

"If I take the wings of the dawn,..."

The time is the present, and the place is a small Southern town; once a loyal one mill town, now a small sun belt community looking for a viable economy. The town is built on gently rolling hills, next to a river. The downtown section holds no building higher than three stories, and extends no further than six blocks in any direction from the central town square.

The barren rows of old building fronts appear as old stone faced men, seeking stability, yet irritated by imperceptible change. The buildings stare through their upper windows at the people passing by. The people pass each other, talk to each other, and move in to and out of the gaping store fronts on the street below.

The U.S. Highway dissecting the center of the town splits into two separate one way streets for the journey through the downtown section, then joins as one highway again. It is along these two streets that the tall buildings rest. The intersecting side streets are narrow, one block, two way passageways to the opposing direction of traffic.

The population of this small town is the same mix as it has been for the last one hundred and fifty years. The young, old, black, white, mill worker, farmer and businessman all pass each other in the streets. The differences are only in their clothes.

Walking the edge of one of the side connecting streets is a woman in her mid fifties. Her hair, mostly white, shoots in all directions. She is five feet, five inches tall, and is dressed in a tattered paisley print dress, and a very torn red sweater, covered by an equally torn tan jacket.

The woman is pushing a grocery cart in front of her as she walks slowly from one end of the block to the other. The street she is on is a narrow, two way blacktop, sloping moderately down. The woman walks carefully, struggling to keep her balance as gravity pulls the heavy cart forward.

Inside the cart is a man, twenty nine years old. He is slightly taller than the woman, and dressed in as tattered a suit as she is. He appears lanky, clumsy, and his whole head is clean shaven.

The man stands up inside the cart, causing it to shift to the same side, tipping slightly. He raises his arms from his side, extending them parallel to the street.

In a very nasal voice the man makes a noise. "Waaaaaaa! Waaaaa!"

The woman firmly pats him on his back several times. The man looks straight ahead, then up in the air.

"Waaaaaaa! Waaaaaa!" he shouts again. Looking back at the woman pushing him, he shouts, "Fly! Fly, ma!"

"Sit back down." The woman says sternly to him.

He remains standing and continues to flap his arms in small circles, parallel to the street. "No, ma! Fly now!"

"No!" She speaks more firmly. "The cart'll turn over again. No."

The man flings his hands in large, jerky circles as he falls to his knees inside the grocery cart. He began to moan a nasal wail. "Waaaaaaa! Fly! Waaaaaaa!"

The woman quickly pulls the cart to the cement curb, in the shadow of one of the sullen stone buildings. The chill of the late morning lingers in the shaded street hemming the side of the building.

"Don't you start now, son." the woman sighs as she grabs the flailing arms of her son.

The man falls silent, struggling softly against the control of his mother.

"We got to go miles 'for we get home. Don't go gettin' in this way on me now. You know what we got to get done 'for dark. Money don't jest stop you on the street 'n jump into your pocket."

The man tries to stand back up, silent but struggling a little harder.

"Now jest you sit back down!" The woman's voice turns almost angry as she lets go of her son and wags her finger at him. "If you keep this up, I'll jest let them come on 'n take you from me like they's always wantin' to."

The man falls into the cart and screws up his face. He bellows in a short deep breath, "MA!"

Sighing loudly the woman stares at her grown son in the grocery cart, almost in tears.

"Ma." The man says in a softer voice. "Fly ma."

"No! I told you, no." The woman puts both hands on her hips. "Like I told that good for nothing man who put you inside of me, then left in the night like I was nothin'," she paused, "Like you was gonna be nothin'."

The man's arms stop moving, and come to a rest on the edge of the cart. His eyes fix on his mother, but his head still makes short, sharp jerking motions.

The woman's eyes open wider as she looks into her son's face. "I sinned. So long ago, but God don't forget. I slept with that good for nothin' man, 'n I sinned."

The woman puts her right hand on her son's cheek and gently strokes it. "God knows what he does; he don't forget us no how."

The man reaches up and grabs his mother's arm and draws her closer to the cart. He hugs her with both of his arms.

In a slow, deep voice he speaks. "I love you, ma."

"You my boy." The woman pauses as a smile grows on her face. "When you was born, I was scared. Ain't no one but me, 'n you, 'n I was scared real bad. But, you was such a joy to hold, 'n you was such a sweet little boy."

The man in the cart smiles quickly back at his mother, lets go of her and sits back down in the silver grocery cart.

"How could somebody be scared, 'n worried with such a sweet baby lovin' her." The woman spoke softly, almost singsong. "God looked down on us 'n saw we was good people; He don't hate us, He gave us each a present." The woman's smile grows a little wider. "He gave us each someone to love."

The man in the cart looks down through the holes in the bottom of the cart, and smiles secretly. "Let's go ma."

The woman continues her smile and pats his bald head. "I know, son." She pulls the cart back into the street, and into the sunshine. "We's better get goin' now. We's got to finish the day 'for it finishes us."