

PAYDAY SPAGHETTI

by

Brian Keys Hands

May, a precocious eleven old, walked up the dirt road and watched the “Meatman” as he pulled his truck out of their parking space. She waved to him and thought it was always nice to see him, as he delivered the best food.

She walked into her trailer and saw Mama at the kitchen table. She looked worse than usual, May thought. Too skinny and pale and the place was a mess again. She told herself she’ll have to clean it later.

“May honey, see what you have in your change purse?” said Mama.

“Why? It’s the same the last time you asked - nothing.”

“Just check.”

Mama fidgeted at the kitchen table as May walked into her room. She brought back her change purse as she clinged to a ragged blanket.

May held up the change purse and squeezed it - nothing.

“Wait,” May said. “What are we having for supper?”

“Check our spaghetti situation. Running short this month is all.”

“The Meatman just left.” May talked louder. “Running short? It’s the 20th.”

“You know I get my check on the 1st.” Mama looked away and bead of sweat dripped down her forehead.

May hurriedly walked over and opened the freezer. There was nothing there but the ice cube trays.

“Where’s the meat?” May asked.

Mama fumbled with something under the table and didn’t answer.

May opened the refrigerator and then went over and looked into the cupboard.

“One and half boxes of spaghetti and three-fourths jar of sauce. That’s not enough,” May said.

Mama ignored her. May walked over and stood right in front of her.

“Mama, it’s the 20th, that’s not enough food.”

Mama talked softer, “Ok, now go burn the trash. Mama has to take her medicine.”

May didn’t like the way Mama sounded when she got “the sweats”. “Mama, the Meatman just left. Didn’t you buy some?”

“Don’t be selfish, you get a free lunch at school, what do I get?” Mama said softly.

May walked over and looked into the refrigerator again and started to cry into her blanket. “But Mama,” she pleaded. “We never done this on the 20th.”

Mama itched the scabs on her forearms. She looked out the window and back at May. She whispered, “I know child, I know. Be a good girl and go burn the trash.”