the tray.

"No. I could never mention it to him and you have to promise that you will not speak a word of it, not even to your husband or grandson. If my granddaughter finds out it would kill her."

"I don't know, Kate, this isn't something I would necessarily keep from my family, considering the fact that Stan is already ill."

"You see, HattieMae, that is exactly why I can never tell him. The news would almost certainly kill him. Please, HattieMae, you have to keep this between the two of us. Besides, hadn't you meddled enough? If you hadn't eavesdropped on my conversation, you would have never known because I would never have told you."

"Yes, and had I not eavesdropped, as you put it, you would still be sneaking around using these." Mrs. McKinney held up an empty prescription bottle. "What is this Kate?"

"Where did you get that? Give it to me"

"It fell out of your pocket earlier. I had been meaning to speak with you about it but I had to wait until the proper time."

"It was a prescription for pain relocation. I got them through my sister back home."

"Kate, you know full well how dangerous it is to take a prescription that was not prescribed for your personal use."

"I am aware, that is exactly why I had my Doctor write the prescription in my sisters name."

"So Stan wouldn't find out?"

"Exactly, not until I am ready to tell him."

"He is going to find out sooner or later Kate. How long have you known?"