

## It Ain't Nothing But a Feeling

With tears in her eyes she lay in bed and thought about the few happy times there had been in her life. There had not been many. So few in fact she could name them all. She had not forgotten a single one.

Some of the few happy times she had shared with Reed. Theirs was not an ordinary relationship. Not by any means. They had come together uncertainly and without really thinking about it. She being uncertain of her own womanliness and her inability to raise desire in a man and he, only thinking about getting laid.

They were both swimmers. She had been swimming at the high school swimming pool for about a four summers before she really started paying attention to him. She noticed how he cut bold strokes through the water and his backstroke was magnificent.

No one had ever paid much attention to Reed as he was growing up. He was always overshadowed by his older brother Bill, two years his senior. Bill was more sophisticated and was captain of the football team. Reed was an Eagle Scout and had attained some of higher rankings – but these were not things that impressed the girls.

Cynthia first met Reed at his father's office. She had stopped by to see when swimming would begin that summer. When she opened the door, instead of seeing Coach Wilson sitting at the desk, Reed was there. Coach Wilson was sitting, reared back in a chair, at the side of the desk. Coach Wilson grinned, just as he always did when a pretty girl was near, no matter what her age.

"Yeah, Kid. What can I do for you?" Coach Wilson drawled at her.

“I came to see when swimming lessons are gonna start,” she stammered.

She had not expected him to be here in his father’s office. She was careful not to look directly at him but she could feel his eyes on her. Her heart was beating so loudly she wondered why they couldn’t hear it.

“What?” Coach Wilson asked with mock incredulity, “you want to take lessons again this year? The boys have already taught you everything they know.” He laughed, probably at the dirty images his mind conjured up.

He picked up a clipboard from the desk and flipped through some sheets attached to it. Without looking up he said, “Why don’t you teach for us this year?”

She didn’t know what to say. She had been taking lessons for four years now and enjoyed the lessons tremendously. But she had always seen herself on the receiving end. Never on the giving end.

He looked up from the clipboard.

“Well do you want to or not?” His voice had a hint of impatience in it.

“Yeah,” she heard herself saying. “Sure.”

He looked at her for a long time. “Be here before six on June 2<sup>nd</sup>.”

He started to write. “I probably won’t see you before then so don’t forget.”

She nodded her head and turned to go.

“Tell that Walker girl I want her here, too. And Lillie Belle. I’ve already told Stouts.”

“Don’t forget,” he called after her as she shut the door.

Her head whirled as she walked to her math class. She could not believe it. They wanted her to help with the Red Cross swimming program. That meant she would be with him from six until twelve every day except Saturdays and Sundays. And since student instructors could swim for free every day and most of the instructors spent most of their free time at the pool, she might run into him quite often that summer. She could not believe it.

Swimming lessons went on for more than a month every summer. You could work a miracle in four weeks. If she could not get something on in that length of time, she did not deserve to get anything on. It was then she decided that Reed Wilson was going to be her man no matter what it took.

She remembered seeing him for the first time – really seeing him. It had been during a pick-up basketball game in the gym a few months previously – a game between the 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys. Snow had been on the ground for nearly two weeks and even the two teachers had noticed how the two classes were beginning to get on each other’s nerves.

Things had come to a head one day when both classes wanted to play basketball at the same time. The boys’ Coach Wilson had the solution. “Play each other,” he said.

“Girls? We don’t want to play no girls,” one boy sneered.

Coach Wilson glared at the boy. “Then you don’t have to play.” He looked around trying to spot someone who would be an impartial referee. He spotted one of his sons who had slipped out of the shop class next door.

He shrilled his whistle. When the boy looked around, he waved his hand at him. “Come here!” Coach Wilson yelled.

The boy walked over to the group. Coach Wilson told his son what he wanted him to do and the game began.

From the moment Reed started the game, Cynthia could not take her eyes off him. She could see his muscles ripple under his tight jeans when he walked. As was customary super jock style of the day, his shirt was one size too small, making his chest look even larger than it actually was. To say he was gorgeous is not being precise enough. To say he was one fine hunk of man would be coming closer to the truth.

Normally Cynthia was a pretty good guard and she liked playing on the same team as Big Doris rather than having to play against her. Big Doris, although only in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, was one of the best forwards in the school. Most of their shots were set up for her. She seldom missed a basket and being nearly five-ten there weren't many of the boys that day who went up against her.

The story goes that a couple of guys had tried to play grab-ass with Big Doris one day on the way to homeroom. She had bounced them both off the lockers lining the wall. The clanging metal reverberated through the halls causing teachers and students to dive for cover.

Before the month was out another adventuresome fellow had only wanted to play tittie bump with her. She laid him up for over two weeks with her knee. His brother told everyone that the guy's balls were the size of cantaloupes. After that the boys stayed strictly clear of Big Doris.

Because Cynthia could not keep her eyes off Reed, she missed a couple of key blocks. Big Doris let her know she had missed them with a couple of trips. Cynthia could not be sure but she did not think anyone had ever been penalized for tripping her own team mate.

When Cynthia was fouled by one of the boys, Reed had stood over her and looked down at her for what seemed like a very long time. Slowly he extended his hand and gave her a hand up from the hard wooden floor.

The game was at 36-34 in favor of the girls when the special dress clock rang at a quarter to the hour. They had only five minutes to dress. They all made a mad dash for the showers including Reed who was by that time as hot and sweaty as the players. That had been over two months ago. She had not seen him again until today.

The story of the game had gotten around the school before lunch time. People stopped her and asked her all about it all day long.

On the way home she ran into her brother at the convenience store. He had money so she did not have to snatch a bear track that day. Maybe you don't know what a bear track is. A bear track is a piece of gingerbread the size of a big man's hand and roughly that shape. They're about the thickness of a teacake. But then you probably don't know what a teacake is either. Oh, well.

Anyway, a bear track is made of gingerbread, about the size of a man's hand, covered all over with hard pink icing. When Cynthia didn't have a dime, she just snatched one. So far, she had never gotten caught. Today her brother paid and they walked out of the store together.

They walked along slowly, munching on their bear tracks. She could tell there was something he wanted to say. Finally, he asked, "Did Reed throw the game?"

She immediately saw red. "Hell no," she shouted at him. "You shit ass. What makes you say that? The girls won fair and square and you want to make out we only won 'cause someone cheated for us."

The truth was, there had been two or three calls that she knew about that were most definitely in favor of the girls. But that made no difference. Those were judgment calls – called the way the ref saw them. They had won fair and square.

Her brother stopped walking and looked at her. "You cuss too much." That was all he said. In fact, he didn't say too much more all the way home.

Reed did not pay much attention to her during the first week or so of lessons. She spent the time after nine o'clock concentrating on building up her stamina for the mile swim she would have to make in order to get her Life Saving badge.

In fact, he had not had too much to say to her at all until one Saturday afternoon as she was on her way to the movies. He was raking up trash in his back yard. She heard a whistle and turned around. She did not see him at first. He was standing in the gloom underneath a tree, leaning on his rake.

"Hi," she called out. "Reed, is that you?" She walked over to the fence out of the sunlight.

"Yeah. It's me. Where you on your way to?" he asked. She told him.

They talked about movies they had each seen that summer for nearly a quarter of an hour. Movies in general. The movie she was going to see in particular. And whether or not she was meeting someone there. The answer was no.

"I might see you there after I finish raking this here yard." He smiled and her heart went racing again.

She floated the rest of the way into town.

When he finally got there they sat together in the balcony of the movie theatre. Most of the kids had come for the matinee earlier and were gone by then. Sometimes there wasn't hardly anyone at all in the balcony on Saturday afternoons.

They sat up near the back where it was very dark and petted. Reed kept rubbing her breast and kissing her on the neck and pinching her nipples. He even put his head down on her breasts and chewed her nipples through her blouse.

His hand kept moving along her leg and finally he got up enough nerve to put his hand between the thighs and force her legs apart.

They were with each other nearly every day that summer. He told her things about himself, things he would never have dared tell anyone else. About his disastrous love affair with an older girl who had gone away to college and never even bothered to call when she was home during the holidays or spring breaks. She could tell that he lacked confidence with girls. His other main issue, the really big one, was his living in the shadow of his older brother.

They talked of many other things. She liked to hear him talk. She shared many of his beliefs and wanted to be part of his struggles, to share his pain, and his rewards. He talked of going away to school in two years. He did not know what he wanted to do with his life but he did know that he did not want to be a teacher like his father.

Every once in a while she could tell that he was beginning to have genuine feelings for her. Sometimes his eyes would become moist and he would be loving and tender. He would say little tender things that made her think she meant something to him. Little things that made her think his future might include her.

Once, he said to her, "I think you're falling in love with me. Don't." That was all he said on the matter, but he started to avoid her for periods of time – as if he were getting up enough strength to resist any feeling that came over him when he did see him.

That fall she knew she was pregnant. Any number of reasons could have accounted for the physical symptoms. But she knew she wasn't ill. She did not need a doctor to verify this for her. She knew. She did not know exactly how she knew. She just knew, that's all.

She was only fifteen and the boy was only seventeen. There was nothing to do. She could not have the baby. They had already decided. They being her mother and father. They had argued bitterly the night she told them. Her mother did not cry, though Cynthia had believed that she would.

She told them one evening as they were having dinner in their kitchen. Cynthia stared into a corner past her father's shoulder as she told them. Her father sat in the straight back chair that he himself had made in the Veteran's Trade School after the war. A lot of their furniture was made by him. He rubbed the turnings on the finials. He never tired of making the intricate shapes. Nearly every piece of furniture he built had some type of turned work.

"What in hell you gonna do with a baby?" he demanded to know of Cynthia. "You gotta keep up your schooling. You ain't old enough to take care of nobody except yourself and now I wonder about that." There were no tears in his eyes but she could hear them in his voice.

Her mother leaned across the table. The old lined scared hand covered the young one. "Cynthia are you sure, Honey? Are you sure? How do you know?"

"I'm sure, Momma," she said with a tone of finality. "My time has come and gone twice."

The sound of her father's hounds out in the back yard brought her father from his chair. He got up and walked over to the door – opened it and yelled out the door at the dogs. They quieted.

After shutting the door, he stood and stared out the glass upper portion. "You can't have this child," he stated flatly. "That's all there is to it. You shoulda known better, girl. You shoulda known better." He stopped and let out a deep breath. Then he went on, "There ain't no use talking about the



sin of all this. That's between you and God." He stopped. His head bent low. He sighed deeply again. "Forgive her, Lord," he said softly.

A week later she lay in the bed in the recovery room. The doctor had just left her and told her she could go back to school any time she felt up to it. "Don't rush it," he said.

She did not ever want to go back to school. She laid and stared at the ceiling, thinking about the things the nurse had told her. "It ain't nothing but a feeling, Chile. A loving feeling. It's natural. A natural feeling."

The nurse came back by to tell her she could get dressed. Cynthia looked despondent. The nurse talked to her in quiet gentle tones, stroking her head and attempting to comfort her.

"You can get it any where. It can come at any time. Sometimes it's the wrong time. But better the feeling at the wrong time than the right time and no feeling. The loving feeling ain't got no respect for time, place, or nobody. Sometimes it's the wrong somebody. But better the wrong body than no feeling for anybody".