

Keeping Faith

By Markisha Williams

She's coming back for me. I know she is because she promised.

“Faith?”

“Yeah,” My sister responded to me. Her voice was soft. I don't really know how to explain it: I just get really happy every time she speaks.

“Why do you have to go?” I asked.

We were lying in the grass near the lake. Mosquitoes bit at me; I smacked them. I didn't want to leave Faith, so I took the mosquitoes like she did.

“To get us a new home,” she said.

“Why can't I go?”

“It's too dangerous.” That was all she said.

I know she's coming back for me.

I wake up early for school. Last time she was home she bought me new clothes.

“There's a new mall in the city,” She had said.

The city is a long time from where we live. Her friend, Derek, took us. He has a red pick-up truck. He reminds me of those men with muscles and tan skin on the cover of the magazines for men. Faith gets all googly-eyed every time he's around. I tease her about it.

It's a little cold as I make my way to school. Buses pass me, the horses are out running. The cows look funny. They remind me of my teacher, Ms. Bennett.

“Good morning, Mr. Rogers.” I greet the store man. He reminds me of the chicken man on those commercials.

“Good morning, Miss Molly.”

Mr. Rogers been here long time. Faith says he's been here so long she's beginning to think he's a vampire.

"What can I get ya today Miss Molly?" he asks. He's sweeping the sidewalk. I don't know why when it's just going to get dirty again. I look at all of the assorted fruits placed neatly next to each other.

"Got any strawberries?" I ask smiling.

He hands me a small batch of them. "Have a good day at school," he says waving as I leave.

I make it to school on time. Ms. Bennett is standing at the door greeting the kids in my class.

"Good morning, Molly." She smiles at me. Besides Ms. Bennett being big, she is pretty. She has big hazel eyes, brown hair, and pretty tanned skin. She's not as pretty as my Faith, but she's pretty like mama would be.

"Good morning, Ms. Bennett." I shake her hand. She doesn't look like me. I don't look like any of the kids on my class. My skin is darker. Faith says it's 'cause we are African American. She said we moved here when I was a baby. Faith said mama was happy then.

I remember mama happy. I remember her braiding Faith's hair and Faith braiding my hair. We used to make cookies and go pick fruit from Mr. Rogers. Everything changed when daddy left and never came back.

Anyway, this is where we stayed. Faith leaves. She leaves a lot, but she always promises to come back. She always tells me about the different countries she has seen, like Germany. She says Germany is beautiful. She promises to take me one day. I hope one day is soon.

When I get home I quickly check the mail hoping mama hasn't checked it yet. She hasn't. A lot of mail from different stores. I search through it until I reach one from Faith. I quickly rip it open.

To My Molly,

How I miss you so very much. Is mama treating you well? I wish I didn't have to leave you with that crazy woman. Have you been eating? How is school? I wish I could tell you the things that are happening here. I wish I could explain it to where you would understand. But I wouldn't know where to begin. But I'm not scared. Now I understand why daddy used to wake up screaming. Of course, that won't happen to me. I have to be strong for you. I really miss you my Molly. I hope to see you soon.

Love,

Faith

P.S. Send me more of your drawings. Birds don't have duck feet, remember.

I laugh at the last part before I put the letter neatly away in my trunk Faith bought me. I then begin to practice my drawing. Last time she was here, she taught me how to draw a bird.

"You start with the feet first," she said.

I smiled.

"Let the rest come to you gently as you work your way up."

I watched her chocolate colored hands glide on the pages with the pencil.

"Here you try." She said handing me the pencil.

On my own separate paper, I traced her drawing, and then drew my own.

"Very good," she said.

Faith always wants me to do good.

“How’s school?” she asked me. We were in the kitchen cleaning the dishes from dinner. She would wash them, then hand them to me to rinse and dry.

“It’s great,” I said, “I got a check plus on my science project.”

Her beautiful light brown eyes showed she was proud of me, “Great job kiddo.”

I frowned, “Mama didn’t think so.”

Faith sighed, “Mama doesn’t know anything.”

“She threw my report card away.”

“Why?” Faith’s voice was angry.

I shrug.

She then leaves the kitchen and begins on to bang on mama’s bedroom door.

“What the fuck are you doing banging on my door?” mama yelled. And they began to argue. Sometimes I could hear Faith crying in her room at night. I think she really misses daddy.

Mama is out tonight like always. I eat dinner. Last time Faith was here she took me grocery shopping and we hid it in the cooler in the shed so mama wouldn’t find it. I take a bath, lay my clothes out neatly for school, brush my teeth, then go to bed at 8.

I wake up out of my sleep to the door slamming shut. Mama is laughing and I can hear a man talking. Then suddenly I hear my door open. Mama’s friend Charles comes in.

“Hey little Molly.” He says sitting his big country body on my bed.

Faith doesn’t like him. She says he’s creepy. Every time he’s around when Faith is here we go to Derek’s house and then get ice cream. But when she’s not here he’s very nice to me. He gives me money for school. He tells me how pretty I am.

“Hi.” I whisper.

“You been a good girl?”

I nod.

“Good, I have a surprise for you. You wanna see it?”

I nod.

He pulls out a sketch pad. I jump up in excitement. I reach for it but he quickly pulls it away.

“You can have it on one condition.” He says with a weird grin his face.

I look at him in confusion.

I wish she'd come back soon.

A few months have passed. I'm sitting in the window in the living room watching all of the other kids play in the snow. Some are building snowmen, some are throwing snow at each other. That's when I see a red pick-up truck that belongs to Derek drive in front of our house. I quickly run to the door.

“Faith is home!” I yell, but when I open the door it's just him and another man dressed in the green booger colored uniform Faith wears when she leaves. I'm confused. Where is she?

“Hey kiddo.” He greets me, but something is wrong.

“Where's Faith?” I ask.

He reaches into the pocket of his jacket and pulls out her sapphire cross necklace. Faith never takes off her necklace. She said it was a gift from Daddy before he had to leave.

“Where's my sister?” I ask again.

His eyes are red. Like he had been crying.

“Where's my sister?!” I scream hitting him. “Go get her now! I want my sister!”

“Molly.” He says.

“Go get her!” Go get her now!” I demand.

She can’t just leave me here. She promised.

He pulls me to him to let me cry. I didn’t know I was crying. Why am I crying? Faith isn’t gone. She’ll be back for me. I know she will.

She has to come back. She promised.

“Aim...Fire.” I hear a bang causing me to jump.

“Ready... Aim...Fire.” They do it again. I look up at Derek who is holding my hand, trying to understand what is going on. He is crying. He had to explain it all to me. Death. Faith never told me about death. She told me about Heaven. She told me that’s where daddy is. Derek says she’s with daddy. But I need her here.

Mama is sitting next to me crying louder than everybody. Why is she crying? Charles comforts her. I begin to remember what happened that night he came into my room. I squeeze Derek’s hand tighter. I hope he never let’s go.

A man in a navy blue uniform comes up to me and hands me a folded flag. I look up at Derek who nods for me to take it.

After the funeral, we meet with a lawyer to talk about Faith’s will. I didn’t know Faith had a will. What’s a will?

“Ms. Peters, are you aware that your daughter and her husband have been fighting for custody of eight-year-old Molly?”

Mama looked upset and confused, “I don’t understand.”

“Faith and I have been trying to take Molly from you.” Derek says.

Faith and Derek are married? Why didn't she tell me?

"Who the fuck do you think you are taking my child from me?" mama yells.

"Miss, please watch your language." The lawyer man says.

"Oh, fuck you." Mama snaps.

"Molly isn't safe with you and you know it. The whole town knows it." Derek is getting angry but is calm.

The lawyer man looks at me and hands me the letter to read;

To My Molly,

There is so much I needed to tell you. Derek and I got married. It wasn't formal. We have an ordained minister here (who knew) and he married us. I wanted to wait until I returned to tell you but it seems that's not going to happen. You should know that Derek and I have been fighting for you. You have the choice to stay with mama or go live with Derek. I trust him to take good care of you. Derek is a fantastic man, and I know he will love you just as much as I have. I am always going to be with you so never give up. I love you so much my Molly. I love you to the moon and back.

Love,

Faith

P.S Remember, birds don't have duck feet

I'm crying again. Everybody is looking at me. I hold the letter close to me, "I want to live with Derek." I say wiping my tears.

"Are you sure?" The lawyer man says.

I nod. I am sure.

I take the sapphire cross necklace out of my dress pocket and put it around my neck. It's just my way of keeping Faith.