

THE
MOSBY
CREEK
CHRONICLES



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CHAPTER TWELVE

The Crayon Kingdom...

James 3:13-4:8; Mark 9:30-37



It was Corrina again. When folks in Mossy Creek got all riled up and things were a mess, as often as not, it was Corrina. There was one way to see things. There was one way to do things. There was one way, only one way—Corrina's way. Nobody actually believed that. People just rolled their eyes and said that. Then they would usually go along with whatever she wanted just to keep the peace. It mostly worked that way at Our Savior Presbyterian Church, too. But every once in a while some who-knew, out-of-the-blue thing happened, and somebody stood up to her. This ended up being one of those times.

Labor Day was over, and the kids were back in school. That meant a new year of Sunday school was in full swing at Our Savior Presbyterian Church. Things were going just fine, thank you very much, when Miss Ruth hauled off and did that unexpected thing that was just bound to happen. She invited Jodie and her two sons, Beau and Duane to come to Sunday school and church with her.

Jodie's husband had been killed in an accident at the sawmill on Baker's Mountain a couple of weeks earlier. She and her boys had just moved to town and were staying with her grandmother for the time being. They had been attending Mt. Horeb Baptist Church out in the country. But now they were looking for somewhere to go to church while they were in town. And you know Miss Ruth. Somehow she found out. And she never missed a beat. She invited them, picked them up, and carried them to church.

Once they got there, Miss Ruth introduced Jodie to her son and daughter-in-law. They took her with them to the young adults' Sunday school class. Then Miss Ruth took Beau to the class for third to fifth graders. That was the class Corrina taught. When Miss Ruth introduced Beau, Corrina smiled, but it was one of her thin-lipped smiles that always made people nervous. If Corrina didn't like somebody, it wasn't hard to figure out. Miss Ruth sighed to herself, left Beau with Corrina, and took Duane with her to the kindergarten class she taught.

After church, folks were visiting a bit before going home for lunch when Corrina found Miss Ruth and complained, "When did you know you were bringing those boys to church? I spent a week getting my lesson ready, and I didn't have enough materials for another child. If you knew he was coming to church, I wish you had told me."

Miss Ruth smiled; it was second nature with her. "I'm sorry. It never crossed my mind. I just found out about Jodie and her boys Friday morning. Her husband was the one that got killed in that accident up on Baker's Mountain." Corrina's face barely moved as she said, "Uh huh..." Miss Ruth continued, "I'll be bringing them with me from now on. She's lookin' for somewhere to go to church and wants Beau and Duane in Sunday school. Wouldn't it be great if..."

Corrina interrupted, "They might be better off at that little Baptist church on the bypass. I hear they're pretty informal. The boys might fit in better there with their blue jeans and tennis shoes. I hope you plan on letting me know if you plan on bringing

anyone else to church with you.” Corrina gave Miss Ruth another one of those patented thin-lipped smiles, and in a blink, she was gone.

Miss Ruth sighed out loud this time. How hard could it be to welcome a child to Sunday school? She couldn’t figure out Corrina to save her life. It never occurred to Miss Ruth that people ought to go to this church or that church because of the clothes they wore. Church was church. People came to worship God and learn about Jesus. She thought, “I guess I’m old-fashioned. I thought you invited people to church and made ‘em glad they came.” She found Jodie, Beau, and Duane and took them home. Before she left, Miss Ruth smiled and said, “I sure am glad y’all came with me to church. See you next Sunday!” Jodie smiled, and her boys waved as Miss Ruth drove off.

Wednesday morning Miss Ruth ran into Corrina at the Piggly Wiggly. Corrina was still mad and took up right where she left off Sunday. “Is that boy coming to Sunday school this week? I want to make sure I’ve got everything just right.” Miss Ruth smiled and said, “He sure is. Jodie and her boys had a great time Sunday. I think they might even join the church.” Corrina frowned and said, “Well, she might, but those boys can’t. They’re Baptists; they probably haven’t even been baptized. I don’t know how they will ever fit in our church. They’re just country people come to town.”

Miss Ruth replied, “Corrina, you know good and well that Jodie and her boys are welcome at church. We don’t meet people at the front door and turn ‘em away because of where they’re from. My land, my Sunday school lesson for this week says Jesus said, ‘Anybody who welcomes a little child on My behalf welcomes Me, and whoever welcomes Me welcomes My Father who sent Me.’ We ought to be hugging their necks. Everybody’s welcome, especially children. Jesus says so. We aren’t some kind of country club.”

Well, they weren’t at church, so Corrina just lit into Miss Ruth. “You sound just like Pastor Marianne. That woman doesn’t know the first thing about being a proper

Presbyterian. She doesn't understand tradition. Our church appeals to certain people. Everybody knows that." Miss Ruth interrupted, "What kind of people?" Corrina gave her an icy smile and coolly said, "Just look at us. Anybody can tell. The way we dress, our education, the things we do for a living—our church isn't for everybody. That's why there are different kinds of churches. Different kinds of people need different kinds of churches. It's just common sense. That's why those boys would be better off in a Baptist church. And when they're better off, we'll be better off, too."

Well, you could have bought and sold Miss Ruth for a penny. She had never heard such a thing in her life and didn't know what to say. She believed that if you couldn't say something nice, you didn't say anything at all. It was hard, but she smiled and told Corrina she had to get going, left her at the fish counter, and finished up her shopping.

When she got home, Miss Ruth put her groceries on the kitchen counter. Then she leaned against the door jamb separating the kitchen from the dining room. And she started praying. "Lord, I don't like Corrina. But she is Your child. And I know that You want me to welcome her every time I see her. It's just so hard. Help me love her just the way You do." Best she could figure, loving Corrina was a day-by-day job that took the Lord's help. As much time as she spent leaning on that door jamb, it's a wonder it was still standing when she got done praying.

Later that week, Miss Ruth and Corrina were attending the monthly Christian education committee meeting. Pastor Marianne was there, too. She was looking for someone to serve on the presbytery's Christian education committee. At first, there weren't any takers. So she described the committee's work. She said, "It's a pretty strong committee. I think you might be on it a couple of years before you ended up being directly responsible for any projects. And by that time you might end up being the chair or co-chair of the committee and have plenty of help. It won't be too hard. But it is important work."

The idea of an easy job turning into a chance to be the chair of a key presbytery committee suddenly appealed to Corrina. She asked, “Don’t the chairs of the presbytery committees serve on the presbytery council, too?” When Pastor Marianne told her that she was right, Corrina signed up. There was nothing about being in charge she didn’t like. She would make a name for herself in the presbytery in short order. She even decided she might let Pastor Marianne ride with her to presbytery meetings. It would sure beat riding in her old SUV.

As they walked out to the parking lot after the meeting, Pastor Marianne told Miss Ruth, “You surprised me. I thought you might like working on that committee.” Miss Ruth smiled and said, “Heavens no! I wouldn’t know what to do. I’m better off teachin’ my kindergartners on Sunday morning. That’ll keep me plenty busy. Corrina will be great! That kind of thing is right up her alley.”

Pastor Marianne chuckled and said, “Climbing ladders just isn’t your thing, is it?” Miss Ruth laughed and agreed. Then she got serious. “You know, I was doing my daily devotion this morning when I read this passage from James. He said we shouldn’t claim to be wise if we’re jealous or ambitious. He said carryin’ on like that that doesn’t have anything to do with God’s wisdom; it’s the devil’s handiwork. It just causes fights. I don’t want any part of that.”

Pastor Marianne nodded her head in agreement and said, “He also says God’s wisdom isn’t just ideas. It’s something you can see—being peaceful, merciful, and sincere. No partiality or hypocrisy. What a list! It looks like he wants Christians to renew their promises to Jesus every day. With James, knowing and doing are always connected.” Miss Ruth asked, “But who are those adulterous people he’s talkin’ about? I didn’t get that.” Pastor Marianne said, “People who are half-hearted in loving the Lord; cheatin’ on the Lord. They just can’t make up their minds about following Jesus.” Well, that was something else Miss Ruth couldn’t imagine.

Sunday came, and Miss Ruth brought Jodie, Beau, and Duane back to church. The boys were as shiny as a pair of brand-new pennies. They were wearing their best jeans and the new sweatshirts Miss Ruth had bought them now that the days were getting cooler. When Miss Ruth dropped Beau off with Corrina, she got that hateful thin-lipped smile again. Beau didn't get a thing, not even a "hello."

When she came back after class, Corrina said, "Somebody needs to pick this boy up after class. I want to get to church on time and sit with my family." Miss Ruth forced herself to smile and said, "I'll get here a little earlier next Sunday." Corrina was turning to leave when she stopped and said, "It doesn't matter. I won't be here next Sunday. Robert and I are going to church with the executive presbyter. That boy and his blue jeans and sweat shirt will be somebody else's concern next week."

At that moment, Miss Ruth blurted out, "Do you love the Lord?" Corrina turned and didn't even pretend to smile. "What on earth are you talking about? I teach Sunday school. I come to church every week. My family helped found this church." Miss Ruth persisted. "But do you love the Lord?" Corrina glared at her and hissed, "My actions speak for themselves."

As she turned to leave, Corrina bumped into Beau. She stepped around him without saying a word. Beau just kept smiling and showed Miss Ruth something he had made in Sunday school class.¹ It was a picture of a stick-figure woman in a garden full of flowers with a scripture passage printed in crayon underneath. "And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness." Amen.



¹

¹ **Alternative ending:** It was a picture of Jesus hugging two boys with a scripture passage printed in crayon underneath. “Let the children come to Me. Don’t stop them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Amen.

