

# **Wind Chime**

Short Story

## Wind Chime

The night they moved in, I could hear wind chimes as I lay in my bed trying to go to sleep. I don't think I'd ever heard wind chimes before. The next day I investigated the source of the sounds, following the tinkle as it permeated our neighborhood. The sound was coming from the house behind us where the new people were moving in. The wind was blowing hard from a hurricane that had slid up the Atlantic coast, ushering in the fall with cool air. A few of our neighbors were going over and introducing themselves to the new people. My friends Jimmy Motley and Sammy Dalton rolled up on their bikes. They both rode yellow Huffly Dragsters with banana seats. I had a Raleigh MX but it was green. It also had a banana seat. Jimmy always kept an army surplus hand grenade in his army jacket. It had been defused of course but Jimmy had put some silly putty inside it and attached a bobby pin to the handle to make it look real.

"I hear they're from Wisconsin or maybe Michigan, somewhere way up north where all the Yankees are at," Jimmy said.

"Canada," Sammy said.

"Canadians can't be Yankees," Jimmy quickly corrected.

A neighbor walked past. Jimmy shot a snot rocket out of his nose and asked where they were from.

"Wyoming," the neighbor said.

Jimmy sneered and shot another snot rocket out of the other side of his nose. Nobody seemed to know for sure where the new people were from. The only thing we were sure of is they looked different. The father was short and round and bald, with a grayish beard that came to

a triangular point midway down his chest. The mother was short as well, with dark hair that wasn't done in the usual way of the ladies in the neighborhood.

"I think she's a gypsy," Jimmy said.

"She could be from Czechoslovakia. I've seen Czechoslovakians on TV at the Olympics and that's what they look like. They look just like all other communists," Sammy said.

We saw a girl about our age and an older boy, her brother we figured. He looked like he was in high school. He was carrying an instrument case. The girl's face was round but pretty in a funny way. Her hair was frizzy and looked like it had been plugged into a socket. Jimmy and Sammy laughed at her.

"I'd maybe do her—with a bag over her head," Jimmy said.

"Two bags. Wonder what her name is?" Sammy asked.

Jimmy listened to the wind chime then laughed and punched Sammy.

"Wind Chime! What else could it be," he said.

They both laughed and took off on their bikes repeating "Wind Chime" over and over. I followed them. We spent the rest of the day riding our bikes up and down the street, jumping curbs and ramps, and checking out the new people and their house. It was definitely the weirdest-looking house in the neighborhood, not the typical suburban tract cookie-cutter home in our little suburban North Carolina town. It was flat with lots of rectangular window and there was a large porch in the front. It was built out of a combination of wood and brick. After a few days, the rumors began to swirl about the new people. Somebody said they were hippies. My father found out that they taught art at the local college. My mother had heard from her sister that they were potters. This caused my brother and sister to laugh. The only pot they'd ever heard of

was the marijuana kind of pot. I wasn't exactly sure what a hippie was except for the things I saw on the six o'clock news, people protesting the Vietnam war, colleges being set ablaze, marches, concerts. From my viewpoint, hippies looked like they might be kind of interesting. They were certainly different than the people in my neighborhood.

It was the first day of eighth grade and Mrs. Berry was calling the roll and there was an unusual name amongst the standard WASP names like Smith and Jones and McDaniel. I looked across the room and Wind Chime raised her hand to the name. Her first name was Michelle. I glanced quickly at her. She didn't paint her face with Maybelline makeup like the other girls were doing in eighth grade and her clothes looked different. It didn't look like she'd gone out and bought new school clothes like all the other girls. She wore glasses like I'd seen on John Lennon, round and they changed to a funny color in the sunlight. Mrs. Berry wasted no time in giving us an assignment the first day. It was a group assignment. As she went down the roll and matched partners, a funny feeling hit me. I somehow knew I was going to be Wind Chime's partner. Sure enough, Mrs. Berry paired our last names for an oral report.

After class, I was alone at my locker. Michelle walked up to me and introduced herself. We talked briefly about the project then she dropped a bomb.

"You can come over to my house since you live right behind me," she said.

I swallowed hard, processing the words, and looking around to see if Jimmy and Sammy were around..

"Your house?"

"Sure, we'll knock it right out. Piece of cake. Bye," she said

She vanished into the sea of middle-schoolers. Jimmy and Sammy immediately approached me as if they'd been hiding around a corner. They weren't big hits with girls even though Jimmy claimed he'd had sex with five girls at our school. He constantly told us about his sexual ritual which had something to do with smoking a cigarette afterwards, but he claimed he had switched to smoking Swisher Sweets when he was finished because that showed you were a real man. Swisher Sweets were tiny cigars and he always had one tucked in a pocket somewhere just in case he needed it. He also kept a condom in his wallet just in case a situation like that presented itself. Sammy claimed only one conquest, but the girl had moved off to Atlanta so there was no way to verify his story. He hadn't employed Swisher Sweets afterwards for his conquest but they were certainly on his list for the next time around.

“What were you and Wind Chime talking about?” Jimmy asked.

“We're doing this project together. I have to go over to her house.”

“Her *house*?”

Jimmy and Sammy looked at each other.

“What's this project on? Blowjob.”

“Nothing,” I said.

I didn't want to tell them the truth. The project was on civil rights and Gandhi. Jimmy started into a song.

*Dipshit and Wind Chime sittin' in a tree,*

*F--U--C--K--I--N--G,*

*First comes love, then comes marriage,  
Then comes Dipshit pushing a baby carriage.*

They both laughed. The bell rang and they headed off. I could hear them laughing and saying “Wind Chime” over and over.

The weekend after the first week of school, Jimmy’s parents were out of town so me and Sammy arranged it so we could stay over at Jimmy’s house. We lied to our parents, of course. We performed our usual juvenile delinquent acts during the long weekend: staying up all night, stealing chocolate milk and orange juice and newspapers off porches. We swiped all the Krispy Kreme donut deliveries for three neighborhoods around, We ate so many Krispy Kremes that weekend that I haven’t been able to eat a donut since. We even made our old standby, a “flying saucer” which was made from a dry cleaning bag with cotton balls soaked in kerosene fashioned at the bottom. It hovered over the neighborhood looking like an alien spaceship and when the kerosene began to burn out, dropped straight down onto a neighbor’s house. Sammy climbed up on the roof and put out the small blaze.

We’d run out of juvenile delinquent mischief and then Jimmy came up with an idea--burn a cross in Wind Chime’s front yard. I didn’t understand what he was talking about. Jimmy’s father worked for the railroad and he and his family had been transferred to our town. Jimmy said that people from the town he used to live in burned crosses in people’s house all the time, especially Yankees and Jews and people like Wind Chime. I didn’t know any Jews except for ones from the Bible, but then I remembered something from going to church.

“Wasn’t Jesus a Jew?” I asked.

Jimmy shook his head no.

“Jesus was a Christian,” he said. “Why do you think they call him *Christ*?”

“But before that, wasn’t he a Jew?” I asked.

“That’s impossible and besides, you’ll go to hell for talking like that,” he said.

“Yeah, it’s called blasphemmy,” Sammy added.

“What did Michelle ever do to us?” I asked.

“Her name’s Wind Chime,” Jimmy snapped.

As we rode past her house on our bikes, Jimmy slammed on his rear brakes. We all skidded to a sideways stop. He pointed to her yard like it was a military maneuver.

“We’ll get the kerosene from my house. Then we’ll get some wood from that house they’re building down the street and make the cross. Then we’ll rendezvous here and light it on fire at midnight.”

Sammy looked at me. He didn’t seem to sure about the cross-burning plan either.

“I don’t want to do it,” I finally said.

“What! Are you in love with Wind Chime?”

I looked at Sammy. He shrugged but I could tell he was going to do whatever Jimmy put him up to..

That night we went down to the construction site and Jimmy and Sammy found a couple of 1 x 4 pieces of pine. Jimmy found a hammer and some nails and quickly fashioned the cross. It was about three feet high. Sammy found a hand saw and he and Jimmy cut the end of the cross so that it made a point.

“Okay, we made it, you have to stick it in the ground,” Jimmy said to me.

“No,” I said.

“Okay, then, you have to light it.”

I shook my head no again.

“I think he’s turning into a pussy,” Jimmy said. “You can be lookout then.”

It was just after midnight and we snuck down the street to Michelle’s house, hiding behind cars as we inched along on our maneuver. Jimmy gave the command and Sammy ran into the yard and tried to stick the cross in the ground, but the ground was too hard. He whispered to us for help.

“Go help him,” Jimmy said to me.

I shook my head.

“Pussy.”



Jimmy ran over and tried to help him shove the cross down into the hardpan. They struggled until they finally got the cross to stick up, and then it slipped sideways so that it was lopsided and leaning over, looking like it might fall any second. The wind wasn't helping. The chimes on Michelle's house were really going to town but in a strange way, they were giving us cover, at least for all the noise we were making. Jimmy tried to light a match. It was too windy for it to stay lit for more than a second. Sammy yelled for him to try to light his Swisher Sweet and he pulled one out of his pocket and tried to light that. He burned his hand and yelled "Shit!" and then the porch light at Michelle's house came on and we all froze as a man's voice called out "Hello" from the house. Then there was the voice of a woman. I could hear them talking as they looked out at us. I jumped on my Raleigh MX bike and scrambled away, but my tire was turned the wrong way and I fell over the side and tumbled on the hard pavement. I skinned my knee pretty bad, but jumped back on the bike and rode away as fast as I could. As I rode my bike back toward Jimmy's house, all I could think about was that I thought I saw Michelle in the window.

That Monday at school Jimmy was bragging about what we'd done. In class, I avoided eye contact with Michelle. Whenever she was around, I tried to walk normally but my leg was really hurting. At the end of the school day, I was standing at my locker shoving my books inside when Michelle came up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder. I spun around.

"What's wrong with your leg?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said.

"I was wondering if you'd like to come over to my house and finish our project."

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

I didn’t have an answer as I looked in her eyes. They were the color of the ocean on a stormy day--green and gray with some blue mixed in. I couldn’t say no.

“Okay,” I said.

After school, Jimmy and Sammy were still bragging about what they did. I saw them and turned to go the other way but they flanked me.

“I saw you talking to Wind Chime at your locker,” Jimmy said.

“So? We’re in class together.”

“You in love with her? She’s a communist, you know,” he said.

“I hear her mother has marijuana parties and orgies,” Sammy said.

“I’ve got to go.”

“Where you going?”

I kept walking and headed home. I kept looking back as I made my way to my house. I knew they were following me. I finally ducked into the woods and walked along the creek that ran behind my house. It was another windy day. The creek was full of leaves and tree branches that the wind had blown down. When I got home, I looked out to make sure they weren’t following me then snuck out the back door and headed to Michelle’s house. The chimes were

really blowing as I made my way through the backyards. I knocked on her back door. Her mother came to the door.

“Hello, you must be Michelle’s friend,” she said.

I nodded and entered the house. Inside, it smelled funny, a lot different than our house. The closest smell I knew was Glade sandalwood air freshener which my mother used in the guest bathroom. There weren’t the usual pictures from Sears or J.C. Penney’s on the walls like our house and the houses of most of my friends. The living rooms in both Jimmy and Sammy’s house had almost identical pictures of a man sitting on the bank of a lazy mountain stream with a fishing rod and a piece of straw in his mouth. The only difference was the water in the painting in Jimmy’s house was green and the water in the painting in Sammy’s house was blue. There were lots of ceramic bowls and curtains made of bamboo separating the rooms of Michelle’s house. She suddenly appeared from one of the bamboo curtains, spreading the bamboo like she was swan diving into a swimming pool.

“Hey,” she said.

I nodded and smiled.

“Let’s go to my room,” she said.

I looked at her a long moment then looked at her mother who was busy with dinner.

“Come on,” she said.

We went to down the stairs to her room in the basement. Her brother was practicing the clarinet on the couch and when he saw us he made a funny grunt and got up and went to another part of the house. Then she pointed to her room.

“Come on.”

I followed her inside. It was the first girl’s room I’d ever been in. It wasn’t exactly what I had imagined but it smelled nice--like some kind of flowers that I didn’t know the name of. I glanced out the window. Jimmy and Sammy flew past on their bikes and I could see them circling back. Somehow they knew I was at Michelle’s.

“What are you lookin at?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

“I’ve seen you with those two guys. Are you all best friends?”

I shrugged.

“They look sort of immature,” she said.

“I dunno.”

I shrugged again.

Pretty soon we had started on our project. She had a set of World Book Encyclopedias in her room and she pulled down the G-H volume.

“You start here and I’ll see what our textbook says,” she said.

I opened the World Book to the article on Gandhi. It smelled just like everything in her house. I began to read and then take notes. I hadn't written many notes about Gandhi when I felt something on my neck.

"You ever read this?"

I spun around and looked in her hand. She was holding a copy of *The Kama Sutra*. I stared at it a moment with its image of a man and woman in coitus on the cover.

"Uh, sure," I said, lying.

"It was written by Vātsyāyana," she said.

"Oh, sure. Of course," I said, going along.

I had no clue what it was. She flipped the book open to a page where a man and woman were in an embrace and their genitals were at impossible angles.

"I'd like to try that someday," she said.

I looked at the picture and my ears began to tingle. I quickly went back to the relative safety of World Book Encyclopedia and the article on Gandhi. After a minute, I felt something on my neck again. As I turned around, I saw that she was dangling a Frank Zappa record album between her fingers.

"You like Zappa?"

I glanced at the album and nodded my head quickly. The album was titled *Hot Rats* and showed a photo of Frank Zappa looking like some sort of a maniac as he crawled out of a

swimming pool. It was all done up in a psychedelic shade of pink that looked like the color of Pepto Bismol to me. I'd never heard of Frank Zappa.

"Sure," I said.

"It's my brother's favorite album. I snuck it out of his room so we have to play it very low."

"Okay," I said.

She cued up the album and the opening notes of "Willy the Pimp" began. It was a bluesy, sad sounding song with crazy guitar riffs, light years away from the usual pop radio I was used to like *Three Dog Night* and *The Carpenters*.

The song continued until it got to the part where the singer starts making funny grunting noises while an electric violin scratches wildly in the background. A funny look came over her face, like the music was doing something to her. She moved forward and quickly kissed me. I grabbed her and the momentum made us tumble onto her bed. She quickly sat up and put her hands on the bottom of her blouse.

"You wanna see?"

"See what?" I asked.

She stood up then took off her blouse off and began to undo her bra. Suddenly her breasts were staring at me like two headlights on a car. Her nipples were large, the size of silver dollars.

They seemed different than the ones I'd seen in the magazines that Jimmy kept under his bed at his house.

"You wanna touch them?"

She moved closer and took my hand.

"It's okay," she giggled.

I touched her right nipple. It was hard and had goose pimply flesh around it.

"Your hands are cold."

She stood up straight then shoved the top button of her Levi's jeans toward me.

"Wanna feel?"

"What?"

She smiled at me. There was a long silence as the wind chimes did their job in the gusty breeze outside. It seemed like they chimed and tinkled forever as if they were sprinkling some sort of magic throughout her room. Then she took my hand and put it at the top of her Levi's then undid the top button.

"It's okay," she said.

I closed my eyes and swallowed hard and then she guided my hand slowly down. We sat there for what seemed like an eternity, and then was a noise at the window and a rock flew threw, breaking the pane. The rock hit her brother's Frank Zappa *Hot Rats* record, scratching the

needle across the vinyl and ended up sitting on top of the World Book Encyclopedia. We ran over to the window and we both got a glimpse of Jimmy and Sammy scurrying away on their Huffly Dragsters as fast as they could pump the pedals. She didn't say anything as she got her clothes situated and then went over to the record player and took the Zappa album off and gently put it back into its sleeve.

"I hope my brother doesn't find out."

There was a knock at the door. Michelle's parents were standing there.

"What happened?" her mother asked.

"Nothing. We were just listening to some music," Michelle said.

Her parents looked at the broken window then at me.

Michelle's father took me into their living room. He sat me on a wooden chair that looked like it wasn't even sanded or varnished. It looked uncomfortable but actually felt nice to sit in. All the furniture in the living room looked like it was made out of the same strange wood and that it would be uncomfortable to sit in. There was a round chair with a cushion that hung from the ceiling. He stared at me until I thought I would pass out.

"We know it was you with those other boys the other night."

He pulled out the cross from behind another chair. It reeked of kerosene. My face went crimson.

"Do you know what that cross means?"



I shook my head slowly. I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes. My tongue was thick as mud. I tried to speak but nothing came out. I finally shrugged.

“I’ll give you two choices. Bring those two boys over here and let me talk to them, or I’ll talk to all of your parents.”

I looked around the room. I could see Michelle in the kitchen sitting down to dinner with her brother. They didn’t seem to be paying any attention to me. I stood up and nodded and made my way out the back door of the house. Michelle didn’t seem to care or bother to say goodbye. When I got outside, the chilly air cooled my still-burning ears as I ran home. Just as I got to my front yard, Jimmy and Sammy intercepted me on their bikes.

“Where you been?” Jimmy asked.

“He’s been over at Wind Chime’s, haven’t you?” Sammy said.

“Get any pussy?” Jimmy said.

“We’re in trouble,” I said.

“What, you get her pregnant already? I told you to always carry a rubber in your wallet,” Jimmy said.

He grabbed his wallet and in a split second was showing me the round ring where a condom had made its imprint.

“No, her father saw us.”

“You mean her father saw you two screwing!”

Both of them let out a yell.

“No, us. The three of us!”

“Saw us what?” Jimmy asked.

“He saw us put the cross in their front yard. He knows we did it.”

They both laughed, but it was an uneasy laugh.

“We have to go see him or he’ll tell our parents.”

Their faces quickly turned to long frowns. They thought a moment.

“He’s a communist. He’s just trying to trick us. That’s how communism works,” Jimmy said.

“Yeah, who knows, he might try and grab our dicks. He’s probably a queer too. My sister said Wind Chime’s brother is a queer. He plays the skin flute.”

He made a funny blowing motion with his hand and mouth.

“We’re in big trouble,” I said.

I started running for my front door but they tackled me and threw me down on the ground.

“It’s not right!” I said.

‘What’s not right?’

“That cross. Do you know what it means?”

“Yeah, it means we hate people like Wind Chime and her family,” Jimmy said.

“My father said they were Carpetbaggers. They’re just here to take our stuff and then they’re going back to where they came from. We have to protect what’s ours,” Sammy said.

They both stared at me. I didn’t have anything else to say to them.

“I think you’re turning into a queer,” Sammy said.

“Yeah, a queer faggot, just like Wind Chime’s brother,” Jimmy said.

He pulled the fake hand grenade out of his army jacket, yanked the pin with his teeth and then tossed it at me. Then he shot a snot rocket out of his nose at me and they both got on their yellow Huffy Dragsters and sped off down the street. When I made it to my front door of my house, I took a deep breath and looked in the side window. My family was sitting down, eating dinner as usual. I could see my parents arguing as they always did, probably about something like a lamp or a table that my mother had bought that my father thought was too expensive. My brother and sister were having their own argument and kicking each other under the table. The wind was still blowing. I listened to the wind chimes from Michelle’s house, but for some reason they seemed closer. I turned and looked up and saw that there was a set of wind chimes hanging from our front porch. My mother had put them there. I watched them move back and forth in the breeze and then I put my finger to my face. It still had the fragrance of Michelle on it. I looked back inside my house and watched my family eating in the warm light. With Michelle’s scent

and the chimes dancing on the ledge above me and the blue shadows deepening in the fading light of the fall sky, I understood that I myself was perched on the edge of something, never to go back to the way things once had been, and that I would be restless until I found new people in new places to call my own.