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Mrs. Eugene Clarence

Ana E. West

Spring Lake High School, 206130@springlakestudents.org

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Spring Lake High School

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Mrs. Eugene Clarence

One day, Mrs. Eugene Clarence awoke from bad dreams to find that her heart was missing. She stretched her arms, and stopped, and searched around to find that - yes, it was gone. The spot that had contained her heart just last night was now curiously empty. It was peculiar, as she hadn't recalled putting her heart anywhere in particular. And still - she checked under the bed posts and under her pillow and everywhere she could think - her heart was gone.

She searched for a servant in her bedroom, to help her, but could not find one. She took steps from her bed and made her way towards the washroom, all the while thinking of her missing heart. She did not find a servant near the washroom, so she checked the wash basin and the medicine's cabinet by herself, and she did not find her heart. She attempted to lace the day's dress and found it to be quite impossible. She stayed in her silk nightgown with the white lace and the pink trim.

Mrs. Eugene Clarence made her way from the washroom through the grand white halls of the Clarence estate to find her husband, who was smoking a rich man's cigar in the sitting room armchair. She looked at his black hair and his sharp, stubbled chin, and she noticed that her husband's armchair was riddled with very noticeable holes, where she could observe the armchair stuffing spilling out. "My heart is missing," she informed him. When he heard her, he contorted his face and spat. "I suppose you won't need breakfast now," he said. It was a strange thing to say, but when Mrs. Eugene Clarence floated through the white marble passages to the kitchen she began her search again. Mrs. Eugene Clarence found herself with no servants anywhere, no food for breakfast, and no heart.

In that moment, Mrs. Eugene Clarence's eyes wanted to mist up. She wanted to weep, but with her heart missing, found that she simply could not, which made her feel hollow. She decided that this sitting around simply could not do. Instead, she went to search for her husband's coat. She did not own a coat, because her husband did not approve of such things.

She pulled the coat around her and paused briefly in the doorway. Her husband did not like it when she left the house. He disliked it so much that he never permitted it. Mrs. Eugene Clarence imagined her husband would be upset with her, but she knew today was...strange. *My heart is missing*, she thought. She simply had to go out this time. So, without letting her husband hear, she quietly pulled the door shut and stepped out into the cold outside.

Mr. Eugene Clarence, when he had married his young bride, had whispered low in her ear, promising carriages and huge chestnut horses; but, she could not find horses, nor could she find a servant to help her. Mrs. Eugene Clarence, cheeks already pink with cold, began the journey into town on foot.

The road outside the house Mr. Eugene Clarence had moved her to was unfamiliar, and she crossed it with caution. She traveled long, winding stretches of road, and her feet began to bleed. She passed an open schoolyard filled with boys. One by one, they began to notice that she was passing by, and she heard her name called in the wind. Evidently, these boys knew her. They whispered among themselves. *What is she doing?*

“My heart is missing,” she called out to the boys. But they did not care. They began to call after her, saying crude, crass things that confused her. She pulled her husband’s coat around her and hurried away.

She continued her walk. Down the hill, over the dirt path, into town. Mrs. Eugene Clarence felt her stomach turn as she entered the town. She realized, dimly, she had known the way into town before, and it made her sick to think about. Her husband did not like her leaving the house, she remembered. But she had come all this way. She could not turn back now.

The town reminded her of old things. There were red brick buildings and brown brick buildings and white buildings, each one of them old and regal in its own quiet way. The townspeople who milled about looked like proper men and women should: men had long coats and firmly mounted collars, women dressed themselves in large skirts of beautiful colors, holding on to each other’s arms as they walked. They dressed so beautifully - they were all so beautiful, and Mrs. Eugene Clarence wanted to take the time to contemplate it.

While she paused to look, Mrs. Eugene Clarence noted that all the men and women had stopped their goings-on to stare at her.

This made her feel strange, but only for so long, as she quickly experienced something stranger. A dilapidated Toyota, led by two great horses, pulled up against the curb, as close to where she was standing as could be. She watched with a vague sense of shock as the man inside took the time to look at her and roll down his window.

He had a handsome face - black hair and a sharp, stubbled chin - and the sight of it made her throat constrict, because she remembered it from her old life. Even without her heart, she could remember him. When he called her name, in a voice filled with concern, he did not call her Mrs. Eugene Clarence. He called her by her old name, and when he did, she felt her brain slow, and then stop.

And then she was gone. She could not think of the boy who had been inside the car - *carriage*, she told herself. *Carriage, carriage, carriage*. Her feet took her past one of the red brick buildings, and then one of the brown brick buildings, and into the white building; the one that she had not been in for years.

Mrs. Eugene Clarence was surprised that she could enter her old church while her heart was missing. As it was, the church had not changed at all in fifteen years, but it was Mrs. Eugene Clarence who had. With God, she felt too alone, so she searched for a servant of the Lord.

This time she found one. The reverend she had once known was in his office, seemingly staring at the sky when Mrs. Eugene Clarence knocked gently on his door. She did not have much to say in the way of preamble. “My heart is missing,” she informed him.

The sky-staring reverend tore his face away from the heavens. When he looked back at her, his face spelled revelation. “My God,” he started, staring at her intently. “It’s you. Again.”

“My heart is missing,” she repeated.

A change passed over the reverend quickly, his brows and shoulders knotting together. "You know, you have a lot of nerve. You're here unannounced. Who do you think you are? Where is your sense of repentance? People can see you come in, you know. Think of what you put this congregation through with that blasted -"

"My heart *is missing*," she insisted, but she felt herself growing quieter.

The reverend stopped where he was, his face going still. "Your heart is missing?" he asked. "Are you sure?"

Mrs. Eugene Clarence said nothing.

The reverend she had once known folded his hands on top of his mahogany desk. "What you're saying...is concerning. You've thought about getting your heart removed?"

"My heart is missing."

"But you're married now!" the reverend exclaimed. When she said nothing, he continued. "You have to understand that the church takes a strong moral opposition to that," the reverend explained patiently. "There are other options. I have pamphlets."

"My heart is missing," she told him, for the final time. He seemed to consider her again, and bowed his head towards his desk. He was silent for what seemed like a very long while.

"You made a mistake having your heart removed. Sit. You need to pray with me."

"Missing!" Mrs. Eugene Clarence exclaimed. She could make the reverend understand, she knew, about how she had woken up this morning and it had been gone. He had to believe she wouldn't tell a lie about her heart.

But the reverend continued. "God can forgive anything, but you need to be honest about repentance. You committed a sin, Mrs. Clarence, but sinning anew was not the right choice -"

Mrs. Eugene Clarence screamed. She screamed at the reverend, and he looked up in surprise, but before he could say another word to God, Mrs. Eugene Clarence was already ripping at the door, tearing out of the church with her hands, and her feet, and anything else she could find.

Once the entire church had been torn down, she stopped, breathless, on the street. She stopped to touch her feet - which were still bleeding - and then to run her hands over her clothes. She had ruined her husband's coat and torn her silk nightgown with the white lace and the pink trim, and she had still not found her heart. This would not do, she thought. There was only one place left to go to look for it.

There was a house she remembered on a hill, and her bleeding feet led her to it - out of the town, through a stretch of wood, and up the sloping land. It was not big - no manor, no castle - but it was not little. It was not painted white, or made of brick, but a soft brown - just like she had always remembered.

When she made her way up to the door and knocked, a woman answered, and Mrs. Eugene Clarence couldn't help but notice that her skin was starting to wrinkle, but her hair was still warm, and brown.

Mrs. Eugene Clarence wanted to tell her this, but before she could say anything the woman unleashed a barrage of noise.

“Your feet are bleeding. Why are your feet bleeding? What are you doing here? You know what your boyfriend thinks about that. Oh my God, is something wrong with him? Is something wrong? Sweetie, do I need to call the police?”

Mrs. Eugene Clarence said nothing, and the brown haired woman took her by the hand and yanked her inside.

“I can’t believe you. If nothing’s wrong, why haven’t you visited? I know that boyfriend of yours thinks about you leaving the house but you should have visited. You know what you put me through, don’t you? When I just sit around thinking about you day and night? Oh, what am I doing? Do you need something? Water. You need water.”

As the woman ran back and forth throughout the house, getting water, and tea, and gauze, she continued to talk, non stop.

“There, that’s better. Are you comfortable? You know, I hate what he’s done to you. You hardly act like your own person anymore. You were someone before you were his wife, you know. If you ask me - it’s 2014. That reverend be darned, you shouldn’t have married him. But that’s hardly the reason why you did it, isn’t it, now? You were always so in love with that man’s life. You called him a ‘modern Regency gentlemen’ - you were always so smart. You always wanted your life to be one of your Austen novels, or your Woolf short stories. Would have sacrificed anything just to be Mrs. Eugene Clarence. You were so in love with that, you probably pretend his trailer park is your estate these days,” she said as she tended to Mrs. Eugene Clarence’s feet.

She looked up. “I see he bought you that nightgown you’ve always wanted, though. Is that silk? With the white lace and the pink trim?”

“My heart is missing.” The girl told her mother.

Her mother froze. The daughter could have counted the seconds, had she been so inclined, where her mother stood still. Then, she began to weep.

Mrs. Eugene Clarence wanted to weep, too, and she wish she could have told that to her mother. Her mother sobbed for her - big, heaving, sobs - and went to stroke her daughter’s hair.

“You have to pray,” she whispered, low in her daughter’s ear. “You have to pray.”

When her mother left to cry within the privacy of her own bedroom, she decided to try her hand at praying. Mrs. Eugene Clarence crossed herself - without her heart - and clasped her hands - without her heart - and fell to her knees - without her heart - and began her prayer. But when Mrs. Eugene Clarence closed her eyes and tried to say ‘Dear God,’ what she saw was her heart.

The image had been seared against her eyelids. She saw her heart and she wished she hadn’t. She saw herself, not a year ago, finding her heart in her swollen teenage stomach. She saw herself showing her heart to her mother and her mother seething with rage. She had seen the teenage boy who had given her the heart get down on one knee, tell her *I could make you Mrs. Eugene Clarence*, and she had jumped at the chance, because all her life, she had wanted to be a noblewoman, she had wanted to be someone who wasn’t herself. She saw herself holding her heart, welcoming her heart into the world, her heart’s big, sweet, brown

eyes, and realizing she loved it when her heart beat. She had seen that boy take her coat and burn it, take her shoes, and burn those too. He had lied to her and told her that he hadn't burned her heart. Her heart was still beating at the hospital; she knew that.

Her heart was dead now; she knew that, too.

Some things in this world are too painful to bear. Some things are too painful to deal with. But Mrs. Eugene Clarence had gotten what she wanted - she was a noblewoman. So as Mrs. Eugene Clarence finally saw her servants arrive and comply as they led her back home, and as she saw her husband and let him rip at her skin, as she tore off her silk nightgown with the white lace and the pink trim that light, she found that she could feel only one thing; gratitude. Her heart was gone; and the only thing she could be now was grateful, for she could not cry if she had no heart.