

The Burial Dress by Kenita Gibbins

“Mary, are you going to rock in the rocker and sew on the silky black thing every night for the rest of our lives?”

“I don't know, Nathaniel. I certainly know I need to do this. We lost two babies in the last three years. You go off at all hours to your political meetings, or off with the Texas Rangers. When are you going to tend to the farmin' out there? Sewing keeps me calm, I think I saw an Indian on the horizon yesterday, It wasn't too hard to figure it was an Indian in this flat, barren prairie land.”

"Rumor is the Indians are gathering up horses all over the countryside, Mary. I think they only want animals and not us.'

“What's that noise?”

“It's the Rangers approaching. We are going after the horses. Get me my rifle, Mary. They need me.”

"I need you also husband. Do I need to shout even when you are here, you aren't? I can't keep the tears back any longer. Go on now.

Make the danger go away. I've got work to do. I'm going to have me the finest burial dress in all of Jack County, Texas. It will be packed in the corner over there in my trunk, just in case you need it. I know Indians are near. I feel 'em. Here's your gun. Nate, you ain't got no sense. Do you hear, no sense?"

I'll just mumble to myself. Dang burn man got himself shot three times before he ever even met me. He still has a fragment of shell in his left shoulder from the Battle of Stone's River. From what I hear it's a wonder he didn't freeze to death to boot.

I like runnin' my hand over the place in his chest where a spent ball landed. I guess the only time he wasn't fightin' for the Confederacy was when he got himself shot. He sure don't like to talk about the scar in his left leg. I reckon that was the worse scare he had.

I should be grateful his bein'a sheriff for two years didn't get him killed. I sat here in this rocker then too. Rockin' our babies one by one. Didn't do me no good. They died anyway. All I have left are baby wraps and my quilt stuffed in my trunk. Got my memories too.

I oughta be makin' my man a burial suit. Nathaniel Brumbelow get yourself home. I pray get yourself home.

I drop my sewing to the floor and run to the door.

"Nathaniel, what's wrong?"

“Mary, I just wanted to protect you and our property.”

“I know that.”

“We tracked them for hours. Finally, we sighted the horses hobbled together in the trees. We didn't know how many Indians there were. I saw in my gunsight an enemy and shot. We approached our stolen horses, and that's when we discovered the Indian I shot was a squaw. Mary, I shot a squaw. I never meant to shoot a squaw. Will the wars never end, Darlin?”

"Stay home, farm our land. We can create our own peace. There's a stirring of life in my belly.”

The rest of the story. Nate did farm the land until his death. The child stirring in Mary's belly was my great, great grandfather Will. He was the only one of their four children to survive past infancy. I have Mary's trunk. Her burial dress stayed in the trunk until their granddaughter died. At the time, we didn't know what the ugly silky thing was and trashed it. Mary died in 1926 at the age of 76. She had become too wide for her burial dress.