

Country

Gimme me a song that tells a story and touches my heart, a song about Mama makin' herself a dress out of flour sacks, and one for Rose to wear to school. Mama never got a day off, not even Sundays. Had supper ready for Daddy when he come home. A few times I saw him hug her in front of us. Whenever he took Mama dancin', we waited up as long as we could, hopin' to see them happy.

Daddy wanted to be a singer, had his guitar and all, and he could yodel good, made up a song about findin' the girl of his dreams. She had blue eyes and was from Texas. Mama told us she was the girl Daddy was singin' about. The man in his song had on cowboy boots, a western shirt, a pistol at his side, and a Texas Ranger's star on his chest, peace lovin' by nature. Daddy called his song "A Lotta Woman:"

A smile on my lips
but not in my eyes.
Whisperin' sweet nothin's,
Nothin' but lies.

My eyes was wild
Till I met you,
And I give my heart
To your eyes of blue.

Chorus:
I swore to be true,
As true as I can,
'Cause you're a lotta woman
For just one man.

I don't run around
From door to door.
My cheatin' heart
Don't cheat no more.

I never thought
I could be true.
But I'd be cheatin' myself
If I cheat on you.

Chorus:
I swore to be true,
As true as I can,
'Cause you're lotta woman
For just one man.

There's Jimmy, he weren't right. We fretted, but we didn't know nothin' to do. When he got older, he was strong as a ox. Girls was afraid to be around him. Mama was scared he might get lost in the woods. She couldn't stand the thought of Jimmie out there all by hisself.

Me? Ain't much to tell. Walkin' two mile to school weren't no bother. Eight grades in one room. Rose was in second. Me and her walked together. Sometimes I give her a piggyback ride. When she fell asleep on her desk, teacher let her sleep.

Teacher said I figured good. The world she told about were like a dream. Nothin' real about it to me. I just wanted to git home and have supper.

Lily was three. She wore only a diaper, 'cept in winter she had a coat.

We raised Blue from a pup, and his ears flopped like leaves on a tree. He slept most of the time, and he loved to hunt. Take out the squirrel rifle, and his eyes lit up, sniffin', rarin' to go. When we lost Blue, I didn't just cry. I bawled. Only time in my life. Someone musta stole him. I missed Blue somethin' awful.

Daddy went down to the mine. He never saw the sun 'cept a few hours on the Sabbath. He was a sad, sad man, and a mean drunk. Daddy's soul was black as the coal he brung up from the earth. If he stopped in a honkytonk on the way home, drownin' his sorrows in a few beers, look out. Mama waited up for him knowin' there'd be hell to pay.

The night he left, he come home and washed up. We ate supper and he sent us to bed. I heard him sayin' to Mama, "I'm sorry, but I gotta go. I gotta get outta here before I die."

"What about me and the kids?"

He said, "I'm sorry. Here's all I got," and he emptied his pockets on the bed. I could see him puttin' clothes in a sack.

"You're leavin' me and the kids without nothin'?"

He begun to cry but kept on puttin' clothes in the sack. "I'm a dead man if I stay. I gotta get out."

He put on his jacket, picked up his guitar, and went out the door. Watchin' out the window, I saw our old pickup drive away in the dark into the night, leavin' Mama with a hole in her heart.

I heard her prayin' and cryin' at the same time. I knowd she was on her knees by her bed. "Lord, what'll I do? What'll I do? Lord, hep. You know the fix we're in." The springs squeaked when she got in bed. I thought she would never stop cryin'.

The preacher said he's prayin' for us, but he was as poor as us. People in the holler had their own to take care of. He said Jesus might help us, but I never saw him in our part of the county.

Mama scraped till her fingers was raw. She opened the cabinet doors, one by one. Ever shelf was empty. She sold ever'thin' she could till we didn't have nothin' nobody wanted. But it weren't enough. We didn't know where to turn.

Three months after my daddy left, Floyd, the sheriff's assistant, deputy, or somethin', came sniffin' around. When he grinned his mouthful of teeth put me in mind of a possum.

The preacher told us about Satan temptin' Jesus. I thought Floyd was Satan, come to tempt Mama. We was hungry, and Floyd was, too. He set two sacks on the table and set down like he belonged. Mama looked at Floyd steady. She looked at Jimmie,—and me,—and Rose,—and Lily. She looked at the groc'ries, and whispered low, "I'll get supper." She did not smile.

Drivin' through the woods in my 4 x 4, I spotted the gray unpainted sidin'. Walkin' toward the house, it wuz hard to breathe, like carryin' a heavy weight. My heart beat like a bass drum. Mama's gone, Jimmie's gone, Rose and Lily have families. I can't quit thinkin' how Mama cried the night Daddy left. I can't cry. I'm all cried out.

