

THE TREE HOUSE

Written by

18-DE07-W42

A trip to an old tree house helps a broken woman reconcile her losses and regain her childlike faith

FADE IN

EXT - MARCY'S YARD - DAY

A near perfect spring day. Marcy's yard, once planted with a gardener's loving care, shows signs of neglect - overgrown flowers, a lawn in need of a trim. The large OAK in back holds the dilapidated remains of a old TREE HOUSE.

INT - KITCHEN - DAY

MARCY, 50's stares vacantly out the window. She seems fragile; faded as the flowered curtains at her window. In front of her, a large SCRAP BOOK is open to photos of a family group. Beside her a folded NEWSPAPER, an untouched cup of TEA. A CANE rests beside her chair.

A KNOCK at the back door. No reaction from Marcy -- she continues to stare in the direction of the tree house.

Another KNOCK. The door CREAKS open. GRACE, 50's Marcy's neighbor peeks through.

GRACE

It's me, honey. Didn't you hear
the door?

Marcy says nothing. Grace breezes in, carrying small BAG of take out.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I brought you some dinner. I need
to run over to church but I wanted
to stop by.

Marcy flinches at the mention of church. Grace remains determinedly cheerful as opens the refrigerator...

GRACE (CONT'D)

I'll just put this in here till
you're hungry...

which is empty, except for some withered veggies and stale MILK. Grace sniffs the milk carton - makes a face. Closes the fridge. Sets the take out on the counter.

GRACE (CONT'D)

How long since you last had food in
this house?

Marcy shrugs. Grace is relieved at the brief response.

GRACE (CONT'D)

And how long are you going to pretend I'm not here talking to you?

MARCY

(tiredly)

Till you go away.

GRACE

Let me fix you a plate.

She busies herself fixing Marcy a small plate from the take out bag.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You need to keep up your strength.

The comment stirs Marcy from her apathy.

MARCY

Why do people say that? It's about as useless as "I'm sorry for your loss."

GRACE

But I am. We all are. I can't imagine what you're going through.

Grace carries the plate over, sets it determinedly in front of Marcy. Sits down in the chair opposite her. She can't help but notice the scrapbook.

ON THE TABLE

Pictures of a young SOLDIER, his arm around both Marcy and his pregnant wife. Other pictures of the Marcy, the young WOMAN and her son, KIP at various stages of growth. The most recent picture is of KIP waving from the tree house outside.

MARCY

Kip loved that old tree house. Just like his daddy did. I keep thinking... he's still out there. That he'll Peek out and wave at me like he used to do.

Grace puts her hand over Marcy's.

GRACE

We don't always understand the ways of the Lord.

MARCY

Don't. Just... don't.

Marcy pulls back, Grace hides her hurt.

MARCY (CONT'D)

First Nathan, now Katy and Kip...
It's not supposed to happen this
way. Nobody should outlive their
child - let alone their grandchild.
Nobody.

GRACE

We haven't seen you in church for
awhile now. You've been missed.

MARCY

I'm not missed.

Marcy shoves the NEWSPAPER toward Grace. On the front page,
a picture of a wrecked SEDAN. The headline: "Fatal crash on
Highway 101 - 2 dead, 1 injured."

MARCY (CONT'D)

I'm the woman who killed her
family.

Grace deftly closes the paper, takes it from Marcy.

GRACE

It was an accident... you can't
keep blaming yourself.

Marcy looks back out the window.

MARCY

I was the driver. Who should I
blame, then - God? Wasn't He
supposed to be my copilot?

GRACE

(gently)

If you don't mind my asking, how
are you and the Lord getting on?

MARCY

We're not on speaking terms.

Grace sighs.

GRACE

You need time to grieve. God
understands that.

MARCY

They should be here, not me. He
made a mistake. God made a
mistake!

Marcy drifts back into bitter silence as Grace watches helplessly.

GRACE

Can I at least pray for you before
I go?

She takes Marcy's lack of response as a yes. Takes her hand.

GRACE (CONT'D)

(prays)

Dear Heavenly Father, we come
before you today for our sister
Marcy. In her time of sorrow and
great loss...

Grace's voice fades as Marcy, disengaged, turns to look out the window.

She glimpses a young BOY, in jeans and a yellow cotton T-shirt, playing near the tree house.

The boy catches Marcy's eye, grins and heads toward the tree house. So familiar...

MARCY

Wait --

Marcy stands, pulls her hand from Grace's, as Grace finishes the prayer.

GRACE

...We pray your peace and blessing
on her. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

She looks a question at Marcy.

MARCY

Did you see?

GRACE

Who?

MARCY

Him! Outside, in the yard.

Grace looks out, sees nothing.

GRACE

I don't...

MARCY

(excitedly)

Over by the tree house. But how he got through the gate...

Marcy looks again. The child is gone.

GRACE

Who was he?

MARCY

It - you'll think I'm crazy. But was Kip! Blond hair, yellow T-shirt.

GRACE

Oh, Marcy. I know what you want to see but.. It was most likely a neighbor kid.

Grace stands. She closes the album and pushes the plate in front of Marcy.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You should rest. Try and eat something. I'll stop by again later.

Grace EXITS. Marcy picks up a fork, determined to try. She looks at the food - repulsed. She shoves away the untouched plate. Opens the album once again, to the picture of KIP waving from the tree house.

She hears a child's LAUGHTER from outside.

EXT - YARD

"KIP" is attempting to climb the rickety stairs to the tree house.

MARCY

Who are you? Come back.

The boy giggles and waves - he's climbing higher now. Marcy stands stiffly. She grabs up the CANE and hobbles outside.

EXT - YARD - DAY

Marcy reaches the base of the tree house as just "Kip" climbs up to the platform.

MARCY (CONT'D)
 Come down this instant. Or I'll
 come after you...

Kip laughs and ducks out of sight.

As she says the words, a memory triggers, and she finds
 herself

FLASHBACK - EXT - YARD - SEVERAL WEEKS AGO

The place is the same but the Marcy of a few weeks ago seems
 years younger, more carefree. Her grandson KIP taunts her
 from above.

MARCY (CONT'D)
 I'll come up after you.

KIP
 You can't.

MARCY
 Wanna bet?

She starts up the ladder. She needs no cane and moves
 quickly.

KIP
 Only kids are allowed up here.
 You're not a kid.

MARCY
 What makes you think that?

KIP
 Because you're OLD. You're my
 Grandma!

MARCY
 (laughs)
 Who do you think built this tree
 house?

Kip shrugs.

MARCY (CONT'D)
 Your Grandpa and I - we built it
 for your daddy when he was about
 your age.

Marcy holds up a small tin BOX.

MARCY (CONT'D)
I brought you a surprise.

KIP
Is it cookies?

MARCY
(smiles)
Can I come up and show you?

KIP
(sighs manfully)
I guess.

The box tucked under one arm, Marcy climbs nimbly up the stairs to the tree house.

INT - TREE HOUSE - DAY

Marcy smiles as she enters the boy's sanctum. She and Kip look out over the horizon. The view seems to stretch on forever.

MARCY
You can see clear to heaven from here. At least that's what I used to think.

Kip strains to look.

KIP
If I look real hard maybe, I can see Daddy?

Marcy squeezes his shoulder.

MARCY
Maybe not that far, but... yes, That's where Daddy is.

She sits down beside Kip and shows him the box.

MARCY (CONT'D)
You know, this box belonged to your daddy?

KIP
It did? What's in it?

She nods for him to open it. He does.

The box is filled with various boyhood treasures. A smooth stone, a slingshot, some wheat pennies, and a small mirror.

KIP (CONT'D)
I bet he used this to signal
pirates. Oh --

Kip holds up the mirror, turns it over. The other side reveals a picture of Jesus holding a little blond haired child.

KIP (CONT'D)
It's got Jesus on this side. Can I
still use it to signal pirates?

Marcy laughs.

MARCY
I'm sure Jesus won't mind. To Him
we're all like this little child if
we believe in Him.

KIP
Even grandmas?

MARCY
Even grandmas.

Kip pulls out a tattered photograph - a young boy, not much older than Kip, in this same tree house.

KIP
This is my daddy when he was
little.

MARCY
You look so much like him.

KIP
Mama says Daddy was a hero.

MARCY
(husky)
He was. We all miss him. A lot.
But we have each other. Always.
I thought we'd take a picture of
you in the tree house and put it in
the box with the one of your daddy.

KIP
Yes. I'll hide them. In a very
secret place.

MARCY
(smiling)
Now, I think your mom may have some
cookies ready in the kitchen.

KIP
Cookies!

On Kip's grin the scene dissolves back to

EXT - TREE HOUSE - PRESENT DAY

MARCY
I know you're up there. Please
come down.

No response. Marcy stands uncertain.

MARCY (CONT'D)
Then I'll come up.

She hears a faint answer, like an echo.

KIP
(echo)
Come up.

She looks at the cane in her hand, then determined, puts it
down and starts to climb.

EXT - TREE HOUSE -

An Marcy pulls herself up to the platform, surprised she's
made it.

MARCY
Little boy? Kip?

She sees a glimpse of blond hair, a yellow T-shirt, inside
the tree house. She enters.

INT - TREE HOUSE - DAY

Dust has built up. There is no sign of anyone.

MARCY (CONT'D)
Don't be afraid. I can help you
climb down if you're scared.

KIP
(echo)
Scared.

MARCY
Come out. I can't see you.

KIP
(echo)
See you.

Marcy wanders through the tree house searching, calling Kip's name.

MARCY

Kip?

Wind RUSTLES, a board CREAKS. No one is there.

As Marcy looks around light GLEAMS off an object on the corner window. Marcy moves toward it.

CLOSE ON -

The small MIRROR lying face up on the window sill. On top of Kip's treasure box. Left there by a young boy to signal pirates.

Marcy picks up the mirror. It is cracked. In it she sees herself: Tired. Hurting. Broken. Slowly, she turns the mirror over, revealing the picture of Jesus. Jesus, holding a young child that resembles her lost grandson.

Her voice echoes from the past.

MARCY (CONT'D)

(sotto)

We are all little children to
Jesus. Even grandmas.

For the first time since the accident, tears flow.

Clutching the picture of Jesus, she closes her eyes as if in prayer.

GRACE

(O.S.)

Marcy. Marcy where are you? Are
you out here?

Grace's voice from the base of the tree calls Marcy back to the present.

When she gazes once more into the broken mirror her despair has lifted. In its place there is grief, yes but also forgiveness. Acceptance. And something resembling... peace.

Outside, the sun rides low on the horizon, coloring the view from the tree house in Rococo shades -- turquoise, amber, vermillion.

MARCY

A view of heaven.

Marcy smiles. Calls out to her friend.

MARCY (CONT'D)

Up here!

EXT - YARD - DAY

Grace, stands below, staring up into the branches.

GRACE

What in God's green earth are you doing up there? You scared me half to death.

She turns, looks out over the vast expanse of sky. A view of heaven. Staring hard, she can almost see...

MARCY

You should see the view from up here. Want to come up?

GRACE

Not me. I'm not crazy.

She catches herself.

GRACE (CONT'D)

(flustered)

I - I didn't mean that you were; I just... can you get down? Should I call the fire department?

Marcy laughs. Grace is almost as shocked by this as by finding her friend high up in a tree.

MARCY

I made it up. I can make it down.

Marcy takes a final glance through the contents of the treasure box. A few pennies, a slingshot, and a picture... of a young boy in a yellow T-shirt.

Marcy tucks the box under one arm, then climbs deftly down the tree, to the amazement of her friend. She's smiling. Grace is stunned.

GRACE

Who are you? And what have you done with my friend Marcy?

Marcy smiles to herself.

MARCY

Know what? I'm starving! Join me inside?

GRACE

(nods)

Hallelujah! It's about time.

Marcy picks up her cane, hands it to Grace - she doesn't need it now. Clutching the treasure box, she heads toward the house.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Say, what's in the box?

MARCY

Pirate treasure.

GRACE

Okay - really?

Marcy nods, smiling.

ROLL CREDITS as Grace follows her into the warmth of the house.

FADE OUT

THE END