

"Joyful Rest"

An Historical Fiction Heirloom Doll Story by Angela Free



Old Reverend Freeman wasn't one to pound the pulpit or scream and shout to bring sinners to repentance. No, he was the quiet, laid-back type who just told the old, old Story and let the Spirit do the bidding. I liked his style! That being the case, it was mighty quiet in the Sunday meetings when the Reverend spoke, and the slightest noise from any of us parishioners bellowed like a barnyard rooster at the crack of dawn.

The church-folk nicknamed me "Anna" on my 84th birthday. They said I was like the New Testament prophetess – old, widowed after seven years of marriage, and never missed church! My real name is Martha. I used to be "worried and upset about many things", but over time the Good Lord has taught me to slow down, sit at Jesus' feet, and choose "what is better". I suppose rearing six children on my own was His good training ground for me.

Being the eldest in our congregation, I took it upon myself last Lord's Day to take a little chick under my wing when her mother needed to retreat to their wagon to nurse her infant. Two-year old Lucy eagerly took her place beside me on the second row, brown curls bouncing. She knew the rule about being respectfully quiet while Reverend spoke, but that's easier said than done for a toddler. When her dangling legs swung, the wooden bench creaked; when she slid down to pick up the song sheet, the floorboard groaned; when she climbed back up, her leather shoe hammered the seat ahead. Try as she might, the wiggles and squirms got the best of her. I tried settling the tot by placing my hand on her knee, then around her shoulders, to no avail. She crawled into my lap for a moment, then she was back on the bench squirming.

At last, I remembered what my mother had done to entertain me when I was a youngster. Reaching into my handbag, I retrieved my finest rose-embroidered handkerchief. Right away, Lucy gave me her full attention. I smoothed out one corner and tied a knot about an inch away from the tip of the fabric. Next, I tied an identical knot on the opposite side. With a strip of fabric from between my Bible pages, I made a loose ball, wrapped it in the center section of the hankie between the knotted corners, and tied it off with the satin pink ribbon from Lucy's hair.

Lucy's eyes became as round as gumballs when I produced a dainty doll. She cupped her chubby little hands, ready to receive her new toy. For the remainder of the church meeting, Lucy played quietly with her doll, until, at last, she drifted off to sleep in my arms, clutching her darling treasure.

From the pulpit, Reverend Freeman glanced our way and gave a smile of approval. He closed the service with the first verse of my favorite hymn: "Jesus, I am resting, resting / In the joy of what Thou art / I am finding out the greatness / Of Thy loving heart...".