

Sally's Story

Sally was the youngest of four children born to a family who owned a small working farm in the Midwest. She was the only girl. Her mother was furious when she got pregnant with Sally. She was already worn thin by three demanding boys and was working herself ragged to keep the farm functioning as her husband brought the enterprise to the brink of bankruptcy every year. They could not afford another baby, and conception occurred in a moment when Sally's mother had surrendered to her husband's demand for sex in order to soothe his many failures. Sally was conceived, and her mother prayed that her baby would die in utero. (She used this fact against Sally often to humiliate her.)

Sally was born beautiful and sweet, bringing a delightful new energy to the house. Sally's dad, who had been vacant and distant prior to her birth, adored his new baby girl, and she found love and comfort in his dotting arms. Over the years, Sally was marked as his favorite, and she reveled in his love and attention. Her energy and spark gave him life, and together they explored the farm and did the chores as he told her all the stories of the land they were tending. She brought him laughter, simplicity, and joy. But as she adored the connection with her father, she endured a cold and violent energy from her mother that began to permeate every other aspect of her life.

Sally was a good, compliant girl and was confused by feeling full of life on the land with her father, only to be chided by her mother when she showed up on the back porch dirty and dusty from the day. Often, as soon as she was within a foot of the screen door, her mother was there staring her down. "Sally," she would spit, "you are late to help with supper. I'll never understand how you can waste so much time idling outside as if there is nothing to do. You are useless."

Taking a breath from her rant, she then looked Sally up and down in disgust. “I don’t have time to give you a bath, so I’m going to have to spray you down. Strip down and get the hose.”

“Mama, please,” Sally would beg. “I’m just dusty, I can go change. I’m sorry I’m late.”

“It’s too late for that,” her mom would say. “Now strip down and I’ll spray you off.” So, Sally would strip down, and her mother would turn on the freezing cold water with the nozzle set to its harshest setting. When the violent, cold spraying was finished, she’d be handed an old rag from the porch, told not to get the floors wet, and sent upstairs to change.

After a few years, her mother’s rage against her became too much to bear. Sally began declining her father’s invitations into his sacred garage where they would sit and drink a cold Coca-Cola on hot summer days. She worked twice as hard in the kitchen to try to please her demanding mother, but it was never enough. Soon her father began to feel wounded by her slights and stopped inviting her into his world. Her mother continued to ramp up her cold rage and treat Sally like Cinderella, while treating her sons like heirs to the throne.

When Sally was ready for formal school, her mom went to the local Goodwill thrift store one afternoon and returned with a bag of clothes for Sally to start kindergarten. They were too big and were out of date, and though Sally had spent most of her time on the farm, she knew these clothes would spell humiliation for her at school.

Her mother could see the disappointment on her face and took the opportunity to call her ungrateful and degraded her body by telling her that no matter what she bought for her, she would always look like a dirty little ragamuffin. Her father was nowhere to be found.

On the first day of school, Sally chose the best dress she could find and gathered the loose material around her waist with an old belt she found in the bottom of a hallway closet. Poverty was nothing new to her, but this was a deeper level of humiliation and dread. She walked down

the long dirt road with her brothers to catch the school bus into town. It was the beginning of a long and brutal school career filled with cruel mockery and abuse.