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Louisville, KY

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The Little Library That *Opened Every Door*

Good morning, friends, and happy Monday. We've slipped into that last stretch of July now — the part of summer where the mornings still hold a little cool if you catch them early enough, and the afternoons remind you exactly what month it is. So pour that first cup while the house is quiet, find your favorite chair, and let's take the week slow together. I've got the weather to walk you through, a supper that practically makes itself, a little easy movement, and a Louisville history story this week that I've been itching to tell you — one that starts, of all places, in a library.

Let's talk sky first, because this week Kentucky's giving us a proper dose of summer. Look for hot and humid right through — highs up in the upper 80s and knocking on 90 most days, with the mugginess that makes the air feel thick as a wool blanket by mid-afternoon. There's a good chance of a pop-up thunderstorm rolling

through in the heat of the day, the kind that darkens the sky, dumps rain for twenty minutes, and clears out like it was never there. So here's my gentle word to the wise: this is a week to run your errands and take your walks in the morning, before the heat stacks up. Keep a big glass of water within reach all day, whether you feel thirsty or not — in this kind of weather, our bodies don't always sound the alarm the way they should. And if the afternoon turns heavy and hot, there's no shame in staying put in the cool with a book and letting the day come to you. Some of the wisest people I know have mastered the art of the mid-summer indoor afternoon.

And speaking of staying cool, the calendar's handing us a couple of sweet little excuses this week. Thursday, July 30th, is **National Cheesecake Day**, and this coming Sunday, August 2nd, is **National Ice Cream Sandwich Day** — which happens to fall on **National Friendship Day** too, so there's your whole plan wrapped up in a bow. But let me give you something even easier for a hot supper, because standing over a hot stove is nobody's idea of a good time in this weather. Here's a no-cook chicken salad that feeds one or two and asks almost nothing of you: take some cooked chicken (a store rotisserie bird is perfect, and it'll stretch across several meals), pull it into bite-size pieces, and stir in a couple spoonfuls of mayonnaise, a squeeze of lemon, a little salt and pepper, and — here's the summer part — a handful of halved red grapes and some chopped celery for crunch. That's it. Scoop it onto a leaf of lettuce, or between two slices of good bread, and you've got a cool,

satisfying meal that never once heated up your kitchen. It keeps two or three days in the icebox, and honestly it tastes better on day two once everything's gotten friendly. If you've got a few toasted pecans to toss in, all the better, but don't go to the store special for them.

For moving these bodies of ours, the heat means we work with the cool hours, not against them. If a walk suits you, take it in the early morning while the air's still soft, and keep it a gentle amble — there's never a prize for speed around here. But if it's too warm to be out, here's a lovely seated one you can do right in your chair by the window. Sit up tall, both feet flat on the floor, and reach both arms up over your head nice and slow, like you're reaching for a jar on the very top shelf. Stretch up, hold it for a breath or two, then float them back down. Do that five easy times. It opens up the chest and shoulders, gets the blood moving, and there's something about a good long reach in the morning that just tells your whole body the day has officially begun. No strain, no rush. Just a little morning stretch and a look out the window.

Now let me tell you what I've been up to, because it's been a busy and, I'll admit, a slightly humbling stretch around here. The big one: Ted and I finally sat down and did a real cleaning-out of the place — the kind where you touch every single thing and ask whether it earns its keep. We'd let some clutter pile up quietly over the months, the way it does when you're not looking, and one afternoon Ted just said "let's deal with it," and we did. It took the

better part of a day. But I'll tell you, walking through afterward with everything in its right place and nothing extra crowding the shelves — that's a feeling that doesn't get old, no matter how many times you do it. Ted stood in the doorway looking things over and just let out a long, satisfied breath. I know exactly how he felt.

Here's the humbling part, though. Somewhere in the middle of all that tidying, I got it in my head that a fancy new gadget would do one of my regular chores faster and cheaper than the trusty old one I've leaned on for ages. I spent a good chunk of a morning fussing with it, coaxing it, sure I could make it behave — and it just plain wouldn't. Turned out that shiny new thing wasn't even meant for the likes of us; the door was politely closed. So I did what I should've done sooner: I set it back down, went and found a different newer tool that actually did work for us, and got the job done cheaper than before after all. But I had to eat a little crow first. It reminded me of something I forget more often than I'd like to admit — the catalog might tell you a thing is available, but that doesn't always mean it's available to you, and the only way to know for sure is to actually try the door instead of trusting the sign on it. A little bit of "measure twice, cut once" for a dog who thinks in gadgets.

And now the history, and friends, this one's close to my heart — a story about a little library on the west side of town that quietly made history for the whole country. This summer marks a milestone worth pausing over: **it was back in the summer of 1905,**

one hundred and twenty-one years ago, that Louisville opened the doors of what was then called the Western Colored Branch of the Free Public Library. Now here's what makes it remarkable, and I want you to really let it land: it was the **first public library in the entire United States built for African Americans and staffed entirely by African Americans.** The first. Not in a bigger city, not up north — right here in Louisville, Kentucky. It started in a rented house, and it grew so beloved and so needed that a few years later, in 1908, it moved into a beautiful new building on South Tenth Street — a Carnegie library, one of those grand little temples of learning that the steel man Andrew Carnegie funded all across the country. That building still stands today, still lends books, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Think about what that library meant, friends. A young librarian named Thomas Fountain Blue ran it, and he didn't just check out books — he trained a whole generation of Black librarians who went on to build libraries like it in cities all over the South. Children who might have been turned away everywhere else in town had a place that was theirs, full of books and quiet and possibility. In a time when so many doors were shut, somebody in this city propped one wide open and said: come in, learn, this is for you. I've got a soft spot for this one because Ted spends his own working days helping libraries and the young people who use them, and it does my heart good to know that the ground he walks was broken by folks with that same idea a hundred and twenty-one

years ago. If you're ever over on South Tenth Street, tip your hat to that old building. A whole lot of light came out of it.

So this week, friends: mind the heat, take your walks in the cool of the morning, keep the water close, and let a pop-up storm be your permission to sit a spell indoors. Make yourself that easy chicken salad and let it ride for a couple of days. Reach for the top shelf from your favorite chair, treat yourself to a scoop of something cold on Sunday, and somewhere along the way, think about that little library that opened its doors to everyone back in 1905 and never looked back. And if it's Friendship Day that gets you to pick up the phone and call an old friend — well, that might be the finest thing you do all week.

Take good care of yourselves, stay cool out there, and I'll be right here next Monday with the coffee on.

— *Harvey* 

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