

# Stories From the Front Porch: Laura

Long time ago now.

When my Daddy said he'd married me off, I tried not to cry. I knew how it was. Times was rough and kids kept coming and it was high time I said, "I do." I was seventeen and all grown up and everything. Why, just the month before, I'd give my doll to my baby sister, Annabee. I'd been having monthlies for nearly three years. I cooked when Mama asked. I tended my sisters and tried to keep a rein on Willy and Luke when Mama took to the birthing bed again.

So I hoped he might be good looking, but mostly I hoped he was nice and maybe not too old.

We met the day the preacher came. He come up to the porch and him and Daddy hung around out front till it was time. So it wasn't like I could change my mind or run off or nothing. Seems like, leastways, I remember that my brothers and sisters might of been a bit quieter, but I was the oldest and they'd never seen one of their own leave before. I heard my brothers pushing at each other and jostling, where they stood at the window and peered outside.

I was in the bedroom with Mama and she helped me brush my hair. It was long, so long and blonde. Like a child's pale yellow. She showed me how to put it in a bun like married women do. I pulled it back tight and wrapped it 'round and 'round. Wasn't proper, she said, that I should let it hang no more. My sisters hovered at the foot of the bed and I was jealous that they could still wear their hair down without a care.

Mama give me a dark, go-to-meetin' dress. It had pearl gray buttons down the front. There was long sleeves with a starched white collar and cuffs. She said, "Take care with this. Might be a long time before you get another nice dress like this one." She rapped me with the hair brush once when she thought I was fidgeting too much. But then I felt her hand cuppin' my cheek and I knew she was hurting as much inside as I was.

"It'll be all right, Mama," I said.

"Um-hmmm," she answered, then got all blustery again so I wouldn't notice she was near to tears.

I barely remember what the preacher said, and I just kept wondering about this tall shadow of a man standing beside me and I could smell the scent of him. It was peculiar, you know? I felt like that man scent was my Daddy's own, when he'd come on in at the end of the day and now here I was, smelling it again. It was like man sweat and the smell of the fields, and the plowing horse and manure – but sometimes it was sweet hay and alfalfa, too. I remember bein' so astonished that I could be marrying a man smelled like my father did.

I scarcely looked at my husband, neither, but I knew his hair was full and turning gray at the sides and I was scared.

Afterward, I sat straight up in a chair and my new husband stood behind me and I got my picture took for the first time ever. Mama told me not to smile 'cause it was a serious thing, getting married. And while I waited for the picture-takin' to be done, I fingered the plain gold band I'd barely glanced at.

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