

ONE

Norman Freeman sat in the living room, reading the Psalms by the dim light of the lamp on the circle top table between his straight back chair and his wife Alma's rocking chair. She was still in the kitchen, cleaning or arranging dishes as she always did after supper, and he was trying to relax a bit before the sun went completely down. Then he could head off to bed to rest up for another hard day of dirt labor.

The sixty-year old Illinois native was a strong man, farm strong, weathered by years of a rugged yet simple life on the prairie, tending the 100-acre homestead that his father had given to him after passing from this life twenty years ago at the ripe old age of 65. Norman didn't farm all by himself like his father did. Instead he hired a local boy to help him, paying him with the profits from the 25 extra acres of corn he planted. Norman was determined to outlive his father and perhaps even enjoy a few years of retirement before being called home.

The phone rang in the middle of Norman's reading of Psalm 90: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God."

The phone rang a second time. Alma stuck her head into the room. "Answer it," she urged. Norman held up his hand as he finished the paragraph. "It might be important," she insisted. "Maybe it's long distance. It's after seven."

“Can’t be more important than the Lord’s Word,” he said calmly as he picked up the heavy black receiver on the third ring. “Hello,” he bellowed.

“Dad, it’s a boy.”

“A boy? That’s wonderful. Who is this?”

“Who is this! It’s Jack, your son. Who do you think would be calling you Dad and saying it’s a boy?”

“Well, I have two sons, you know.”

“Dean? Right. Like he’d be calling with some *good* news.”

“Never mind that,” Norman said sternly.

“How’s Sylvia doing?” Alma whispered, as she sat down in her rocking chair.

“Momma wants to know how Sylvia’s doing.”

“She’s just fine,” said Jack. “The baby is, too. He weighed in at seven and a half pounds, and he’s doing really good.”

“Seven and a half pounds,” he repeated so Alma could hear. “And they’re both doing well.”

“Did they name him yet?” Alma whispered.

“You got a name for this young fella yet?”

Jack paused for a second to add some drama to the announcement. “We named him David Norman.”

Jack’s words caught Norman by surprise, and he had to clear the lump in his throat before he commented, “You named him David Norman, after my dad and me?”

“Yeah, we did,” said Jack. Alma sat back in her chair and cried more tears into her dish towel.

“You didn’t have to name him after me, Son.”

“Sylvia wanted to name him Norman David, but I said there weren’t any major leaguers named Norman.”

“White Sox just brought up a young kid named Norman Cash, I think.” Alma brought her dish towel down to

her lap in disbelief that these two were already talking baseball.

“White Sox?” gasped Jack. “Since when are you interested in the Sox. I thought you were a die hard Cubs fan.”

“I am,” said the elder Freeman proudly, “but I happened to read it in the paper. If this kid Cash is any good, the Sox will probably trade him away.” Alma shook her head at the direction of the men’s conversation.

“When can we visit them?” Alma asked, rising above her previous whisper to insist on a subject change.

“Can we visit you all sometime? Momma wants to see this new grandson.”

“Anytime, I guess,” said Jack. “When can you get away from the farm?”

“Oh, I suppose we could make it up there in a couple weeks or so.”

“Great,” said Jack. “I’ll let you know when Sylvia gets to come home from the hospital, and we’ll send you some pictures as soon as we get this first roll of film developed.”

“Pictures? That would be good,” said Norman. Alma shook her head vigorously in agreement. “Okay, son, don’t go spendin’ all your money on a long distance call. We’ll get over there and see you all in person sometime soon. Congratulations. We’re really proud of you. Make sure you tell Sylvia and the new little one we said hi.”

“Thanks, Dad. I love you.”

“I love you, too, Son.” Alma waved her hand back and forth in front of her. “We both love you. Thanks for the good news. Good bye.”

“Good bye, Dad.”

Norman straightened the phone cord and hung up the receiver in the cradle. He sat back in his chair and sighed. “Momma, I guess that makes us grandparents. You feel any older?”

“I felt a little older when we heard that Sylvia was pregnant,” she said, “but now that it’s happened, I just feel happy, real happy.”

“Me, too,” Norman sighed. “But I’m also tired, and I’m gonna get some sleep. Sun’s gonna come up early again tomorrow, and the corn ain’t gonna plant itself.”

Norman pushed himself up, using the arms of his old chair. His knees popped a little, but he didn’t feel any real pain in his joints. Alma sat back in her chair, contemplating the events of the evening and the ramifications a new grandson would have on their lives and even more on Jack and Sylvia’s lives. Norman bent over her and kissed her gently on the top of her head. She lifted her eyes to meet his.

“Well, Grandma, goodnight.”

“Goodnight to you, Grandpa. Warm up the bed for me, will ya?”

“Don’t stay up too late,” he urged, although he knew it would probably be a couple of hours before she would make her way back to their bedroom and crawl under the handmade down quilt on the springy old double bed they’d shared for almost 40 years.

What does that woman do during that “before bed” time? Cleaning? Listening to the radio? Reading?

He didn’t ponder the possibilities very long. Instead, he drifted off to sleep quickly and stayed asleep all night to refresh his body for another day of the steady

and sometimes mundane chores and toil on their Central Illinois farm.

Alma sat in her rocking chair for several minutes until she heard the creaking of the bed springs. She bowed her head to pray. “Lord,” she whispered, “now I have one more person on this earth to pray for – David Norman Freeman.”