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Yard Sale

Her

The car hit a pothole. Again. Dan was busy shaking to a forty-year-old Led Zeppelin tune. She watched as he pouted and preened to the beat. Angela fiddled with her wedding band. Again. Growing bored with each passing mile of farm fields and little white houses. Roadside crosses littered the abandoned roads. Occasionally she'd glimpse a face adhered to the cross. She could understand the longing involved. The never-ending sadness that clawed at you.

"Dan, there's a sign for a yard sale." Life shot through her. "It's only a few miles off this road." She had become addicted to other people's stuff. Wondering about the stories behind each object—the teddy bear that may have been beside a young girl while she was growing up. The piece of jewelry that had possibly been through generations of families. One time she saw a plastic doll in a baby carriage. The baby was dressed in a pink gown and hat. Angela couldn't keep her eyes off it. An elderly woman came to her side.

"That was my daughter's favorite." The woman picked up the doll and held it to her chest. "Where did it all go?"

Dan blasted another song, and she stared out the window. She'd asked herself that question after every crooked mile of this trip

Him

He noticed how Angela always stared at him. Was she noticing his flaws again? Grinning at his bald spot and thickening waistline? She gave him the same look his doctor gave him—a tilt of the head and a condescending grin etched on his face. The trip had gone downhill after they left Craig at the college. When they got back, their home would be barren.

Dan thought of all the birthday and sleepover parties. The neighborhood kids had used their home as a gathering place because of the pool and trampoline. Pictures of those times would console them, but the emptiness of the shadows would soon take over. Dan stared at the road and tried to think of nothing.

Seventies rock blared through the radio. He glanced over at Angela. She was zoned out again. Over the course of twenty-five years of marriage you learned the game. You could never deny a woman the ability to shop or yard sale. It was matrimonial suicide. Marriages that stood the test of time had yard-sale acquisitions all over the home.

Dan wished he had taken up golf or developed a passion for sports, but why would anyone want to waste their Sunday watching football? He enjoyed tinkering with their old mini-van and day dreaming about owning a sport car.

He pulled off the road and headed to the yard sale. The sky had become a deep purple with splashes of orange mixed in. The wind had picked up. Plastic bags and papers flew across their path. A few miles ahead a community appeared—small homes with broken-down trucks and cars scattered all over the yards. Washing machines had been left in a sump.

A sense of unease shot through him. This was not a high-end yard sale. He turned to Angela and noticed how happy she looked. His anxiety decreased. For a moment Dan flashed back to a time without children and the heavy burden that life put on you. It was nice to her smile again.

Her

Angela's mother had been a robust woman who spent most of her life in the kitchen. She tried recipe after recipe for pasta dishes. The problem was, she wasn't very good. When Angela got stuck in city traffic the exhaust fumes reminded her of the many burnt dinners throughout her childhood. They were fun times though. Angela had loved every moment with her mother. Except for one thing.

"Honey, please light the stove."

The process began with a deep breath and the sign of the cross. You had to open the cabinet below the stove, turn on the gas, then light a match and pray you didn't explode. The smell of the gas used to turn her stomach. And yet now she yearned to see that flame come back into her life.

Dan had a vacant expression. He hated coming to yard sales. Memories made him uncomfortable. Both his parents had died young and now the boys were in school. He'd stay in the car or take a short walk in the neighborhood.

The community was rundown but she could see that people had tried to make the best of their bad luck. Small gardens and tidy yards lined the roads. Several signs asked that drivers slow down because they loved their children.

On the side of the road a large yellow sign pointed to a home on a cul-de-sac. A yard sale sign pointing to the backyard was planted next to a tree with a rusted out swing looped around it. Dan pulled to the curb. For a moment they both stared out at the tiny A frame

home. A medium-sized dog, tied to a tree, ran in circles barking furiously. The chain had wrapped around the tree limiting its mobility. Windows were shuttered and years of wear had worn down the shingles. Except for the dog, the home looked abandoned.

Dan turned to her. "Are you sure about this?"

Him

He loved old horror movies when he was a kid. *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Silence of the Lambs* had been his favorites. This home could have been used in either movie.

“What could you possibly want here? Don’t you have enough crap around the house? Would it be too hard to stop doing this and live in the real world—it’s over. They’re gone.”

The words came out of his mouth before he could stop them. God, he was stupid. Some of the worst arguments they had started with his big mouth. Dan had come to realize it was a curse that afflicted most men.

Angela hung her head. For a moment he thought she was crying. Dan felt the heat rise to his face. It always happened after he had said something without thinking. But a part of him was still defiant, wanting to be independent and strong. The other part knew he needed her more than she needed him.

She turned to him. “I know what you did.”

Dan touched Angela’s shoulder but she was already reaching for the door handle. She got out not looking back. She headed straight to the dog. Dan tensed and got ready to run out. The dog continued barking but stopped when Angela put out her hand. A moment later the dog was licking her fingers and wagging its tail.

Her words echoed in him. What had he done?

Together

Dan watched as Angela disappeared around the house. Nerves shot through him. He had a bad feeling about this place. The dog eyed him warily. Dan walked a wide circle around the animal. What could he possibly have done? He'd devoted most of his life to her and the kids. There'd been little bumps in the road. He paused and stared at the lingering clouds. A weak sun tried to make an appearance. The bumps had been too small to make a difference. Hadn't they?

Dan hesitated before he turned the corner. He imagined rusted out cars and a ton of cheap clothes awaiting him. The dog had started to bark again and thicker, darker clouds matted the sun. He noticed dark curtains covering all the windows. A sour, rotting smell wafted from the woods. Dan turned the corner. Three long rows of items extended to a fence encircling the yard. The land then dropped to a hilly ravine. The sides of the home were surrounded by dense woods. Dan didn't see anyone.

"Angela."

Wind had picked up and a rusty hammock started to swing. He pulled out his cell to see if there was a connection. Nothing. Another dead area. He tried to think of his options. Should he go back to the car and get the bat. Maybe he should...

"Over here, Dan."

A group of apple trees stood near a small shed off to the side of the house. Angela was kneeling by a woman in a wheelchair. The woman had shoulder length blond

frosted hair. A thin smile creased her face. Her blue dress fluttered with the breeze. They were the only ones here. Angela waved him over. Trees moaned and creaked. Dan hesitated and looked behind his shoulder. A large cat darted toward the woods.

Dan felt uneasy about the way the two women looked at him. The woman in the wheelchair motioned to his wife and spoke into her ear. They acted like they knew one another. Angela stood up and reached for the woman's hand.

"Dan, this is Sarah."

The woman was younger than he thought, probably in her mid-forties. She manipulated large rosary beads in her hands. Pictures lined the wheelchair. He watched as she closed her eyes. She spoke just above a whisper.

"Your wife says you've been missing something for a long time."

Rays of sun filtered down across his wife and the wheelchair. He looked at Angela but couldn't read her face. Sarah had opened her eyes and her gaze penetrated him.

"Not that I know of."

Sarah wheeled her way to Dan and stopped inches from him.

"Be honest."

Dan started to feel his anxiety turn to anger. What was his wife telling this woman?

“I don’t know what you two are talking about.” He pointed to his wife. “I’ll see you back at the car.” Dan was determined to get out of this situation.

Angela’s voice rose above the wind. “Stop.”

Dan continued walking but knew the tone in her voice. Something was wrong. He turned to her.

“I know what you did and why you did it. Come with me.”

Revelations

Dan's clenched fists banged against his thighs. "Are you going to tell me what the hell is going on?"

Angela nodded and continued walking on the caked dirt at a brisk pace. The sun was trying to hang on but would soon set. A strong smell of manure filled the area.

"Do you remember how badly we wanted a home when we got married?"

"What's that got to do with this?"

Angela watched as horses galloped in the green fields. The early part of their marriage was full of small apartments and basement rentals. They'd spend weekends drinking cheap wine and looking through homebuyer's guides. They were near the barn and a lone horse stood eating grass. Angela stopped and turned to him.

"We never had any money and then one day we had enough for a down payment on a starter home."

Dan took in the wonderful scent of hay and freshly mown grass. The past always caught up with you.

"You knew."

Angela came over to him and ran her fingers through his hair. "Yes."

The barn next to them was two stories. It had large doors with a picture of a rooster above the entrance. On the top were smaller doors, maybe for the hayloft. She led him into the barn. Angela went past the horse stalls and came out at the back of the barn. She went to a large object covered under tarp and pulled it off.

Dan felt a flood of emotions run through him—working for hours on the car in the streets and cruising by the ocean under a blanket of glowing stars. The sleek body of the 1966 Mustang GT 350 glistened under the moonlight. It's funny how an object could turn you into a child again.

"I never wanted you to know."

Angela came over and wrapped her arms around him.

"I never believed your story that the car was stolen." She kissed him gently. "I was just so happy to get out of the basement. I should have done something then."

Dan got in the driver's seat and exhaled. Tears had started like tiny buds around his eyes. "I wanted a better life for our children." He stroked the wheel and looked around. The car was just about how he'd remembered it in his dreams. "How did you find her?"

Angela told him how she'd gotten the information from his brother. How she'd saved over the years. How she'd found the owner—Sarah's deceased husband.

A full moon made the fields look ripe and full of life. Angela sat next to him.

“We spent all our lives giving our kids what we didn’t have. We gave every ounce of ourselves to our careers and family. We forgot to give to us.”

Dan sat staring at her. Tears had cascaded down his rugged face. Angela wiped them off and kissed his cheeks.

“We created this beautiful world for our children. And then we forgot what got it all started.”

Dan took a deep breath. “Our love.”

Angela smiled. “The closer we got to an empty nest, the more I withdrew. Going to yard sales was like trying to capture someone else’s memories because I couldn’t deal with mine anymore. The kids’ going to college has been hard on me.” Angela pulled the seat back and closed her eyes. “Everyday I looked at their baby books. At the back of Ed’s I found a picture of the old Mustang. Your brother told me the whole story.”

Dan laughed. “He always had a big mouth.”

Dan turned the key and the engine purred like a big old lion. He got out, undid the zippers on the sides and put down the roof. He got back in the car. Things were changing so fast—one door closing and others opening up. It made him sad and hopeful at the same time.

“Hey, pretty lady. You want to go for a ride.”

Angela leaned back. Dan eased the car around the barn. It was all there again—the wide-open road and an open slate waiting to be filled with new memories. The sky was lit like

the fourth of July. A sweet summer scent blew through the car. He gave her a wink and pulled out.