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A GREEN DRESS AND A CHAINSAW

Kelsey Wood

One second we were all laughing together in the backyard at the three picnic tables. They lined up against each other to form a long dining table alongside the short, white fence. We slapped our knees at Uncle Irv's perverted jokes under the red gingham tablecloths. We had just finished eating and were still too full to get up. Unlike our usual family picnics, we each had real porcelain plates, (even if none of them really matched), and silverware for the special occasion. We all must have agreed that Grandpa's sad potato salad wasn't that good, since small mounds of it were pushed to the sides of everyone's plates. Grandpa Otis agreed with the joke, which made Aunt Mary howl the laugh that made everyone in turn laugh at her. One second everything was loud and obnoxious and normal. The next second, the rev of an engine forced us to stop all at once. Aunt Millie and Grandma Sawyer's mouths hung open, but I clenched mine closed. Every head and wide eye moved to the back door that led into the garage. My cousin Callie was holding a buzzing chainsaw and staring at her husband David with dead eyes.

It was cloudy. It had rained all weekend, and while the weatherman said that it wasn't supposed to rain that day, I think it did in the morning before we got up to watch the news report. The ground was muddy with random patches of wet green grass. Callie and David didn't have the best yard, or the whitest fence, or the biggest house, for that matter. The yard was pretty big though, and very bare. There was only one tree in the yard and it was in the middle towards the back. Its branches hung over the fence into the next yard, but I don't think the neighbors minded the free shade every summer.

Callie was wearing her favorite dress. I knew that it was her favorite because she had told me. She wore it last Christmas when David gave it to her. It was the green one, the cocktail dress with a sweetheart neckline and a bow at the bottom of her open back. It was the same shade as the Jell-O mold cousin Kelly helped make with her mom, the one with the pineapple chunks in it.

David put his hands on his hips and sighed and yelled over the saw, "Now, Callie, let's go inside and talk about this." She lifted her arms so the saw was level with her face and stomped into the mud with her pretty, nude heels.

The mud was thicker than I thought it was. As she stomped through the yard, pools of it sucked the shoes right off her feet. Her toes mashed into the thinning grass and wet dirt. Brown splattered her dress with every step, but she didn't care. Her blonde hair was still pinned perfectly in place. At first it looked like she was going towards David, but she walked past without even looking at him. He didn't even flinch; he just looked down at the ground when she did. She stopped at the trunk of that one tree and looked up at it. The chainsaw weighed her arms straight down in front of her.

My mom took this opportunity to hit my dad on the shoulder, signaling him to do something. He waved a hand at her and continued watching Callie, the way he did when Mom interrupted him watching wrestling on TV. None of us could do anything but watch her. We knew she had a temper, she got it from Uncle Rick, but utilizing tools from the garage wasn't something she'd ever done before. My brother Dale turned his head to look at me, as if to ask me what happened. I didn't know. Nobody did, so I just shrugged. Only God knew at that point, and I was sure it went in one of his holy ears and right out the other. It couldn't have been that important.

"Callie, please!" David yelled over the saw after he turned around to watch her.

"We came back to this tree to eat the last pieces of our wedding cake after the reception. Don't you remember, David?"

David nodded in agreement as she turned to the tree and took a swing at it with the chainsaw. Sharp pieces of bark flew from the trunk and the light brown flesh on the inside showed through. Aunt Millie screamed and Uncle Rick put a hand over her mouth to shut her up. When there was a decent slice in the tree, Callie stopped and turned around again.

After a few heavy breaths she yelled, "You remember the swing that we hung up two summers ago, David? When we didn't have air conditioning in the house yet and we stayed in the shade all day? Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember!" he yelled back.

Again, she turned and sliced the tree a bit deeper. When she was finished, she looked at her husband.

"Do you remember when we were hanging up clothes on the clothing line a couple months ago and..."

"And the bird fell out of the tree and we took care of it. Yes, I know, Callie. I remember everything. What's your point?" David wasn't mad, he was practically begging at this point. He ran to her and stood in front of her like he wasn't scared.

"I remember everything. Why are you doing this?"

"How could you do that to me? I love this house, David, I love this house! I thought you did, too!" she cried. Tears started to well up in her eyes and roll down her cheeks.

"I do love this house, Callie, but..."

"But nothing! If you loved this house you wouldn't have decided to sell it! Especially not without telling me!" She turned and put the chainsaw to the tree. David looked around for a way to stop her, but he didn't try.

"Callie, stop it!"

"No!" she cried, shaking with the saw in hand. "Not until you get our house back!"

"It's too late for that now, Callie, it's already sold!"

Callie cried and pushed harder on the saw forcing the blades faster into the

tree. She sobbed loud and clear over the noise. In a minute the saw was almost to the other side. She turned the thing off and threw it on the ground away from her and David. Then she pushed and hit the tree over and over until it started to move.

“It’s gonna fall!” Uncle Irv called. My aunts and grandmas screamed as they got off the picnic tables and ran towards the garage.

My cousins and I ran after them and the men just stood up slowly to watch it fall. The tree fell away from us, but into the neighbor’s yard. It took down the whole back section of fence and splattered mud everywhere. Callie just stared at it, her fists at her sides and her breathing heavy. Tears were still falling down her face, mixing with the muddy spots on her foundation and blush. She still looked pretty though, and her hair was only a little messy now.

David walked over to her and opened his arms to hold her, but she pushed him away. He wrapped his arms around her and she pushed him away harder, this time screaming, “No!” She ran up the yard in her bare muddy feet, and through the back sliding door, shutting it behind her. David went after her. They probably dragged in mud all over their carpet.

My mom grabbed my arm and my brother Dale’s, too, and said we were going home. I didn’t really care. There wasn’t anything left to do since Callie and David ruined their own party. Dad hollered to us that he’d be at the car in a minute. I think the neighbors came over pointing fingers and demanding to know what happened. I pulled out of my mom’s grasp and watched her pull Dale behind her. I turned around one more time to look at the tree and saw Grandma Sawyer ask Aunt Millie something. They walked over to the side of the house and took down the bright banner that read *Happy 5th Anniversary*.

That’s when Dad grabbed my shoulder and led me away to the car. “Emma, don’t you ever act like your cousin Callie,” he said. I shook my head at him because I didn’t even know how to use a chainsaw.