

Mrs. Smith

By: Gus Dick Andros

Ring! Ring! Ring!

"26-523." She always answered with her telephone number.

"Mrs. Smith, this is Gus, Jr."

"Yes, I recognized your voice. How is your mother doing?"

"She's fine. It's me that is having a problem. This house is full of people, and I can't stand them. Can I come over and talk to you?"

"You know you're always welcome. I'll be waiting for you." she said and hung up the phone.


I had to sneak my bicycle out the back door because I knew if the people saw me leave the house they would be more convinced of what they already thought. You see I didn't cry at the funeral that morning and resisted until I was "encouraged" to view the body of my father. I wanted to remember him alive and the person I loved the most. Only mother and I did not throw ourselves across the casket. In the Greek Church grief is measured by the scene created at the wake and funeral. Mother and I were Christian Scientists, and our idea of death differed from the Greeks. Daddy's funeral was a large affair, something that I will never forget. The funeral parade was at least four blocks long, and the Governor's car followed the family limousine. The grave site was a beautiful location on a hill that overlooked a small lake. Under a canvas canopy, the coffin was opened again and the Greek priest sprinkled dirt on his body. Because the family had to be next to the casket I could reach out and touch my father. I shut my eyes as this part of the ceremony was performed.

On the way to Mrs. Smith's, our Christian Science practitioner, and the only person to whom I confided my problems, I met a neighbor who felt he had to give me his sympathy and tell me how wonderful my father was, as if I didn't know. I told him that no one had to tell me anything about my father. He was taken aback by my protest. I was 14 years old and not too tactful. I am sure he thought I was rude.

I loved Mrs. Smith's house. It was a large white frame house on a hill with an inviting walk way to the door. Her yard was always manicured and green, while the yards on either side were burnt yellow. At that time Oklahoma was suffering its worst drought and to maintain a nice yard meant time and energy.

Mrs. Smith met me at the door, and we walked down a long dark hallway to her office. She was a large black woman always dressed in white down to her white nurse's shoes. Her corset made her breasts look larger than the rest of her body.

She always had the shades pulled down, and yet you could see clearly. At the time I never gave it any thought, but years later, I realized it was because so many white people visited. She sat behind her large oak desk, and her calming voice made me feel that she really was a direct line to the Lord.



I told her how much I loved my father and that he was the only person who had ever told me he loved me--without being asked. I didn't tell her that he would always bring home candy for his boys, and that I would fake illness so I could sleep with him. He would cuddle me until I fell asleep, but I would always wake up in my own bed. I did this for years. When we were alone he would confide his problems to me. I remember it bothered him that everyone called him by his first name, and yet the Governor was at his funeral. He made me feel I was special to him. If I loved this man so much, why couldn't I cry like my brothers did?

Mrs. Smith told me that the soul had not died and that my father was alive in me. She read to me from Science and Health, "There is no life, truth, intelligence, nor substance in matter. All is infinite Mind and its infinite manifestation, for God is All-in-all-----Spirit is God, and man is his image and likeness. Therefore man is not material; he is spiritual." She assured me that my love for my father was reflected in his love he had for me and that would never change. I had felt that I had lost the only person who cared for me and I was alone, but Mrs. Smith made me believe that my father would be with me forever. Mrs. Smith put her arms around me and I started to cry; she held me until I gained my composure.

I went back to our house and parked my bicycle in the front yard and walked into the living room, crowded with well wishers, and I didn't care what anyone thought. In fact, I was smiling, because I knew that daddy was still with me. Ten years passed before I was invited to another Greek function. I did not attend.