

An excerpt from "Finding My Way"

One night early in 1994, before he joined the Navy, Braunle and I were visiting Mabelle. We'd been keeping her company ever since Chris had joined the Navy, and she liked having us around. If we weren't off filming with Andre, Steve and Bo, we were hanging out with her.

What neither of us knew was that one of her ex-boyfriends had gotten word that Chris was now in the Navy, and he'd started nosing around, trying to get back together with her. The night in question, we were just getting ready to leave Mabelle's house. Before we could, there was a knock on the door. Mabelle answered, and in walked one of the biggest guys I'd ever seen—and what I could see screamed “redneck” to me. From his cowboy hat to his huge belt buckle, exaggerated Southern drawl, shit-kicker boots, and a huge, muddy truck plastered with Confederate flag stickers sitting in Mabelle's driveway, he was the kind of guy that checked off every box on the redneck stereotype list. He was the kind of guy whose gun rack needed a gun rack (and yes, his truck did have a gun rack).

Mabelle introduced us, and the way he looked at both myself and Braunle was enough to send a chill down my spine. I'm sure he didn't expect to find a couple of guys with the girl he was actively pursuing again. But he was civil enough, especially when he found out that we were on our way out the door. Shortly thereafter, we said our goodbyes, and Braunle and I were on our way.

Turns out that I had another reason to feel a chill run down my spine. I called Mabelle the next night, and she told me what had transpired after Braunle and I left. The conversation between the two of them, as I recall it, went like this: no sooner had Braunle and I gone out the door when this guy says “I should follow them out there and kick their asses.”

Mabelle couldn't believe her ears. “What? Why?!”

“Did you see the way they were both dressed?”

At this point in Mabelle's recounting of the incident, I shook my head. Braunle and I had dressed the way we always did: me with my torn jeans, heavy metal t-shirt, my Doc Marten combat boots—I also had my long hair at the time—and Braunle was dressed like an extra from a rap video. *The guy's ignorant and racist too*, I thought, mentally checking off the last two items on the redneck stereotype list. Sure enough, what Mabelle said next confirmed that.

“Yeah, so what?” she said to him.

“That one guy was wearing a bunch of Satan-worshipping heavy metal bullshit, the other guy was dressed like a fucking (I refuse to reprint his exact racial slur), and you don't see what's wrong with that?”

With that, he started for her door, undoubtedly anticipating beating the two of us to a pulp. Before he could take two steps, though, Mabelle had darted in front of him.

“Don't you dare,” she hissed, getting up in his face. As Mabelle is not a tall woman, that must have been a sight. “If you harm even one hair on either of their heads, you will **never** see me again!”

The threat worked. He backed down. All his plans to get back together with Mabelle turned out to be all in vain in the end, though, as she shot him down hard. Luckily, Braunle and I never saw him again. If we ever did, I'm sure he would have made good on his threat.

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