

Grandpa's Gift

by Gail Gritts



Wrapped in the aroma of pipe tobacco, Grandma Vauna's father was a tall, thin, fun-loving man who always wore crisply pressed pinstriped overalls. Reba and Katherine spent much time with their great-grandparents. Great-grandpa Bill was a favorite playmate. Great-grandma, Ola, was a short, rounded, lady who always wore an apron, except when she went to town. Her long, grey hair was neatly pinned back in a bun and she wore thick cotton stockings. She was a quiet lady who gently took good care of Reba and Katherine.

Going to town with Grandma Vauna and the great-grandparents was a treat Reba and Katherine always enjoyed. They would all dress up in their going-to-town clothes, jump into the car and chatter happily all the way. There they would go from shop to shop as the grandparents did their business, paying bills, buying groceries and visiting with friends and relatives. Eventually, they would all wind up at Mary's Variety Store. There, Reba and Katherine would be allowed to choose a toy or some candy, if they had been well behaved during the shopping trip.

This little family-owned variety store had only one U-shaped aisle that was chock-a-block from floor to ceiling with every imaginable item. There was a section for hardware, a grouping of cosmetics, a collection of greeting cards, a display of fine gifts and flowers, crockery and cutlery, school supplies and stationary items, hats, hankies, sunglasses, and of course, candy and toys.

On this occasion, while the two grandmothers were occupied searching for just the right greeting card, Reba and Katherine found themselves exploring the vast array of candy and toys with Grandpa Bill.

Choosing the perfect reward for their good behavior was no mean task. It wasn't every day that they were allowed to shop at Mary's, especially without the grandmothers looking on. They searched through the card games, the boys' toys, the jewelry and the coin purses. The dolls and the board games were too expensive and the bubbles and bubble gum were too messy. Finally, after some lively discussion and a good rumble through the remainder of the toy section, Reba and Katherine found the perfect gift for their good behavior – a box of children's face paints.

Grandpa Bill approved and gave a mischievous smile as he happily purchased the simple treasure for his two little girls. "Now, let's not mention this to the grandmothers," he said quietly, "let's make it a surprise." The two girls heartily agreed.

Upon returning home and changing into play clothes, Grandpa stealthy slipped them the secret gift and Reba and Katherine took it outside to play.

An old cook stove, abandoned by the backyard fence, had become their own special play place where they spent many happy hours pretending to be great cooks. Today, however, there was no cooking involved.

Excitedly, they opened the small cardboard box. Four children's face painting crayons rested inside waiting to be used.

On went the sky blue eye shadow, black eyebrow penciling, pretty pink cheek color and, of course, bright red lipstick. They had such fun parading around the yard pretending to be movie stars and Miss America. And, they both looked so beautiful.

Then came the familiar call from Grandma Ola, "Reba and Katherine, come back to the house."

Happily, the two painted girls came waltzing in with a happy air of expectation.

However, when the grandmothers saw the cosmetically enhanced versions of Reba and Katherine, they gasp in astonishment and began to rapidly fire questions, "What is this all over you face?" "Where did you get this stuff?"

Sheepishly, Reba and Katherine pointed to Grandpa Bill who sat at the old cherry dining table sipping coffee and wearing a silly,

childish grin. As he amusingly listened to the grandmothers scolding him for his choice, he gave the girls a little wink.

After some family laughter, all evidence was scrubbed from the faces of Reba and Katherine. The makeup was never seen again. But the memory of a great-grandfather who always enjoyed a good bit of fun still warms their hearts.