

ABBY

My brother's wife Marilyn, thinks I should be lonely. I'm not. I've got my dog, my work, OK hobbies and Glen my golf buddy. I'm fine.

My sons have moved away. One son, Carl, that lives in California. He hopes to be an actor. He sells cars until the big event. His current wife, she is number three or four. She'd like to think I don't exist.

My other son, Steven, is the assistant to an assistant of a politician. He lives in D C. Wrong party as far as I'm concerned. We don't talk much anymore. Abby would say I'm being pig headed. Maybe?

Abby, my wife of 39 years, May God Bless Her Soul has been gone a while. Two years four months six days, with in an hour or two seven days, but who's counting?

Marilyn has friends. So, Here we go again. I see the sign for the Outback Steakhouse. All this traffic. I hate traffic. Why couldn't we have done this closer to home. I mean the farmers diner on main street in my home town is more my style.

Blink Blink Blink I pull the shift lever back into low. Me and my old pickup don't belong here. We are old, he and I. Small town.

I should have drove Abby's car, but I can't. It hasn't moved in quite a while. Maybe I'll take it in next week for an oil change. My stomach feels empty, not hungry simply empty.

I left Abby's letters spread out on the table. I read them over every time I go out like this. I guess I really don't want these things to work out.

A gap in the traffic. I start to let out the clutch and change my mind. I put my foot back onto the brake. A horn blows from behind me. A car sits there with it's left turn blinking. Someone wants to turn. I'm in the way. O K Buddy Next gap. I gun it hard and let go the clutch. Hope for the best. I made it. So did the car behind me. He took the parking place closest to the door. I found one in the third row.

Do I pull the key. Yea I guess, that's what they do in the big city. I'm not locking the doors though.

I enter the vestibule. The guy that pulled in behind me stands in line. Where's Stan. I'll just wait for him. I stand back looking at some of the posters. I've seen them before . I guess they don't ever change them.

It's a noisy place, seems like everybody is talking. I mean everybody. It's never this crowded at the farmers diner. I know a lot of the people there. Here they are all strangers. They do seem to hold a conversation some how. I don't know why we always meet here.

Well at least I came alone this time. I can leave that way, too. One time I rode with Stan and Marilyn and I forget Dianna Denise Dolorous I really can't remember. She was nice enough at first. Anyway it was a longer ride home.

"Jay, There you are. Marilyn thought she saw your old truck drive in." Stan had put his hand around my arm and was piling me inside. I was face to face with the clown that had honked at me and grabbed the better parking space. I had to snicker as I passed moving into the dining room.

"You know him?" Stan asked. I shook my head.

“I’ve seen him before.”

“We’re right over here.”

Marilyn was leaning over the table in conversation with a woman. My date I assumed. Marilyn looked nice. Her hair done up. Her hair its natural color. She was good at keeping the gray at bay. A dress, always a dress when she went out. I stood behind Stan until he pulled me up beside him.

“Heather Colmes.” The woman turned away from Marilyn and turned toward me. She also wore a dress, one of green and cream print. “This is Jay. My brother.”

“Hi” I put out my hand. She looked up at me. She was plentiful. Her dress was tight across her breasts. Why does a man always have to notice breasts first? She put out her hand. It was soft and full. Her hair was powdered over a light color. Her cheeks round and pink. Round tinted granny glasses. I couldn’t see her eyes. A smile that was rich and didn’t appear phony.

“Well Hello. I’ve heard so much about you, I think I know you already.” I reached up removing my cap. I wanted to scratch my head. Didn’t.

“I don’t think this is fair I don’t know you at all.” I said jokingly as I sat down beside her. She smiled. I didn’t know if she thought was I clever or trying to be cute? She turned toward Marilyn. She nodded her head. Did she wink. She turned back. I sat beside her. She put her right hand on my elbow. The other hand on my wrist. (Hue Boy) a toucher.

“Well.” Does she start every sentence with a ‘Well’ “That’s why we’re here.” She said. I ordered a Jack Daniels and coke. We talked about books we’d read, movies we’d seen. There was no talk about grandchildren neither from her or from me. She’d been to Europe. I’ve been to south east Asia. Of course that had been quite a while ago for me. Things were going in fine fashion. Best date yet.

I heard a laugh. In that crowded room with all that noise all those voices and above it all I heard a distinctive laugh. It sounded familiar I couldn’t quite place it at first. I turned my head as a group of young women, girls entered. One had a blonde head short bob cut. I could see her only from the back of her head. My heart stopped. Now when you’re young you think that is romantic thing. When you are over sixty and your heart stops, it could be serious. I turned back to Heather, but I couldn’t stop thinking about that laugh.

I looked around the room. I had to see that woman’s face. Heather got quiet. I tried to restart the conversation. Was I that obvious. Things had gotten awkward. We finished diner. I was about half way through my desert when I excused myself to go to the Joey’s room.

I was almost there when the door of the Shela’s opened and that girl stepped out. The blonde girl with the bob cut. She was looking down, not where she was going. I did a quick shuffling side step. Not quick enough. She looked up only in time for her to see who she was running into. I put my hands around her arms to keep her from falling. She looked up at me. She stared. I stared. That heart stopping thing again.

“Excuse me.” She said.

I was tongue tied. I wanted to say something clever, but nothing came out. “No” I said “Excuse me.” I stared.

“Take a picture.” She said “It will last longer.”

“No thanks.” I said as I pointed at my head. “I won’t forget.”

She turned quickly and hurried away. I watched her as if I’d watched her from behind

Abby

a hundred times and never tired of it. I stood there because for a moment I had forgotten why I was standing there, then I remembered and made my way to the Joey`s.

When I got back to the table Heather`s chair was empty. Stan was helping Marilyn from her chair. Marilyn looked at me. Her face pale nothing there except for her brown eyes.

“You Bastard.”

“What did I do?”

“You know very well what you did.”

She turned and marched toward the door. My mouth fell open. I understand that isn`t unusual me. It seems to happen more and more. Stan and I followed. I leaned toward Stan.

“What did I do.” I whispered. I think Marilyn heard me. I could tell by the way she moved her feet. Stan stopped. Marilyn continued.

“Marilyn said something to me that she thought you two were really getting along nicely.”

“And.”

“And every time you weren`t talking you were turning around and looking for that girl at that other table. It was ba a a ad.” He shook his head. slowly.

“Did you see her?”

“NO”

“She looked exactly like Skeeter Holmes.”

“Who?”

“Skeeter Holmes.” I emphasized.

“From high school? That screwy girl you dated. I swear you think you`ve seen her here you think you`ve seen her there.” His head nodded slightly down.

“Yea, That girl.” I leaned forward. I bounced with excitement. “Don`t you remember her.”

“Not as well as you I`m afraid. Is that the one you went nut`so over? I gotta go. As mad as Mar is, if she has to stand outside the car waiting for me to unlock the doors, I`m up a shit creek.”

I looked around the room. The blonde girl and her friends were nowhere to be seen. I scrunched up my face hoping no one would see me do it. “Skeeter” I said softly. I drew my head back and forth slowly. “What the hell was I thinking. Skeeter had been gone for a number of years. ”

I couldn`t take my mind off that blonde girl. It had started to rain. The wipers tapped out a phone number. Five one ... seven six ... five four ... seven one ... nine one. Where did I get that number? Five one ... seven six, It started over again.

I punched in the number into my phone, I hesitated and changed my mind. I put the phone back in my pocket. The wipers kept saying that number as they streaked across the windshield. An hour later I was home. Repete was glad to see me. We went into the house together.

Repete is my dog. My wife had a dog she called Pete. This dog reminds me so much of Pete I call him Repete. Repete made his way to his dish looking, then came back to me and looked up.

“Hungry?” He didn`t say anything. I went to the fridge and pull out one of his treats. He only gets a treat once a day and I had already given him one today, a gave him a second

one anyway.

I went over to the couch. Sat. I turned on the TV. I rolled up and down through the stations. Repete came over and sat on my lap. I stared at an old black and white.

I put Repete over to the side. I started to get up. Repete tried to get back on my lap. Walked over to the thermostat. 72 degrees. I guess that's all right. I sat back down. Stared blankly at the cowboys. My hand slowly stroked Repete's head.

I pulled my phone from my pocket. I pulled up Steven's number. It's late in D. C. He probably works tomorrow. I brought up Carl's number. He lives in California. Not so late there. I shake my head and put away my phone.

"Let's go to bed. What do you say, RP?" Repete looks up at me. "I don't know how you could miss her like you do. You never even knew her."

I laid in bed. Sleep doesn't always come easy. My stomach hurts. I wonder what they put in the food tonight. I went to the bathroom. I sat. That didn't do it. I opened the bottle of pink stuff. I filled the measuring cup to the top. The directions called for half a cup. What do they know. I slugged it down and went back to bed. The whole time Repete was at my feet.

In the morning, I made coffee. I always start my day with coffee. I let Repete out. I sipped my coffee. My stomach still hurt.

I made my way to my shop. An unfinished painting of Abby stood on the easel. Maybe I'll get the eyes right sometime today. I turned on my belt sander and polished a piece of wood. Where did I get that number? Why is it stuck in my head? Call them and find out. You call them. I didn't mean to hurt Heather's feelings. She seemed kinda nice. (But she looked just like Skeeter.) Heather, Skeeter or maybe some jackass that just wants to sell me something I don't need. Just call the number and find out.

It was lunchtime. If I hadn't looked at the clock I might never have realized it. I looked at the unfinished painting of Abby on my way out. At least without eyes she couldn't see how miserable I have become.

Just soup and a grilled cheese sandwich. I watched a Twilight Zone one time and this phone line fell onto a grave and the deceased call his wife. What if that phone number reaches Abby? Where ever she is. I could know if she is alright and that. That's stupid. A thing like that never going to happen. Never never never Only in the movies. Call the number Call it Call it.

"Is that what you think I should do?" I said as I looked down at Repete. Repete was at my feet again. "OK then."

"Hello, Is there a Skeeter there?" I don't know why I said that. It sorta slipped out.

"Sheeter Holmes speaking." I hung up the phone as fast as I could. I put the phone down on the table and stared at it as if it could and would bite me. I stared at it for hours maybe thirty seconds. It rang. I jumped up from my chair, stepped back tipping the chair over backwards. I watched it ring. Then a voice came on. It was Stan.

"You know that wife of mine, She is never going to give up. She called Heather. Do you believe it? Heather is willing to give you another chance. I don't think you deserve it but. Marilyn says if you screw up again I'm to slug you. Bang you hard enough in the ribs with my elbow to put you in the hospital."

"That's nice of her."

Abby

“Don’t blow it again or else.”

“I know.”

“Next week sometime. You’re not too busy are you?”

“You know better than that. The farmers diner in town this time?” He sighed.

“If you don’t like Out Back I’ll try for some place else.”

“There’s that Chinese halfway there.” I said quickly.

“Marilyn will pick a place and I’ll let you know.” I hung up. The phone rang again.

“Hello?” It was a woman’s voice.

“Hello?”

“Who is this?” Same voice.

“Who is this?” It seems we said at the same time.

“I asked first.” We also said at the same time.

“This isn’t funny.” We said simultaneously.

“Is this who I think it is?”

“I don’t know. Who do you think it is?” There was a pause on the other end of the line. I was afraid to speak again.

“Jay?” I couldn’t move. I slowly pulled the phone away from my ear. “Jay Jay Grant. Is that you?” I brought the phone back.

“Yea. It’s me.”

“Do you know who this is?”

“If you’re that girl from the restaurant.” I said slowly and quietly. “I know who you look like.”

“Yes. That is all you need to know for now. I want to see you.”

“I don’t know.”

“Please. You’ll never have to do anything you don’t want to do. I promise. I Pinkie promise.” Ouch there goes that heart thing again. Skeeter used to make me pinkie promise all the time. To her a pinkie promise meant if you backed out of the promise you’d have to sacrifice your little finger. She claimed she had six pinkie fingers in a jar in a drawer at house. I never saw them but then again I never backed out of a promise. She made me pinkie promise I wouldn’t tell anyone about the first time I slipped off her bra.

Skeeter disappeared the night the fair left town. I wanted to die. I joined the army.

I cut off ties with friends and family. I didn’t need them broken hearted when the inevitability happened. My friends in the army called me fearless. That wasn’t true. I simply didn’t care.

A girl wrote me a letter. Thanking me for saving her brothers life. Letters came in from all around the country. Thanking me but I was touched by a girl I didn’t know, a girl named Abby. I changed my mind. I did want to go home. I wanted to meet her. I wanted to live.

“You’re not busy are you?”

“No. I’m retired.”

“I want to see you. Is today OK?”

“Where?”

“Pick me up where I saw you last night.”

Abby

She slid in the truck. She slid all the way over and sat next to me. She sat there just like like Skeeter always did.

“Let’s just drive OK.” I wanted to sink my nose in to her sweet hair. Put my arm around her. Hold her breath. I wanted to never wake up.

“Can you stop somewhere?”

“Anywhere?”

“No “ she said “A quiet place. I want to tell you all about it but I don’t want you driving off the road and getting us both killed.” I stopped the truck. I turned it off. She turned to me pressing her lips to mine. I kissed back. We moved our lips around and a round in and out back and forth for a few minutes or maybe hours.

“You really are Skeeter aren’t you?”

“Yes. I thought you might not believe me any other way.” We locked lips again. I took her to my place.

“I got old. You didn’t.”

“I can explain all that. It’s a little hard to believe. Even for me. Here goes. I went back to the fair that night. Late. There was a man and he offered me a ride in a time machine. He said I could be gone for any amount of time I wanted, come back and no one would ever know I’d been gone. I jumped from there to here. I’ve been here quite a while. Once here I Bumped onto you. I didn’t know what to do. You’ve aged. Nicely I must say.”

“Thank you.”

“More handsome.”

“ Just keep it up and I’ll ask you to marry me.”

“Will you? I want that more than anything. I’ll go back. You won’t even know I was gone. I might remind you of what you said just now. Would you like me to push it a little?”

“I don’t care.”

“We will finish high school together. We’ll get married. We’ll spend our life time together.”

“Can’t you stay. I want to marry you, now.”

“How much time will we have? Five ten years. I’m seventeen and you’re what almost seventy. People will talk. I want a lifetime. When I go back I’ll remember this time. It is something I’ll always cherish it. You won’t. Things will change. For you this didn’t happen.”

“Oh, I don’t know if I like that.”

“It’ll be OK. You’ll never know.”

“Let’s sleep on it.”

“Who is that?” Skeeter was looking at the unfinished painting of Abby as we strode through my work area.

“That was my wife. I can’t seem to get her eyes right.”

“What was she like?”

“Wonderful. She wrote me when I was in Nam. She saved my life.”

Abby

“She saved your life?”

“Yea I was down. I didn’t care about anything. That is why I was in the war to begin with. I threw myself out there. Without you I didn’t care. She wrote. She wrote a lot.”

Abby’s letters were spread out on the table. I must have been reading them when I got home last night.

“Really” A horn blew outside. I pulled the curtain. It was Glen sitting in his car in the driveway.

“Look I’ve got a golf date with friends. I’ll tell them and cancel. I’d rather stay here with you.”

“I don’t want to come between you and your friends.’

“I don’t mind.”

*DEAR JAY GRANT*

*MY BROTHER CAME HOME TODAY. THE DOCTORS SAY HE WILL WALK AGAIN. HE SAYS IT IS ALL BECAUSE OF YOU SAVED HIM. YOU CARRIED HIM OUT UNDER FIRE. YOU WERE SWINGING THAT M16 AROUND FIRING BACK WITH ONE HAND AND CARRYING HIM WITH THE OTHER. IF YOU HADN’T HELD YOUR FINGER IN THE HOLE IN HIS CHEST HE MIGHT HAVE DIED RIGHT THERE. THANK YOU FOR MY BROTHER. I WAS AFRAID I MIGHT NEVER SEE HIM AGAIN. I DON’T UNDERSTAND WAR, BUT I’M GLAD HE CAME HOME. THANKS AGAIN*

*LOVE ALWAYS  
ABBY MAISON*

When I got home Heather was gone. Her bag was gone. All gone nothing left except some extra dishes in the sink and wine glasses in the bedroom. No proof she was ever here.

I ran to my shop. I picked up the painting of Abby, the one without eyes. And crushed it to my chest. I called Steven in DC. I told him how much I loved him. I kept him on the phone for hours. I called Carl I told him I loved him and missed him. I was on the phone with Carl when Stan and Marilyn came through the door. I tried to explain. Stan tried to remove Abby from my chest. I held fast. Marilyn was on the phone. Soon we were in the car. I sat in the back with Abby. Marilyn held Stan’s hand. They talked in hushed tones. Marilyn kept looking back at me. We drove a long time. They told me I might have to stay overnight.

Stan and Marilyn come by about once a week

Steven came today. It was good to see him. I hugged him in a death grip. I think I

scared him, as if seeing me like this wasn't enough to scare him. I'll bet he'll worry he might turn out here like me. I'm going to miss him. Maybe not. What if I don't.

Carl and his wife the third or fourth, you'd think he was an actor already, stopped by yesterday. He told me all about the car business. I was bored to insanity but always polite. He is losing his hair, but he was still Carl. It was good to see him.

We didn't talk about why I'm here. I don't want him to know. I guess I don't want anybody to know. I won't even tell that Doctor Jefferies. He's nice enough I guess. I'm just not going to tell him. I make up stories about the war. He'll pat my back and say "See you tomorrow."

Heather on the other hand, I don't understand. I only met her that one time. She comes by everyday. She seems most sorry for me, more than anybody else. Some days she's seems sad, but she always tries to cheer me up. She even brought Repete a couple times.

We play cards. We play checkers. The other day she brought me a fast food burger and fries. We ate together. Our eyes never meet but that is O K.

Sometimes she'll bring in a movie. She'll sit beside my bed and hold my arm. I don't hold her hand. Last night she kissed my cheek. I'd really like to like her, but why? What is the point?

"Would you like to take your pill now?" Camel the night duty nurse asks.

"No, I don't want to sleep. I might miss it."

"Why do we have to go through this every night. Have you missed anythin'yet?" She walks closer to my bed. She puts her plump hand on my forehead like a loving mother.

"Nobody understands." I say.

"I know." She doesn't know. She is trying to be nice. She is good at that. "Don't make me call Mark." She adds softly. Mark is mean. He gets the pill down one way or the other.

"Don't take Abby." I shift my head left and right.

"Lordy child. I won't take her. I promise." She crosses her big chest. I assume her heart is under there somewhere.

"Pinkie promise."

"I'll pinkie promise you. Now you'all take your pill." I like Camel. I swallow the damn thing. I think I hear her say "Good night"

"Good morning Mr. Grant." The voice isn't familiar but the routine is. Abby has slipped from my chest. I patted frantically around my bed.

"Looking for this Mr. Grant?" The nurse hands me my painting. I kiss the painting and crush it to my chest. My eyes are still blurry as I'm blinded by the sun. I see the nurses silhouette.

"You know we could get some paints and you could finish her eyes. She must have been beautiful." I can't place that voice.

"She was. It doesn't matter it could all be gone like" I snap my fingers. "That" Why did I say that. I have to be more careful. I rub my right eye. That is the one that comes in to



Abby

focus first. I get a good look at the nurse I'm talking to. She is a small figured girl. Blonde hair. Bob cut.

"Skeeter You came back."

"Skeeter who?" The girl in the sun snapped. "That`s an unusual name." She was reaching for my arm. "Here, Let me take your blood pressure."

"You look like a girl I once knew."

"I do. That`s nice. Was she the woman in the painting?" She asked cheerfully.

"No. Someone else."

The door opened I turned my head. Heather entered just like she did everyday.

"I've got to introduce you to my best friend Heather Colmes."

"You don't have to introduce us." The young nurse said. Heather`s head was shaking viciously (NO). "This is my grandmother Sylvania. Sylvania Holmes."

My eyes meet Heather`s, I mean Skeeter`s. Her great big raccoon eyes were beginning to water. We stared. Get out the jumper cables. That heart thing again. "Why?" Was all I could get out of my dry mouth.

"I'm an old woman." She brought both her hands up and pounded on her chest. "I waited such a long time and then I was afraid you wouldn't love me." She stood back. Then waved her hand.

"Meet your granddaughter."