

ARTS

FICTION

Redecorating the Room

By Jennifer Evans

The deputy came to pick Sheila up yesterday because she was wandering the streets again. The neighbors called the deputy and said she looked lost and she was moving her lips about something they couldn't understand. Lisa's gray-haired, God-fearing mother was old and sick.

Lisa's father died in a car crash a year ago when she was fifteen; she never saw her mother cry. She never saw any emotion of anger or sadness on her face. There was always a smile, a glow, something almost angelic about her mother even on the day of the funeral. All the people were gathered together in the small church; cries exalted from the pews, handkerchiefs went from eye to nose, nose to eye. Sheila greeted people at the door to thank them with handshakes and hugs for coming to her husband's going away party. She asked everyone to wear white instead of black and to bring balloons instead of their sorrow. Lisa sat on the front pew; her eyes on the floor and her tears dampened her dress. The preacher preached no sermon but Sheila spoke with such joy the sun shined from her mouth. "My Abe is going to be with Jesus today; it's a beautiful day." One week later, Sheila began a new project of redecorating the house with Jesus pictures, figurines, posters, or cards that had Jesus' name on them. She put Jesus wallpaper in the rooms, except for Lisa's, and spent the day knitting Jesus sweaters. When Lisa asked her why the fetish, she said "It's just my way."

Lisa saw a definite change in her mother; it was almost frightening and she didn't know what to do. Three months after the redecorating started, Sheila left out early in the morning to get some groceries and returned that evening with Deputy Bluke. When Lisa asked what happened, Bluke told Lisa Sheila came into the office and said she didn't know how to get back home. Sheila blamed it on old age, said there were too many streets, and thought nothing of it. Nothing had changed since the first incident.

"Lisa! Come on girl get up! We got a lot of work to do and breakfast is on the table." Lisa rolled over on her stomach and partially opened one eye to see the time on the clock, five-thirty. She rolled on her back again, sat up, pushed her long-brown hair over her shoulder, and finally flung her feet over the side of the bed and stood erect on the floor. She felt around the floor with her toes looking for her slippers. "Lisa!" After breakfast Lisa wrapped one of the handmade scarves around her hair, slipped into a white long sleeve shirt.

"Lisa if you don't mind, go and start packing up the figurines in the living room. I plan on decorating your father's old study. I put out a few boxes for you. Pick up a dust rag as you leave out."

Each small sculpture was different, in size, texture, and the position Jesus was in. For the first time Lisa took a moment to notice the uniqueness of each one. Jesus was wearing a white robe lined in gold in one of the models. In another his arms were wings and the little model of earth was positioned between the two wings. There was so many different ones, Jesus made of gold, sitting on a throne, on the cross, coming out of a cave. Then there was Lisa's favorite, Jesus driving a truck and it read on the bottom, "Have any worries? Throw them in the truck. I'll take them away." She laughed a little, wiped it off, and placed it in the box.

She picked up the first box to put it in the hallway and she heard tapping on the door. "Lisa!" Sheila called from the study.

"I got it, Mom." When she opened the door Deputy Bluke was standing on the porch. One hand in his pocket and the other was over his gun. His eye brows turned inward on his face, his cheeks were puffed out-full of

pink bubblegum-, his small chest was poked out like a little bird, and his hat was tilted towards the ground.

"Mornin' Lisa, can I come in?"

Lisa folded her arms across her chest and leaned against the open door. "Is your mama home, Lisa?"

"What do you want, Joe?"

"I want to talk to your mama." He leaned up to open the screen door and Lisa locked it. "Lisa, I don't want any problems."

"Are you going to arrest for me locking my door?" Deputy Bluke spit out his wad of gum on the ground and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Lisa, I just wanna talk to your mama."

Sheila came around the corner with a big smile on her face and a sweatshirt in her hands.

"Deputy, I thought it was you.

Well come in." He tugged on the screen and rolled his eyes towards Lisa. "Lisa, don't be rude, let him in."

"Mama he's coming to take you away."

"Oh no he's not; the day I leave

is the day the good Lord will take me away. Now go on, unlock the door."

Lisa reached over, slowly pushed the switch up, and pushed open the screen door hitting Deputy Bluke in the face.

He let out a slow ouch and rubbed over

Lisa sat in the small, dreary waiting room. It was ten-thirty and she felt that her mother had been in with the doctors for hours. The walls were decorated with maroon paint with pink happy faces. There were two brown rocking chairs on each side of the pink love seat and a small auburn table beside the door with a black bible on top of it. She suddenly felt the urge to rip off the wall paper and tie-dye the color of the furniture.

Lisa was sitting in one of the rocking chairs and Bluke positioned himself on the loveseat; the opposite end of Lisa. He was already chewing on another wad of pink gum.

"Lisa, your mother is gonna be fine." She crossed her legs and folded her arms across her chest. "Lisa, you don't have to talk to me, but right now I'm the only person that you have to talk to." She rocked back and forth in the chair and stared at the door. Bluke let out a breath and scooted to the other end of the seat. Lisa quickly got up and sat in the other rocking chair.

Bluke stood in front of Lisa and put his hands over his hips.

worry." The doctor patted her arm.

"Everyone is telling me not to worry but no one is in my position. How soon are you all gonna place her in the nursing home?"

"Well, Wade Water nursing home could have her in a room within a couple of hours; or maybe even sooner than that."

"Where is she?" Lisa inquired.

"She's in room 105."

Lisa thought about her mother, living in a tiny room, with bare walls, no figurines or flowers. The thought of her mother being taken away from the house she spent so many years redecorating brought tears to her eyes. She wiped them away quickly and licked her lips again.

"No one ever thinks about me. None of the crazy neighbors, or the stupid deputy." Tears began to fall from her eyes rapidly, one after one. "You're not taking my mother."

"Lisa, calm down," Bluke said as he reached out to rub her back.

"No!" She swiftly turned to face him. "My father is gone. I don't have any other family and you are not taking my mother." She yanked the deputy's car keys off his clip- on key ring and ran out of the room.

"Lisa! Bluke ran out the door behind her. "Lisa!" She ran to the elevator and pushed buttons.

"Come on!" She fussed at the elevator and watched as the numbers slowly went down. The doors opened and before she could walk in, two arms flung around her and pulled her back.

"Lisa, what are you doing!" Bluke held her tight and she struggled to break free. "Lisa, stop!"

"You can't take her; she's all I have." She pushed away one of his arm and took a step towards the elevator. He trapped her in both arms again and pulled her back.

"Lisa, stop! You're gonna hurt yourself. Your mama is sick and she needs proper care."

"What about me? Who's gonna take proper care of me?" Her words were choppy and spoken through her tears.

She stopped fighting, dropped the keys on the floor, shifted her body weight against Bluke, and cried. "You can't take her." She sobbed again.

Bluke's parents picked Sheila up from the hospital and took her to the nursing home while Lisa gathered herself in the waiting room. When Bluke asked her what she was trying to do, she said for a second she thought she could actually grab her mother; put her in the car and just drive. "I'd still have mother," she said.

A room opened at Wade Water and the doctors thought it would be a good idea to get her in by noon. She and Bluke didn't speak as he drove her home to pick up a few of her mother's belongings.

When they pulled in the driveway, Lisa opened the door to get out, but Bluke didn't move.

"Joe, can you come help me carry her stuff to the car?"

"You're not gonna slam the door in my face again, are you?" He teased. Lisa shook her head no, expressionless, and proceeded to get out of the car.

The house was empty; nothing was left but figurines, wall paper, clothes, and empty beds. Lisa didn't want to think about the emptiness or loneliness; she wanted to get mother's clothes and leave. She saw the box of figurines that she had started packing earlier that morning. It's time to redecorate child, she heard her mother say in the back of her head.

She packed quickly. A few pairs of pants, under garments, her knitted sweaters, throw blankets, and a few other necessities.

"Joe, you can carry the suitcase and I'll carry the box." It was a large brown box sealed with tape.

"What's in the box, Lisa?"

"Stuff for mama's new room."

She looked up at Bluke and could suddenly hear her mother's voice in the back of her head, say "thank you, child."

"Thanks, Joe." He nodded his head and winked.

"I told you I'd take care of you."

When they arrived at the nursing home it was almost one and Lisa insisted she carry the box inside and that Joe carry the suitcase; even though the box was heavier. She asked the nurse which room her mother was in.

"Are you her daughter?" Lisa nodded. "Oh she has been talking about you since she got here. She's in room 107, we just got her settled. Hey Deputy Bluke, how are ya?"

"Fine, ma'am." Lisa thanked the nurse and walked to the room. She could hear her mother laughing.

"Hi Mama." Lisa cheerfully said as she walked in the room.

"Lisa, I was just thanking Deputy Bluke's parents for letting you stay with them for a little while. Oh this is all gonna pass; it's only temporary." Sheila was sitting in cushioned chair beside the bed.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bluke, thank you for driving mama over here." Joe kissed his mother's cheek and shook hands with his father.

"We bought you some food, just a little chicken and macaroni from home. We didn't think you had eaten today." Lisa partially smiled and stood beside Sheila.

"Mama made breakfast this morning." The room was still, every one was waiting for the other to say something; even the walls were hoping to echo a sound. Lisa held the box in her arms like a baby. She wouldn't put it down.

"Hey, I haven't eaten anything either," Bluke finally said. "We'll be back in a bit to pick you up, Lisa." Mr. and Mrs. Bluke said their goodbye's to Sheila and walked out of the room. Bluke bent down in front of Sheila and patted her hand. "We'll take good care of her." Sheila smiled and put her other hand on top of his. He stood up, looked at Lisa, and walked towards the door.

Before he could get both feet out, Lisa grabbed his arm and he stopped.

"I'm sorry I tried to steal your car and for that scratch under your eye." Bluke smiled, shook his head with a short laugh, and walked out of the room.

"Well, Lisa, looks like you did good today. Maybe one day you two could get married. God works in mysterious ways." Lisa sat the box down on the bed and tore through the tape with a set of keys.

"Well, mama, that would surely be a mystery to me." Sheila got up from the chair and put her arm around Lisa's shoulders.

"What you got here, Lisa."

"Well, this room looks a little dry like I thought it would. So we're gonna fix it up a little." Sheila put her hand to her chest and the other to her mouth.

"Oh Lisa," a tear fell down her cheek, "you didn't have to."

"Well, you can't stop living, can you? It'll feel like home in no time." She picked up the figurine with Jesus standing over a family of three; mother, father and baby. "Mama?"

"Hmm?"

"Why did you start redecorating everything with the image of Jesus?"

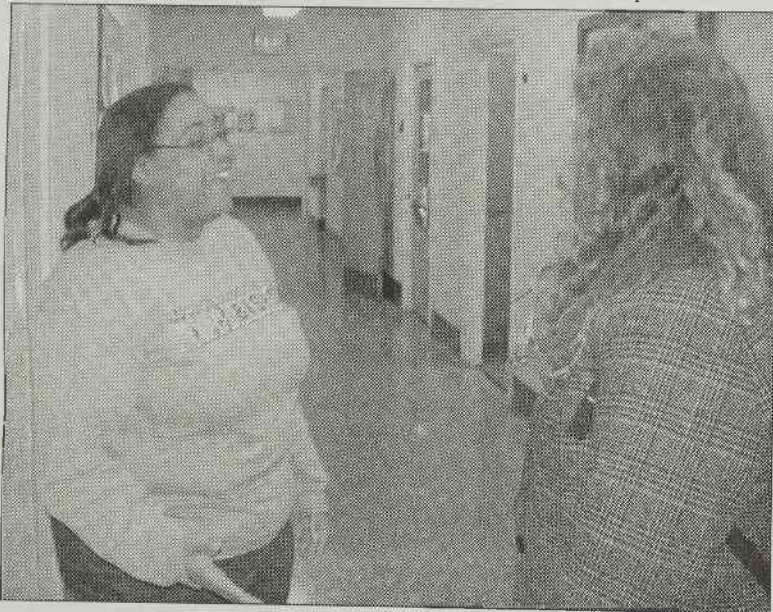
"It's my way."

"Your way of doing what?"

"Not worrying? Worries get the best of everyone. People worry about money, about clothes, about health, about me, about you. Seeing the image of Jesus and all His glory reminded me not to worry. It's just my way, baby." Lisa kissed her mother's cheek. She looked at the figurine again and smiled.

"We can put this beside your bed. Come on mama, we got lots to do."

Sheila laughed and also found in the box: her needle, yarn, thread, canvas, her brown apron, and her blue scarf. The one with Jesus Loves Me in bold red.



Jennifer Evans (left) is set to graduate.

his face. "Lisa!" Sheila squeaked out.

Lisa stepped back from the door and gave him room to walk in, unharmed. Sheila sat down in the recliner with the sweatshirt draped over the armrest. Deputy Bluke walked over to the recliner and squatted in front of her.

"Ma'am, I'm afraid I've got some bad news."

"Well last time I heard that, your father stopped by to tell me my husband had left this world." Her smile broke the Deputy's heart and he patted her hand. He spoke softer now, as if he was talking to a child. Lisa stayed in the doorway and felt the urge to ask him not to touch her mother. She didn't want him near her.

"We had some calls last night from some of the neighbors. They said they caught you walking aimlessly last night up and down the road again. They're worried about you and Lisa."

"Oh I was just praying; that's all. Come on Joe, you can't take me in cause I was praying."

"Folks don't think you're praying." He patted her hand again and Lisa let out a breath. "I told you last time if something like this happened we'd have to take you in to get checked out."

"You're not taking her." Sheila put her hand over her chest. "Mama, what's wrong?" She shook her head swiftly.

"Look what you're doing to her, Joe."

"Lisa, I'm trying to help her.

Now don't get yourself in trouble." Lisa walked over to her mother and snatched Joe's hand off of hers. Deputy Bluke slowly stood straight and put one hand over his gun.

"Oh stop acting like you're big stuff, Joe," Lisa said, "you're not taking her." Sheila grabbed her daughter's hand and held it tightly.

"It's ok, Little Lisa. I'll go."

"Lisa, why do you hate me so much? I'm just doing what's best for your mama." Her eyes met his.

"Sit down, Joe. A doctor is gonna come in here and tell me that my mama is crazy and it's your fault."

"Oh come on, Lisa. I was just doing my job. Your neighbors are worried; I'm worried. If anything happens to your mama I'll make sure you're taken care of."

"Oh now that you created the problem you think you can fix it by telling me everything is going to be just fine."

"I didn't create a problem! Your mama has a problem and I am trying to help her."

"Oh every one wants to fix my mama's problems." Lisa lifted herself from the chair and stood in front of Joe. "What about me? Who's gonna fix my problem?"

The door opened and a short bald black man wearing a white jacket walked in.

"Lisa Churchill?" Lisa shifted her eyes from Bluke and turned them to the deep voice. "I'm Dr. Whiteall; I was just with your mother."

"So is she crazy?" She put her hands on her hips and rested on her right leg.

"Your mother is showing signs of Alzheimer."

"So what now?"

"I spoke to your mother and she told us that you two were the only ones living at home. I suggested that we put her in nursing home so she can be properly taken care of. She said that Deputy Bluke's parents agreed to look after you if anything happened." Lisa's arms dropped by her sides and she licked her lips. She wanted to fall on the floor and cry, hold her stomach and cry.

Bluke raised his hand to rub her back and then resisted.

"So who's gonna pay for all this?"

"We'll work something out with payment, Ms. Churchill. Please don't