

Easter Plans

by Josh Baker



“He’s not your real son!” my Aunt Helen hissed at my stepmother as she pointed her crooked finger my direction. “And he’s not my real nephew, so stop kidding yourself.”

It wasn’t the first time my Aunt had made me feel less than welcome, but it hurt worse being devalued in front of the whole family on Easter Sunday. Aunt Helen hosted Easter brunch every year in the garden of her upscale home. It was a high-end affair with exotic foods and over-the-top decorations.

Once again, Aunt Helen had prepared lavish Easter baskets for her son Gary, and my older sister Sophia, but neglected me entirely. “He is, and will always be, my son. It’s not right to exclude a child, especially on a holy day.” My stepmother spoke with poise and great restraint.

Aunt Helen rolled her eyes. “Well aren’t you the model of generosity; the widow taking in the mutt.”

Although I was only seven years old, I clearly understood her nasty inference. My stepmother knelt down and kissed me on the cheek. “Pay no attention to her, Alex,” she said with a warm smile. “Go get your sister, we are leaving.”

Mom was my protector; my guardian angel. She and Dad were married less than a year when he suffered a fatal heart attack. She had always cared for me and loved me unconditionally, like I was her own flesh and blood.

As we exited my aunt’s yard, we heard a cackle across the lawn. “You know I’m right!” That was the last we saw of Aunt Helen.

The years passed. Our family enjoyed many modest Easter celebrations, all of which included mention of Aunt Helen in our table prayers. Mom would remind us that Jesus’ death and resurrection offered redemption to even the most troubled souls.

When I was twenty-two, Mom battled breast cancer and lost. Sophia was out of state working towards her master’s degree when we found out. Although she came and stayed by mom’s side until the end, Sophia was on a plane just a week after the funeral. Only in reading Scripture did I find any consolation during this lonely

period of my life.

Over the next year I changed jobs, rented out Mom's house, and took up residence in a studio apartment hoping to find comfort, but I only became more withdrawn. I couldn't see how this was God's plan.

One warm spring Friday I was laid off from my job. It was doubly hard since Sophia had informed me earlier in the week that she would be celebrating Easter with her new boyfriend's family. Unemployed and alone on Easter, what could be worse?

The very next day I received a surprising telephone call. "Is this Alex?" the clinical voice on the other end asked.

"Yes." I answered.

Over the next half hour I learned that Aunt Helen had suffered a moderate stroke. With her son Gary overseas, the list of potential caregivers had whittled down to me and Sophia. Since Sophia was out of state, I was the last candidate. I agreed to help, thinking Mom would have wanted me to.

On Easter Sunday I made my way across town to my aunt's home, which looked smaller than I had remembered. A nurse greeted me at the door and brought me in to see Aunt Helen. "Happy Easter, Aunt Helen," I said cautiously.

She cocked her head revealing the palsy on the right side of her face and a weak smile on the left. "Alex, I am so glad you came. Thank you," she slurred.

I smiled and looked around the room filled with various medical devices, then noticed a wooden cross hanging above the front door. "It's been a long time."

Tears trickled down her face. "Alex, I am so sorry for the way I treated you and your mother." She labored to speak each word. "Can you ever forgive me?"

I smiled and took her hand. "I forgave you long ago, Aunt Helen. Long ago."

We had a wonderful Easter celebration that day, complete with an Easter basket she had prepared specially for me. I spent the next three months with her until she passed. Miraculously, I was offered a job the following week. I've not questioned God's plan since.