

A Patty Duke Weekend

“I’ll get it!” Seven year old Zelda Riggolio screamed at the top of her lungs, jumping from her seat, rushing from the kitchen through the living room to the front hall, where the front doorbell was ringing. Back at the kitchen table her mother and father sat, picking at a soggy bean, beet, and Frito casserole, brought over by their hefty next door neighbor, Mrs. Whoop. Outside, a crisp November wind blew the colorful leaves from the trees to the wet Saturday evening lawn.

“Get back here, Z!” her mother, Iris, called. “Whoever it is can wait until I get to the door.” She pushed away her untouched plate and headed to the front door. “Who could it be? In this weather?” Back at the table, Mortimer Riggolio, Zelda’s father, returned the contents of his plate to Mrs. Whoop’s once colorful, chipped casserole pan and quietly replaced the lid.

“You never know who is at the door these days.” Iris pushed her daughter aside and opened the front door. On the porch stood Piney Fork’s letter carrier, Davis, with an oversized package. “Oh hello, Davis...” Iris spied the package. “...another package? Don’t tell me who it’s from.”

Davis placed the brown papered package on the threadbare hall carpet. “It’s from the same place yesterday’s package came from, the day before that, and the day...” Davis sniffed the warm air. “...bean, beet and Frito casserole? I gots one a them waiting at home for me, warming in the oven. That Mrs. Whoop is too kind!”

“Way too kind.” Mortimer added, opening a cold can of beer. “Would you like another to keep it company?”

“Mortimer, please,” Iris snapped, eyeing the box in front of her. “Thank you for the box, Davis. It seems that Mortimer’s mother is doing a bit of...housecleaning.”

“I’m allergic to beets, they make me pass out.” Zelda offered jumping on the box, and tearing at the string.” Gramma is sending me all of daddy’s old toys!”

Iris kicked the box to the corner of the hall. More old junk, if you ask me. Thank you Davis.” She began to close the front door. “Stay warm.”

“You bet, Mrs. R.” Davis smiled, placing his cap on his head. “That bean, beet and Frito casserole’s gonna keep me plenty warm!” Iris closed the front door and turned to wards the kicked, dragging Zelda with her. “We will not open that box until after dinner, little girl. When your father has finished all the casserole he put back in the pan!”“

“Gramma loves us; maybe we should send her something.” Zelda suggested, returning to her own plate of peanut butter and crackers.

“Maybe we can send her some of this casserole.” Mortimer, groaned, eying his daughter’s plate. “I wish I was allergic to beets.”

Later that evening, Zelda lay, under a worn blanket on the living room floor, next to the now empty box. She was surrounded by an array of used coloring books, crayons, and mismatched Hasbro color forms. Her father was still at his seat in the kitchen, his untouched cold plate surrounded by a half dozen empty beer cans. At the counter, Iris was putting the rest of the unwanted casserole into a small foil pan.

“We can take this to your little friend’s house tomorrow, Z.” Iris called, over the din of the nearby radio. “Does her whole family like beets as much as she does?”

“Dinka loves beets, her pa loves beets. That’s about it.” Zelda replied, and returned to her toys. “Gramma is very organized. Yesterday we gots all the B’s...books...Barbies...bingos...”

“All the junk that your grandmother doesn’t want around her house any more, Z. Can’t she just throw thins away in her own trash?” Iris snapped.

“Mother doesn’t like to waste. Those were all hand me down from my sister, down to me. If they’re good enough for me to play with, they’re good enough for my little girl.”

“You played with these Barbie’s and Patty Duke stuff?” Zelda jumped up from under the blanket. “Too bad I didn’t know you when you were a kid.”

“I may not have let you play with him, Z”. Iris added, dryly. ”He’d be a bad influence on you. Never finishing his dinner and all.”

At the table Mortimer groaned. “Bees and beets. Not a good match.”

“Do you plan on sitting there all evening, Mortimer?” Iris turned to face her husband. Mortimer, I’ll make you a deal. Either you eat your casserole, every last bite, or you get on the telephone and tell your mother to stop sending us all that junk.”

Mortimer started to protest, then glanced at the cold casserole on his plate. “OK, you win.” He struggled to stand, then paused. “I don’t know her number. It’s uh, upstairs.”

Zelda stood in the kitchen doorway. “You knew it this morning, Daddy, when you called her and asked her for fifty bucks.”

Iris bent and placed the roll of foil under the sink. “No problem, Mortimer, I’ll dial it for you right now. You just sit right there, the phone cord is long enough to reach from the wall.” She lifted the large telephone receiver and began to dial. “We’ll discuss the fifty bucks-dollars later!”

The next day Iris stood on the back porch by the steel garbage can. By her side was Zelda, digging through the large box of broken and mismatched toys. “Z, Just pick one

more toy. The rest go in the trash.” Out of the corner of her eye, she spied her neighbor, Mrs. Whoop, barreling through the hedges that separated their back yards. “Oh, no, hurry up, before Mrs. Whoop gets here. I’ll never hear the end of it.”

“I’m keeping these Patty Duke Colorforms. And the Patty Duke coloring book.” Zelda announced. “Everything else is just junk. No wonder Daddy is so boring.”

Zelda’s toy selection was quickly interrupted by their neighbors booming voice.. “Did I hear you mention toys? Anything for the church bazaar, or my Rhonda?” Rhonda was Mrs. Whoop’s be speckled pet duck, which could usually be found on the Whoops front yard, quacking happily away at passing cars and irritated neighbors.. She leaned down and fished thru the box of mis matched doll body parts, coverless coloring books, broken Lincoln Logs and dried Play Doh.

“It’s all going in the trash, Mrs. Whoop. Rhonda would choke on those tiny pieces.” Iris nudged the box away with her foot.

Zelda held out the Patty Duke toys for her neighbor to see. ”Except this stuff. I’m keeping em. I’ll color her clothes when I watch her on the TV. And her cousin.”

Iris shook her head. ‘We have a black and white television, Zelda. I’ll have to get you a whole box of black and gray crayons.”

Mrs. Whoop eyed the coloring book with dismay. “Patty Duke? Why the poor girl was blind!” Mrs. Whoop exclaimed. “But that cousin of hers wore lovely eyeglass frames. A nice sturdy pair, just like Rhonda’s!”

Zelda recoiled in surprise. “Blind? Then she didn’t know what color her clothes were either!”

“Blind as a bat and deaf as a doornail...at least she was in this movie I saw. Many years ago...” as she tried to remember the film's title, she was distracted by the sight of once colorful, chipped casserole pan soaking in a large bucket on the other side of the weathered porch. “I see you enjoyed my casserole, Iris! I bet you found it as tasty as Rhonda does!” In the background, her duck happily agreed. “I can whip up another batch for your Sunday dinner tonight!”

“Beets make me pass out.” Zelda explained, then added thoughtfully. “...blind, huh. Then how'd she know she had a cousin, or what her clothes looked like. Daddy was coloring her all wrong!”

Iris pushed her daughter aside. “Well, Mrs. Whoop, we really liked your casserole... especially, Mortimer!” She added, loud enough for her husband to hear.

In the kitchen, Mortimer groaned loudly

Later that evening, Zelda lay, with her Patty Duke coloring book and crayons on the sofa in the living room,. Behind the large black and white television in the corner of the room, Mortimer fumbled noisily with an unorganized array of tubes and wires. “Darn it, you'd think by 1977, they'd invent a television that doesn't have all these tubes in it.” He held a handful in the air for his wife and daughter to see. “I'll just take these down to the hardware store tomorrow during my lunch break and check em.”

Iris, stood in the arched entryway, hands locked to her hips. “They have invented something Mortimer Riggolio; it's called a COLOR television Solid State. With transistors; not those old tubes. Maybe you'll take the hint this time and buy a new set, rather than keep fixing that old one.’

“Yea, Daddy, how am I supposed to color Patty and Cathy here, when I don't even know what colors to use?” Zelda added, logically. “Maybe they're green, from Mars.”

Mort attempted to stand, banging his head on the top of the wooden console. “Well, I didn’t know Sunday was gang up on Mortimer day. If I did, I’d...whatever...” he stepped over the tubes on the floor, avoiding all but one, which exploded with a tiny pop. “I need a beer, excuse me.” Mortimer clumsily slid out of the living room past his wife. “And...if the Patty Dukes were good enough for me, they’re good enough for my little girl!” he mumbled, under his breath.

“Zelda’s right, Mort,” poked Iris, snapping him with her ever present dishcloth. “And don’t forget that you have to save a few minutes during your lunch break to enjoy your... bean, beet, and Frito casserole!”

The End