



I was  
just  
thinking...

SOMETIMES when Bernie and I are having a second cup of coffee, she talks about The Store.

My grandparents owned it when I was a child. I remember dimly the slanted sunlight across the old wood floors. I remember the tantalizing flavor of the grocery department. I remember the leathery smell of the shoes. And I remember, too, that I ran through The Store, filling my arms with toys and dresses and beads because my generous grandparents would sooner have mortgaged The Store than confess all these weren't really their own to give away.

And Bernie talks about Mr. Hulin, whose kingdom was the cracker barrel and the pickles and the meats, and about her secret crush, Mr. Bunch, whose high collar rose above men's suits.

In those days in a sleepy Southern town, nobody in The Store was ever Orton or Hawkins. The salesladies who clerked were always gentlewomen in reduced circumstances and they were always Miss Viney and Miss Ethel and Miss Laura. Grandmother was Mrs. Mac.

When Mrs. Mac came home from market at St. Louis or New York, she brought with her bombazine and bengaline and soutache braid and great confections called millinery. If a customer



deplored the absence of plumes over a wreath of grapes, Mrs. Mac's milliner trimmed the hat anew.

Bernie, their daughter and only child, was lovingly gowned and slippers in the largesse from The Store long after her marriage and my birth. Then, year by year, Mr. and Mrs. Mac grew older and their feet grew wider and gray came to their hair and to the business.

The Store died long ago in the depression, the same year that my grandparents began to die a little, too. I know the building is still there in the sleepy country town because I saw it again while passing through.

The old name, McClain-Cook, is still visible through the faded paint. And I wish I had never found it.

*Patsy Johnson*

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