

1984

Attie Mae

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Attie Mae

"You got enough sugar in your tea Lucy?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Did I ever tell ya 'bout Eddy?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Eddy Butler, Lord he was sharp in his day. Not like these here plastic lookin' boys y'all be pantin' after. Got their processed hair hangin' all down around their shoulders and the way they prance around the streets, wearin' them tight jeans and high heel boots, Lord Jesus, it's a sin and a shame! Now Eddy, he was a man that had deep down beauty, the kind of beauty that stays with a man for a lifetime. Even when he was layin' in that silk lined casket he still looked good, though it was a little hard to tell with the side of his face being gone and all. Everything Eddy wore clung tight to his body. He was a big man with huge broad shoulders. He got them shoulders unloadin' beer kegs down at Harold's pool hall. All his clothes were hand-me-downs donated by rich white folks to the Holy Lambs of God Missionary Baptist Church but whenever he went out he'd be dressed to kill! Pass that cake over here will ya? Want some? It's choc'late."

"No ma'am. Chocolate breaks out my skin."

"Eddy had a beautiful complexion. Ya know how lots of men be havin' them razor bumps spread out all over their face, not Eddy, his skin was smooth as butter. He was the color of dark maple syrup. His eyes were black as tar and his lashes fanned out, thick and curly across his eyelids. His lips, oh mercy me, it gives this old heart a start when I think about Eddy's lips. They were a deep shade of russet and I swear to ya Lucy to this very day I can still recall the feel of Eddy's lips, firm, thick and sensuous. Eddy had a way of grabbin' people's attention when he walked in a room, ya know, a presence, whatcha call it, a 'ora'?"

"Aura"

"Yea, that's right, Eddy had an aura 'bout himself. I think it had something to do with the way he talked, kind of mesmerizin'—like. Mesmerizin', I like that word. Picked it up watchin' Phil Donahue don'tcha know. Eddy talked real deep down in his throat, sounded sort of like thunder rumblin'. He spoke slow and easy, drawin' every word out to get the best effect. I'll tell ya, I don't think there's a woman alive that could love a man as strong and hard as I loved Eddy Butler. Ya ever been in love, Lucy?"

"Well, yes ma'am, once."

"Eddy loved me too. I member just like it was yesterday, walkin' down Jay Street, hangin' on Eddy's arm. We'd be on our way to the matinee or the bowlin' alley or the skatin' rink, didn't really matter as long as I was with Eddy. We used to take long drives in his daddy's Ford. Those were the days. It was in the backseat of that very same car that I gave Eddy my virginity. Ya still a virgin Lucy?"

"Uhm, well a . . ."

"Oh buddy, Eddy was some kind of lover. I tell ya, he could light a spark in the coldest woman. I should know, when I first met Eddy I was a bonafide iceberg. Eddy was sharp. Did I tell ya that? Yes lord, and we was so in love. Whenever we'd walk by people would glance over our way and throw us one of those ain't-that-cute kind of smiles. I member every mornin', after bein' out with Eddy all night, I'd come sneakin' in the back door and mama be standin' right there, her hands planted on her wide hips and her foot just a tap tap tappin' on the linoleum. She'd say, 'Where ya been girl' askin' me like she didn't already know. I knew she knew cause all the time she was talkin' to me she had this sideways grin on her face. Then she'd tell me, 'Girl, ya best be wipin' some of that glow off your cheeks 'fore your daddy get down here deman-din' his breakfast. Eddy and me was always discussin' marriage. I member we used to sit out behind Bartholomew Brown's dairy, ya know, up on that big old hill he got back there. Yes Lord, we'd be back there for hours swattin' flies and buildin' dreams. He was forever tellin' me 'bout this little yellow house we was goin' to have, 'Attie,' he'd say, 'right out back our house ya gonna have the biggest, best, garden of to-matoes and greens ya ever seen in your life.' All we were waitin' for was that golden eagle to swoop down and drop off our bundle of money. We had to wait on the eagle cause Eddy could never seem to keep a job. He'd work for a few days and then decide that workin' was snuffin' out his creative flame. He was an artist, a musician to be particular. Did I tell ya that before?"

"Yes ma'am many t . . ."

"Yea, Eddy was a drummer. He was good to. He played in this little band called "The Billy Blue Notes." They was called this on account of Billy Thomas bought the costumes. They played in little clubs around town. Never nothin' big, but Eddy was happy. Course the war changed all that. I member when the letter came, Eddy and the boys were so excited. Ya should have seen 'em all bug eyed and proud. They kept spoutin off bout how their Uncle Sam needed them for the protectin' of his country. All I wanted to know was, who the hell was Uncle Sam and why did he want to put my Eddy in the war to get his butt shot off.

To me it seemed like if old Sam was bad enough to get himself into trouble he ought to be bad enough to get himself out of trouble. I asked Eddy bout this. He just took my chin in his big hand, his thumb strokin' my cheek, looked me hard in the eye and said 'Attie, baby, a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.' The night Eddy and the boys left to go to war, our church, The Holy Lambs of God Missionary Baptist Church, got together and held a goin'-off-to-war-prayer service. Ya go to church Lucy?"

"Sometimes ma'am."

Lord ya should have heard the moanin', groanin' and amenin' goin' on in the church that night. I member the funniest thing happened on that particular night. We had all been harmonizin' on "Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross" while Rev. Jasper was askin' the Lord to keep his unblinking eye on those young, brave, fightin' boys of the congregation while they were out protectin' Uncle Sam's country. All of a sudden Sister Ella Rose, you member her don'tcha? She was the one who got blown up when they threw that bomb in the Southside Baptist Church. Lord have mercy on all those dead children. Well anyway Sister Ella got so filled up with the Holy Spirit, she jumped up out of her seat and started swayin' back and forth flappin' her arms and shoutin' 'Thank ya Jesus.' Then I guess her feet got happy cause she started to run down the center aisle. I swear if I live to be 120 I don't think I'll ever see anything funnier than this 200 pound old woman wearin' a pink flowered house dress and baggy support hose runnin' around the sanctuary flappin her arms. She looked just like an oversized pink and brown canary with braids. Deacon Percy tried to stop her by jumpin' out in front of her. That was a big mistake! Sister Ella Rose never stopped. She never even slowed down. Next thing we knew, Deacon Percy was laid out spread eagle in the middle of the floor. It must have took em a half an hour to wake him up again. When they finally got Sister Ella Rose pinned down she was sweatin' so hard that the fine baby hairs around her forehead had curled up into little tight knots. She was pantin so fast the poor woman pretty near gave herself a heart attack. The rest of the service went on pretty smooth. After we sang a little more and prayed a little more I woke Eddy up and we went home. More tea, Lucy?"

"No ma'am I'm fine."

"Pour me a little more, put some sugar in there too, little more, that's fine. Ain't nothin' like a good cup of hot tea to pick ya spirits up. I ain't been feelin' quite up to snuff lately. Woke up this mornin' with pains in my feet. Yes Lord, won't be long till I'm walkin' them streets of gold and singin' with the, with the . . . uhm where was I? Oh yea, Eddy done gone off to war.