

THE
MOSBY
CHRECHKE
CHRONICLES



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CHAPTER SIXTEEN



Nothin's Changed...

2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Spring in Mossy Creek is a cascade of colors. The mountains are freckled with dogwoods and redbuds. The yards are plush, deep-green carpets with patterns painted in daffodils, tulips, and crocuses. The fringe on those carpets is fragrant lilacs and golden forsythias. Springtime in the mountains is good living. Well, mostly. Pastor Marianne was standing in the front yard of Our Savior

Presbyterian Church after worship visiting with folks as they headed home to lunch. That is when she saw Dave and Corrina headed for the parking lot. Corrina was happy most of the time these days. But Dave looked like somebody had kicked his dog and stole his truck. Pastor Marianne excused herself and tried to catch up with them.

Now, Dave is a lawyer, but he drives a pickup truck with more than a few years and miles on it. Corrina always keeps him stocked up with fashionable clothes. But there is something modest-looking about Dave. He doesn't wear his money. He never makes a big deal out of who he is or what he does for a living. He is just a real good guy. Most folks like Dave a lot.

He had slid in the front seat of his truck when Pastor Marianne caught up with him. Corrina started looking for an excuse to let them talk. So when she saw someone in the front yard of the church, she waved at them and headed back to visit with them. When Pastor Marianne called his name, Dave left the door of his truck open and turned in his seat so that he was facing her. He grinned and asked, "What do you want, Preacher?" Pastor Marianne chuckled and whacked his knee. He knew she didn't like being called "Preacher." With Dave, it was all in fun. But Pastor Marianne gave as good as she got. "Nothin' much, Counselor. How are things goin'?" Dave paused before he answered and ran his hand across the top of the steering wheel. "Nothin's changed. One day's 'bout the same as another, I guess."

Well, that wasn't the answer Pastor Marianne was hoping for. But she wasn't surprised. Dave had a son named Walker who had gone to college just

down the road a bit. Most folks think it is one of the best in the country. Four years later, he went straight from college to law school. And it was the same story again; he stayed close to home. Now he and Dave worked in the same practice together. That would have tickled Dave plumb to death if it weren't for his daughter, Ashley.

During her senior year of high school she got it in her head that she just had to go to the University of Wyoming. She said she wanted to major in agroecology and conveniently overlooked North Carolina State when she said nobody this side of the Mississippi was offering anything like that. She also wanted to take her horse with her. Truth be told, folks figured she just wanted to leave. Ashley was one of those kids who just couldn't get out of Mossy Creek fast enough.

Well, out-of-state tuition turned into a burden for Dave. He did well by his family, but he wasn't a rich man by any means. That is probably how Walker ended up sideways in the road with Ashley. And then it got worse. After her sophomore year, she dropped out of college. But she didn't come home. She stayed in Wyoming and started working on a ranch. That was what was eating Dave up. And Walker? He and Ashley hadn't had a peaceable thing to say to each other since then.

"Nothin's changed," Pastor Marianne mused. "Man, I hate that for you. How's Walker?" Dave smiled and said, "Oh, he's fine. You know Walker. That boy was born to work. If it were up to him we'd be handling twice as many clients." Pastor Marianne chuckled. Walker was as steady as the mountains he

loved so much. What you saw was what you got. He was at Sunday school and church every week. Worked long hours. Hunted a little. Made some time on Saturday afternoons to watch a little college football or basketball on TV. Like his dad, he drove a truck. Walker was usually a good guy.

But some of what made him such a good guy was wrecking his relationship with his sister. For Walker, there were no good reasons for leaving Mossy Creek, just excuses. And that is what he thought of Ashley's plans to go to school in Wyoming—just excuses. She might as well have told her family to drop dead. And when she left school, well, that just did Walker in. Here he and his dad were making a living and having to pay for Ashley's dreams all at the same time. And she up and quit. To do what? Ride a horse for a living? Once he had been talking to his dad and fumed, "God knows what she's doin' out there." Before he could say another word, Dave said, "Yes, He does. The Lord is watching over her when I can't. That's how I sleep at night." Well, that wasn't the answer Walker was looking for. When he left, he left mad.



Pastor Marianne leaned against Dave's truck and let him talk a little bit more. After a few minutes she went back to her office. Corrina had caught a ride with someone else, so Dave headed for home. When he got there, she and

Walker were grilling in the back yard. It wouldn't be long before those steaks were ready, and they would be great. Walker knew his way around a grill. Corrina didn't ask Dave what he and Pastor Marianne had been talking about; she could guess. But Walker didn't know about that conversation. And he traipsed right into a big ol' mess when he asked Dave where he had been. He replied, "Just talkin' to the Preacher." But Walker didn't leave well enough alone. "What did she want?" Dave replied, "Just wanted to know how everybody was doin'. I told her nothin's changed; we're fine."

That is when Walker started grilling Dave. "You mean she was asking about Ashley? Why doesn't she let that go? I have; she never even crosses my mind." Well, Dave didn't like that a little bit. But it wasn't his way to give his kids a hard time, so he went inside to change his clothes and find a cold Diet-Pepsi. Dave knew Walker was a good kid. He just had a short fuse at times. Dave kept praying he would give Ashley just one more last chance. He loved his kids. He even loved them when they wouldn't straighten up and fly right. And he was just waiting for the day when his family would be together again. He could just see it. They would be sitting on the back porch, grilling and talking and just having a big ol' time. He couldn't wait. But it seemed like that was all he did anymore.

Well, they haven't invented the cell phone that can't ruin a Sunday afternoon. That is what Dave was thinking when his went off. But when he answered his face broke into the biggest smile you ever saw. It was Ashley. He plopped down in his favorite overstuffed chair, nursed his Diet-Pepsi for a half hour, and had a grand time taking to his baby girl. Sometimes things come

together and you end up having a perfect day in the space of a half hour. When he hung up, Dave got his truck keys and went out the back door. Corrina told him dinner was just about ready. But he was on the move. “Just had a call. Gotta go. I’ll be back in a bit.” Walker asked, “Anything I can do, Dad?” “Not yet, son. I’ll be back directly. Don’t wait on me.”

Well, sir, five minutes later he was at Pastor Marianne’s just beating on her front door. It wasn’t a very Christian thing to do what with it being the Sabbath and all, but he couldn’t wait. Pastor Marianne opened the door and invited him in. “Hey! What can I do for you, Dave?” “I need some advice. I just talked to Ashley, and she wants to come home. She’s talking about selling her horse and the trailer. She said she didn’t need any help, but she wouldn’t sell her horse for anything unless she was broke. I think she’s scared. I think she’s scared to ask me for help. But if I send her money, Walker will just about lose his mind. What should I do?”

Pastor Marianne leaned back in her chair and looked at the ceiling. Then she looked at Dave and asked, “What’s changed?” Dave looked a little shocked and said, “Everything. She wants to come home.” Pastor Marianne shook her head and asked again, “What’s changed?” Now, Dave was getting a little bit aggravated when he shot back at her and said, “I don’t understand. What’re you gettin’ at?” Pastor Marianne smiled and said, “Hang on just a second. Remember the Prodigal Son? Tell me, what changed in that story?” Dave said, “The Bible says the younger son changed his mind. He was comin’ home no matter what.” Pastor Marianne said, “OK, I get that. But what else changed?”

And then Dave got it. He saw himself sitting in his truck, running his hand across the steering wheel, and saying, "Nothin's changed." He looked Pastor Marianne dead in the eye and said, "Nothin' changed. The old man never quit lovin' his son. That's how he knew when he finally came home; he never quit lookin' for him. When his boy said he'd live in the barn and work for minimum wage if he could just come home, his old man acted like he never heard a single word he said. He never quit lovin' his son." Dave paused and said, "And I will never quit lovin' Ashley. Nothin's changed. There isn't a thing in this world I won't do to see her home again."

After that, Dave knew just what to do. He went home and packed a bag. But he didn't say a thing to Walker. Then he told Corrina Ashley was coming home, and he meant to ride back with her and her horse. In the morning he told Walker he worked too hard. He told him to shut the office down except for emergencies and go hunting for the week. Then Dave made that hateful two-hour drive to the airport. The end of the day found him in Laramie. It was another world. There were half as many trees as back home and twice as much wind. But when he saw Ashley, he took off runnin' like he didn't have any good sense at all and hugged her neck. What kind of man acts like that? Well, a week later Dave and Ashley were back home, back in the mountains. Her truck was packed full. She was carrying everything she had taken with her to Wyoming and then some. They were having a big ol' time. It's a long drive from Laramie to Mossy Creek. But when you've got three years of catching up to do, time just flies. Her truck was pulling a new trailer with her horse and the one she

rode on the ranch. Dave had bought both of them for her. He wouldn't hear of leaving that horse in Wyoming. She wanted to apologize; he wouldn't hear of that either. He wanted to hear about ranching. When she started talking about going back to college, he wanted to hear all about that. Dave told her he would pay her way. By the time they were almost home, Dave was driving, but he felt like he was flying.

When they finally got home, the sun was setting. The mountains were still speckled with blazing white dogwoods and beautiful redbuds. And that evening they were draped in a blue, orange, and red sky. It was a picture from God's coloring book, so it was picture perfect. Dave turned into his long, twisting driveway. As he crossed the cattle guard, he saw two horses, saddled and standing alone. Dave recognized them—one was Walker's and the other was Corrina's. But he didn't see anyone with the horses. So he stopped to look around.

Just then the last rays of the sunset fell on the horses, and Dave saw something else—Walker stepped out from behind his horse. He had on a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, a ball cap, and cowboy boots. And the next thing you know, he was running for the truck for all he was worth. Then Ashley jumped out of the truck. And they hugged each other so hard they 'bout knocked each other down. It made Dave smile. They were kids again. It was a miracle. It was just like the old days before they got so lost and aggravated with each other. He yelled at Walker, "I thought I told you to go huntin'." Walker said, "I am. I'm huntin' me a

sister. How'm I doin'?" Dave just laughed and drove on up the driveway to the house.

I know what you're thinking. I was thinking the same thing. Where on earth was Corrina? Well, nobody but you and me know this, but she was watching the whole thing. She was standing right there in the front yard thinking what a fine thing it is when the lost get found and the dead rise to new life. And she whispered, "Those kids... Nothin's changed. Praise the Lord—they're just like their old man."

