

My Life At Shirley's

written by

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EXT. MAIN STREET SIDEWALK - DAY

Grey, feathery clouds loom over TERRA WALKER, 21, and her sister, NORA, 16. They stare down the building's dimly lit sign in front that reads "Josie's Tattoo Parlor". The two sisters look to each other, grin, and intertwine their pinky fingers.

INT. TATTOO PARLOR - LATER

With her arms crossed, Nora taps her foot impatiently while Terra and a skinny SKATER GUY get tatted up by JOSIE, 37, and JAMES, 24, respectively. Terra looks at her sister's face and makes a playful eye-roll.

TERRA

Hey, what did you do with the money
I gave you?

Nora opens the front of her JOURNAL to reveal a few crumpled twenty dollar bills. Terra smirks.

TERRA

I wonder what Momma would say if
she were here. She probably knows
you'd try to weasel out of this.

NORA

Maybe. She'd probably say it would
mean a lot to you. You know, the
whole guilt routine.

Terra frowns before Josie moves the buzzing needle on Terra's right wrist.

TERRA

(screeches)
Ow! Watch it, or I'll yell for
Josie.

JOSIE

I am Josie, sweetheart, and don't
flinch. We're almost done.

Nora stifles a laugh and watches the skater guy pay at the register and exit. Nora's smile falters as she sits in the only other black chair in the joint.

JAMES

Hey, how are ya? What tattoo would
you like, and where do you want it?

Nora points to Terra's finished tattoo of the FAST FORWARD SYMBOL with the words "Only Forward" displayed underneath.

NORA

Same one as Terra's, please.

Nora holds out her left wrist. She and Terra exchange a knowing look. Then Terra smiles down at her wrist and heads to the counter with the journal and her ID while Josie rings them up.

JOSIE

So, "Only Forward" huh? What does that mean? You two watch too much TV?

TERRA

(smiles)

No, ma'am. It's something our momma used to say to us.

NORA

Yeah, she always told us there's no going backwards, only forward.

Nora bites her lower lip and squeaks as James moves the buzzing needle. Terra looks to the old black WRISTWATCH on her left arm.

TERRA

It's only 11:15? Yay that means we have plenty of time before my shift at Shirley's starts!

NORA

You're the only person I know who actually enjoys work, especially on their birthday.

TERRA

Well, you'll find out when you start working.

NORA

Excuse you. That journal you're holding IS my work. I'm gonna be a great writer one day, and that means practice.

Terra looks down at the journal and sighs with a puzzled expression.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHIRLEY'S COUNTRY STORE - AFTERNOON

Terra locks her rusty blue car and faces the quaint wooden porch and rocking chairs next to the store's signature sign that reads "Shirley's Country Store: Making customers leave home for homemade biscuits since 1975!"

TERRA

How could anyone not love a place like this? I'd kill to run a place like this one day.

NORA

It does have a home-y vibe. I'll give you that. Maybe I'll write about it in one of my books.

Terra's eyes widen at Nora. Nora looks down blushing and motions with her tattooed arm for them to go inside. They see a MAN in a black suit sitting in a rocking chair on their left. He looks around the porch, clicks his black pen, and writes on his clipboard. Terra and Nora share a puzzled look.

INT. SHIRLEY'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Terra nearly slips on the white floor tiles and leans on the beef jerky box on the counter for support.

TERRA

Hey Shirley? We're here, trying not to slip on your clean floor.

NORA

Did she use too much mop water again?

Terra shrugs. Then SHIRLEY GRAYSON, 52, steps out with an off white apron snuggled around her waist and a broom in hand. She tightens her frizzy ponytail and wipes the sweat from her forehead.

SHIRLEY

I've said it once, and I'll say it again. My floors are never slippery. Y'all just have weak feet.

Terra, Nora, and Shirley share a silent glance. Then they all burst into a giggle fit.

SHIRLEY

Now let's get the fryers going. It's time for practice. Although I hardly remember the last time you needed help with the lunch rush.

Shirley pulls Terra in for a side hug. Then Terra gleefully scurries through the small counter door that connects the counter and the kitchen area. She grabs the black apron hanging from the coat rack and ties it around her waist.

Nora takes a seat next to JOE THOMPSON, 68, in one of the small booths. He grins and pats her on the shoulder.

JOE

'Bout time y'all got here. I'm starvin'. Where have y'all been?

Shirley walks toward their booth and smirks at his belly.

NORA

For her birthday present, we got tattoos at a place in town. The place was kinda sketchy, but I didn't mind since it was for Terra. She's been sad about Momma lately.

SHIRLEY

That's sweet, Nora, and you act like I didn't scramble your eggs right this morning, Joe.

JOE

Nah, you did, but I like when the girl cooks for me. Lord knows, she's been rulin' this kitchen since she was knee high.

Terra walks out with a basket of steamy potato wedges and places them on the table. Joe chuckles and gently takes Terra's hand.

TERRA

The only difference is I make your biscuits fluffy instead of crispy nowadays. I'll have your usual out in a moment.

Shirley hurries to the kitchen as more CUSTOMERS pile in. Terra goes to the other booths with a notepad and pen. Nora passes Joe the plastic ketchup bottle on the table. We see the man in the black suit enter and sit at a corner table. He gazes around the room and nods in approval.

INT. SHIRLEY'S COUNTRY STORE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Shirley grabs a bag of potatoes, cuts them up, and scoops portions of them into two fryers on her left. Once they're in, she opens the oven and removes a tray of golden biscuits.

We see Terra enter through the kitchen door, and she starts fixing a few fresh containers of coleslaw. She places the tops on a couple of them and removes the crispy, fried chicken from the fryers on the right, sets out several paper plates, and looks at the orders.

INT. SHIRLEY'S COUNTRY STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Shirley and Terra hand out plates to LOCALS at different booths. Terra stops by Joe and Nora's table with a plate of two chicken legs, a biscuit, and a side of coleslaw. Joe unfolds his napkin, grabs his fork, and tastes his coleslaw.

JOE

My goodness, girl, you'll have a restaurant of your own one day.

TERRA

Aw Joe, I couldn't leave Shirley's. Who'd be here to make your lunch and refill your tea everyday?

JOE

I don't know, but while I'm thinkin' on it, could you get me some more unsweet tea?

Terra nods, and Joe hands her his almost empty glass.

Shirley sits across from Nora and Joe as Terra heads back to the kitchen with the glass in her hands.

SHIRLEY

I can't believe that child wants to cook her own fried chicken and biscuits on her birthday. Guess that means she ain't a child no more.

JOE

Amen to that!

Shirley turns and grins at Terra bustling about the store as if she owned it.

SHIRLEY

God, I'll miss that pretty smile.

NORA

What does that mean?

Shirley looks back at Terra, and faces Nora and Joe.

SHIRLEY

I'm only letting her cook her dinner because I have a realtor coming to look at the store after closing. I'm gonna sell the store.

Nora sits up straight. Her mouth hangs open.

NORA

You have to tell her. If not, it'll be like Momma leaving all over again.

JOE

The child has a right to know, Shirley. She's your employee.

Shirley shakes her head before she walks back to the kitchen. Nora frowns. Joe sighs and takes a huge bite out of his first chicken leg.

INT. SHIRLEY'S COUNTRY STORE - EVENING

Shirley flips the OPEN sign that hangs on the front window to CLOSED and stands by the counter with a worried look on her face. Terra huffs and sits across from Nora in the booth.

NORA

Finally stepped away from your sauna, huh?

TERRA

Yeah, it was getting stuffy in there. Our chicken is frying now though, and the biscuits are baking. We'll be eating soon.

We see KEVIN TURNER, 58, enter and remove his black fedora to reveal his balding head. Nora and Terra squint at his odd presence.

TERRA

I've never seen him before.

Terra walks over to greet him, but before she can speak, Shirley walks up and shakes his hand.

SHIRLEY

Good evening, you must be Mr. Turner. I'm Shirley. If you'd like to follow me, I-

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

KEVIN

Oh no ma'am, I'd much rather see
this sweet place for myself. I-

TERRA

(interrupts)

What's this for? A publicity gig?

KEVIN

Oh no, I'm trying to size up the
price that this store could sell
for.

TERRA

Sell?

Terra frowns at Shirley who has a glum expression on her
face.

SHIRLEY

(sighs)

I was gonna tell you, but I'm
selling the store. I can't afford
to run it anymore.

Terra steps back with a terrified look on her face. Her eyes
water as Nora stands by her side.

NORA

Terra? Are y-

TERRA

I think I'm gonna be sick.

Terra rushes to the back of the store. Nora shakes her head
at Shirley before following.

INT. SHIRLEY'S COUNTRY STORE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Terra runs her hands through her tangled hair and violently
wipes her tears away. She holds herself steady on the white
marble sink and looks at her frazzled reflection in the
rectangular mirror.

TERRA

You can't keep acting like this.
God, you're 21 years old, and
you're acting like a scared little
girl.

A KNOCK sounds at the door. Terra reluctantly lets Nora in.

NORA

Okay, what was that?

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

TERRA

I can't handle this! Momma skipping town was bad enough. Now I'm losing the store. I don't have a home. I don't have anything left.

NORA

Don't say that. You have me and Shirley.

Terra inhales and exhales slowly.

TERRA

I'm sorry. That's not what I meant. I'm not good at anything except cooking. I'm not like YOU. I don't have big dreams.

NORA

Maybe the universe is imbalanced. Like maybe I've been dreaming too big, and you've been dreaming too small. Ugh I'm not good at this.

TERRA

You're really not.

Terra rolls her eyes. Then she and Nora smile at each other and laugh.

NORA

I'll take that if it helps you. Either way Terra, no matter what happens, you need to remember Momma's advice.

Nora looks down at their tattoos, grins, and hugs Terra. Then Terra splashes her face with cool sink water before exiting.

INT. SHIRLEY'S COUNTRY STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Nora and Terra walk to the booth to find Shirley sitting alone with her face buried in her hands. Terra peers over at her and taps her shoulder, but Shirley doesn't respond.

SHIRLEY

I took the biscuits out of the oven, and finished cooking the chicken. I figured that was the least I could do.

Terra glances at the counter and takes a seat across from Shirley.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

TERRA

I'm calm now, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

I'm sorry you had to find out this way, especially on your birthday.

Terra folds her hands and places them on the table.

TERRA

It's okay. Tonight has made me realize that I want to own this store one day. Selling is not an option when a store like this is so valuable.

SHIRLEY

Sweetie, running this store is more than frying chicken. Profit keeps declining, and I don't know if you're ready for this part of the job.

TERRA

Now's the time for me to get ready! You've always said I could take over one day. I can start training now by saving the store! I think we should start off by having a fish fry to raise money!

NORA

Preferably before the place closes.

SHIRLEY

That could be a good fundraiser, but it may not work down the road. You could regret this, Terra.

TERRA (CONT'D)

Nora was right. I wasn't dreaming big enough. I don't know much, but I know I want to learn. I won't abandon the store. My life is here, and so is yours.

Nora pats Terra on the shoulder, and Terra clutches Shirley's wrinkled hand. Then Terra grabs their plate of biscuits and fried chicken and places it on the table.

TERRA

We can figure out details later. For now, we have to look forward to our new beginning together.

FADE TO BLACK.