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English 430
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UNTITLED

There's four chairs that sit under the awing of the post office and two of them's got rockers and cane backs. One rocker is mine and the other is for my best friend, May Fencent. The two stationary chairs don't belong to nobody in particular, just whoever chooses to take a rest every now and then.

Me and May spend a many hours rocking and watching the years drift on. May, poor thing, is a widow woman, the ex-post mistress, and a lonely soul with nothing much to do. Not me though. I use to be the head teacher at the Lostem Day Care Center, and I still work there on Monday's and Thursday's from fall to spring. Being retired didn't suit me a-tall. I ain't no widow, never been married, but I ain't no virgin either. I like companionship and I get sick and tired of May always telling me, "You should just give up on looking for a husband and flirting the way you do." I don't try to explain, because it has no effect on May.

I'm babbling, I know, but I want to tell what happened. I want to tell what I seen with my own two eyes, and what I heard with my own two ears, no more than a year-and-a-half ago.

This skinny woman come running out of the woods near the edge of town. She was shouting, screeching really, "The bar.

Not too far
From where we
were sitting,

Is this
near the
post
office?

This is
a
delightful
and
funny
opening
which
brings the
character
close
immediately
and makes
her
likable.

Great lead-in
to the next
event.

ets got Toam. Ets got Toam in ets mouf."

Me and May was sitting and rocking in our chairs. We hadn't seen rain since the last of April and the county was as dry as top-grade kindling wood. It was June and time for school to let out. Those bunchy, ^{wonderful!} white cloud whiffs were doing a slow sail across the sky and the sun had been up since half-past-five. I remember it was May's birthday, her sixty-^{seventy}~~fifth~~. I was only sixty-^{four}~~two~~ then.

*This is a
truly
 terrific
description*

"The bar. Ets got Toam."

I could barely make her out, running and hollering like she was, but I thought I recognized that faded green housedress and that long, tangled brown hair as belonging to Lovey Kroft, and I thought she was saying some bear had Tom.

Four or five of the menfolk, standing in front of the barber shop were squinting and straining to make out what she was talking about, but Lovey just went on running, turning back toward the trees and shrieking, like maybe a swarm of wasps had caught her pulling down their nest and were stinging her till she put it back up. That was Saturday.

ha!

Of course by Monday morning, when her husband found her, Lovey wasn't making no sense a-tall. She had that glazed kind of look in her eyes, like them crack-heads and shoot-um-up dopesters they show on the real-life police shows. And even though her lips kept on moving, wasn't nothing but drool coming out of her mouth by then.

You see, Pete Kroft had called the sheriff after he finally

found his wife, and the deputy, Lester Potts, drove out by the church to bring them back to town.

Lovey looked a frightful mess, she did. All long and skinny, with that tangled heap of hair and that faded dress, ripped near to shreds. That's the way she looked when Lester helped her out of the brand new Chrysler squad car. Couldn't have been more than twenty-five-hundred miles on the odometer then. Fine machine, and I am partial to machines since they make more sense than most humans, and that car could go ninety, maybe a hundred miles an hour easy. It had the county name painted on the front doors and those big blue and red lights blinking from side-to-side.

This detail really pulled me!

But getting back to Lovey, from the time Lester helped her out of that car, till the day she left, she never did talk no more. So it got to be two days before Frekles Punston let it spill that him and ^{his} the Mrs. hadn't seen Tom, their eleven-year-old, since Saturday noon.

Now just wait! Lots of folks understand that. The Punston's ^{De} been married twenty years, they got eighteen young-uns to prove it, and there ain't no twins in the bunch. So it ain't so surprising that they didn't come to missing Tom till Monday, around the time for the last day of school. Now I know you thinking, that's just plain ridiculous, but it might a had something to do with having all those young-uns. I don't know, I never had any. ✓ good!

great sense from the earlier rose. of expectations they did something to him.

Anyway, that's when the law got involved, rounding up

This widens the story and makes it credible.

deputies and volunteers to search out our winding roads and the wood out back of the All Faiths Church. All the men and a good many women joined the search, not Lovey though, she wasn't in no shape to do more than sit on the post office porch with a patchwork quilt round her shoulders, rocking ^{her body} back and forth in one of the stationary chairs. I don't even think Lovey knew it was getting on to summer.

So off went most of the town, tramping round the roads and cussing through the woods, just a searching for Tom. All Monday noon till night, all day long on Tuesday, and I guess maybe a hundred or so, about a third of the town, went out again on Wednesday. That was the day of the big parents and teacher's picnic and to tell the truth, ^{I'll tell you true,} most folks were of two minds, but like I said, maybe a hundred or so went on searching.

Lester had to keep reminding folks that there weren't no bears out in the woods. "Miss Lovey was near hysterical when Pete found her. Maybe she did see something back in the woods, but it sure wasn't no bear, I'm here to tell you. Just the same, don't go wandering too far from the group. I want us to all meet back here at one-thirty, y'all got that?" he told them.

great! Heads went to bobbing, a few bear jokes, and of course a few bare-bottom jokes followed that. Me and May were pretty much walked out by Wednesday. We'd been baking pies in her kitchen most of the night, for the picnic, and had only sat rocking on the porch for about two hours. We wished them luck and

watched them go.

It didn't do ^{no} on good. They went on searching and counting heads. Every hour or so they would count the heads of the children to make sure Tom hadn't sneaked back in.

I'd be lying if I said there wasn't no grumbling among the last of the volunteers. The days were starting to get really hot and the mosquitoes had brought some hearty appetites with them. Hell, some folks were grumbling on the first day of the search, but if those little pests hadn't been biting and causing itchy bumps to raise on the skin, maybe they would a gone on searching. It's hard to say.

Anyway, after Wednesday, the whole town quit looking for Tom, and it wasn't because the sheriff put a stop to it either. ^{I want you to listen close,} And to tell the ~~complete~~ truth, it wasn't because Tom just up and came back.

As I remember it, Lovey Kroft was still sitting on the porch, creaking the dry floorboards, rocking her body and looking around. The creaking sound of her chair, that carried on the wind, was the loudest and most regular sound out of all the noises around.

Then at about a quarter-to-one, a change came about. The sky was still as blue as a picture and the clouds were almost motionless, but it seemed like the sun was cooling, or fading, or maybe just pulling down its shades, because up in the south sky, down near the All Faiths Church, something big and dark was rising up over the woods. It looked like it was sucking

This is
Lovey,
series, and
wonderful!

perfect!

the light out of the noon day and eating the sun rays and cloud puffs. To me, it looked like a huge bear, like those bears in the zoo in Philadelphia. Lovey stopped rocking and kind of staggered off the porch, hugging the quilt around her. When nobody tried to stop her, she walked south, toward the end of town.

*lovely and
mystical*

And it got quiet. One of those loud quiet, so heavy and deafening that it makes your shoulders hunch in and you forget to breathe. That's the way I felt. And folks just stopped doing what they'd been doing and started milling out into the streets and looking up. I couldn't hear a thing. I saw May faint, but I don't think nobody paid her no mind, except I noticed she was fainting in slow motion. Her body wavered back and forth a time or two, then her head folded forward and her heels tilted backward, and she just sort of floated down to the porch, like a dogwood blossom on a gentle wind.

wonderful image!

Well, I don't think it was more than five minutes before everything started to come back to almost like nothing had happened. That grizzly shape just dropped his head and sunk back to where ever it came from, and that's the only way I can describe it. It shifted those eyes of blue sky, and then it yawned, opening a huge mouth. There wasn't no teeth and no tongue in that mouth, just tiny, little shapes jumping up and down, and hollering. Some were holding hands or hugging each other, and Lovey was standing in front of all the rest, holding her quilt. Then that ^{Bear} thing closed its mouth and they were gone.

*this
is
sad
and
frightening
and
wonderful.*

I know you never got to read about what happened here. There was never a wire story sent out, no more search parties, and very little talk about that Wednesday afternoon. The picnic was postponed, of course, and May revived a short time later. *only half the volunteers ~~are~~ come back + met with Lester Potts that day.*

Most of us older folks have lived here for decades, just like our parents did, and their parents before them. We've seen things, and some of it can't be explained, but I just don't understand why people always move when something happens. This time it was Pete Kroft and his young-uns, then another family, and its been a family ^{about 10, 20 years} ~~about~~ ^{every} ~~month~~ ^{couple} for the last eighteen months.

Me and May sit on this porch and watch people move out and people move in. The people moving in are coming from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and places like that. We make them welcome, but we don't talk about things that happen here. May says maybe I'll get lucky and find a husband among this new group. I don't know. The only thing I know for sure is me and May ain't going nowhere, ^{we like it, right here.} and that there ain't no better place in ^{the} world than ^{Right here} Lostem, PA. ^{there's too obvious a message in the name of the town?}

This is a truly wonderful story with the most engaging and delightful narrative voice I've read in a long time! The character just captures all the funniest and brightest moments of this story and enchants the reader.

I think the picture of the town and its responses is really funny on the surface but sweet and sad underneath, and reveals a great deal about settings where time (and life) pass differently from →

the world of the "big city" and contemporary slide stories.

I think you're a true storyteller with a wonderful narrative voice! I hope you keep writing like crazy. (and you might want to send this story somewhere: maybe Yankee magazine or our own Whiskey Island.)