

SUNDAYS WITH ETHEL

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Sunshine. Birds chirping.

The tall grass sways in the gentle breeze.

BAXTER, age 82, stands there, taking it all in. He wears shabby clothes, an old hat, three days growth of beard.

He limps forward across the field.

Finally he comes to a gravestone. He examines it.

BAXTER
Hello, my love.

He takes a deep breath. A slight grin.

He attempts to sit down on the grass, but he struggles. When he finally gets his backside to the ground, he's nearly out of breath.

BAXTER
Lordy! That was probably a mistake. Not sure I can get back up. You may be stuck with me again.

He studies the grave with a tender expression.

BAXTER
Sorry I missed last week. I was just feeling... down. I'm better now though.

He looks all around. He spots a bird singing.

Reaching into his pocket, he removes a sandwich.

BAXTER
Yeah, tuna. Again. I know, I know. But you'll be glad to know I finally used the oven last week. I made some eggs. Didn't burn the house down or anything!

He takes a bite of the sandwich.

BAXTER
Hmm... a bit dry. What I wouldn't give for some of your sweet tea about now.

He gazes at the sky, contemplating.

BAXTER
Garden's not looking so good. You
were always better at keeping it
up. You were always better at...
everything.

He eyes the grave, becoming emotional.

BAXTER
I miss you, Ethel. I miss you
something terrible.

He glances around as if lost.

BAXTER
What am I supposed to do now?

Having lost his appetite, he puts the sandwich away. He
sniffles, trying to regain his composure.

BAXTER
Claire called yesterday. She's
doing good. Don't see her much.
She's busy with... things. She
says Anna has a boyfriend. Can you
believe that?! He's in a rock
band. Has long hair.

He considers. Scratches his head.

BAXTER
I wish I had long hair.

He stares off for a moment.

BAXTER
You know something? I still can't
find my harmonica. I know I was
never much good at playing it,
but... Do you remember where I put
it?

He stares at the grave. Silence. He nods his head sadly.

FOOTSTEPS. Baxter glances behind him and notices an elderly
but spry woman approaching. Her name is NELLIE.

Nellie, dressed nicely, holds beautiful fresh-cut flowers.
She strides past Baxter, who looks up at her, surprised.

BAXTER
Hello.

She glances at him, seeming almost irritated, as she continues on. She pauses at a nearby grave.

Baxter watches her, curious.

Nellie stares down at the grave, none too pleased. She bends down and removes dead flowers, replacing them with new ones.

She organizes the flowers with great care. Then she rises and examines them.

BAXTER

Looks like we're neighbors. So to speak.

She ignores him, arranging the flowers a bit more.

BAXTER

Come here often?

She stands, studying the flowers with a stoic expression.

BAXTER

I'm Baxter. Haven't seen you here before. In fact, I rarely see anyone here. Except for that one groundhog who lives over there. I named him George.

She sighs, irritated.

NELLIE

It's usually so much quieter here.

Baxter gets the hint. He drops his head.

BAXTER

Sorry. Didn't mean to be blabber. I'm not used to being around people much anymore...

Nellie looks over at his wife's grave.

NELLIE

She might like some flowers, ya know.

Baxter eyes the grave as if having never thought of such a thing.

She removes the fresh flowers from her husband's grave, then walks over and places them on Ethel's grave, arranging them nicely.

Baxter observes, pleasantly surprised.

NELLIE
My husband didn't like flowers
anyway. He liked cigars. And his
dog. Those were the only two
things he liked.

She glances over at her husband's grave, shaking her head.

Baxter studies her as she returns to her husband's grave.

BAXTER
(blurting out)
I like your britches.

NELLIE
(sternly)
Don't you look at my britches!

Baxter looks away, embarrassed.

BAXTER
No, I meant... your whole outfit.
It's... nice.

He drops his head, flustered. A long awkward silence.

NELLIE
What was she like?

Baxter notices Nellie regarding his wife's grave. He considers, reminiscing with fondness.

BAXTER
Kind. Gentle. Pretty. Funny.
Patient. Better than I deserved.

NELLIE
Evidently.

Baxter chuckles. Feeling a bit better, he removes the sandwich from his pocket and takes another bite.

BAXTER
Say, did you hear the one about the
lady and the giraffe and the hula
hoop?

Nellie gives him a look.

BAXTER

Well, this lady shows up and sees a giraffe with a hula hoop around his neck. And the lady says, "Hey, how did you..."

He pauses, trying to remember.

BAXTER

No, wait. The giraffe shows up and sees the lady with the hula hoop and he says, "Hey, why..."

He pauses again.

BAXTER

No, that's not... I can't remember how it ends, but it's real funny!

NELLIE

I'm sure.

Baxter nervously tries to think of something else to say.

BAXTER

Wanna play frisbee?

NELLIE

(baffled)

You brought a frisbee?

BAXTER

No. But I can bring one. Next time.

She sighs, irritated. Baxter berates himself.

Nellie admires the scenery.

NELLIE

I like the trees here.

Baxter notices them.

BAXTER

Yeah. I like trees, too! I have some at home. And some shrubs!

Another awkward silence.

Feeling a bit foolish, Baxter gazes at his wife's grave.

BAXTER

I miss her. The house... is so empty. No laughing. No singing. No footsteps. She had the daintiest little footsteps. You could always tell it was her. There was no mistaken 'em.

He grins. Nellie studies him.

BAXTER

I feel better when I'm here with her. I mean, I know she's not really here, but... at least there's the birds. The trees. George. It's nice. It... does me good.

Nellie finally softens a bit, as if she can relate.

NELLIE

Yeah.

When he glances over at Nellie, he catches her staring at him. She quickly looks away. She checks her watch.

NELLIE

I have to go.

She examines him.

NELLIE

Will you be able to get up from there?

BAXTER

Who knows. It'll be an adventure. I need some adventure in my life.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a bag of candy corn.

BAXTER

If not, I have candy. I'll survive. For a while.

Not sure what to make of him, Nellie turns and starts off.

BAXTER

Nice meeting you. I'm here every Sunday. 2 p.m. sharp!

Showing no reaction, Nellie continues on.

Baxter shrugs, again feeling a bit foolish. He stares back down at the grave. He sighs.

NELLIE (O.S.)

Nellie.

Baxter glances back.

Nellie, having paused, now eyes Baxter with a kinder expression.

NELLIE

I'm Nellie.

Baxter nods, pleased.

BAXTER

Nellie.

A slight hint of a grin from Nellie. Then she turns and departs.

Baxter takes a deep breath, as if exhausted from the whole experience. He sheepishly looks down at his wife's grave.

BAXTER

What? You're the one who said you didn't want me to be alone!

He shrugs.

BAXTER

And this is the only place I ever go. Here and the doctor. It's slim pickings.

He considers.

BAXTER

Of course she ain't as pretty as you, but... she seemed nice. A bit feisty, maybe.

Putting his sandwich away, he gazes at his wife's grave.

BAXTER

The flowers suit you.

He has a thought.

BAXTER

Say, Ethel: How would you like if I brought you flowers every Sunday?

He mulls it over. He removes his hat, running his hand through his thinning hair.

BAXTER
Ya know, maybe I could use a
haircut. What do you think?

He regards her grave as if listening.

BAXTER
Well, first things first: I gotta
get up from here.

He struggles to stand, finally getting to his feet, nearly out of breath.

He contemplates something.

BAXTER
I don't even know how to play
frisbee.

He chuckles. Finally he looks down at his wife's grave, a warm grin spreading over his face.

BAXTER
Goodbye, my love. Until next time.
See you in my dreams.

A bird SINGS a brilliant song. Baxter smiles.

Then he turns and hobbles away under the midday sun, proceeding across the field.

BAXTER
(muttering to himself)
Maybe it's the girl who has the
hula hoop and she sees the giraffe.
And then they... no, wait...

He tries to remember, shaking his head.

FADE OUT.

THE END