

A Green Dress

I remember it like it was yesterday, another smack across my face, and more blood rushed down my mouth. With his fifth beer intact in his thick grip, he glanced at me and cackled, soon staggering across the hall and making his way out toward the front door. Steadily examining my bruises, my sister took a warm cloth and slowly dabbed the bloody areas. I just glared at her. It had been her second time witnessing this kind of behavior from our father.

There was no sober day in the life of Todd Waiger. I didn't mind so much back then. Those were the days when he missed my mother most. My mother left us when I was five and my little sister was just born. After she left, my father progressed with his liquor habits, and slowly, his resentment against me built, until I was old enough for him to physically beat me.

At the age of fifteen I made myself the man of the house, just so Julie could look up to someone. I took on the role of a house wife; swept, cleaned the dishes, cooked, folded laundry, and most importantly, made sure my sister had enough attention. One evening after school, I got a head start on laundry right about the same time my father came home.

“Billy, get your ass in here!” he hollered

“What happened?”

“I'll tell you what happened, my beer is all gone. Where is it?” I stood in disbelief.

“I think you had your last one yesterday. Maybe you should lay off the beer,” I suggested. He grabbed my arm and smacked me across the face.

“Don't disrespect me, ever.” I ran to my room and right next my bed was my sisters yellow dress hanging on the side of the laundry basket. I grabbed it and hugged it. It was at that moment when I realized that my father never laid a finger on Julie. I created a feeling of envy towards my sister when I thought about how she had never been struck by our father. I wrapped the dress around my legs. I found comfort and protection in my sisters dress; the glorious feeling of never being hit again.

The next day I stayed home from school. Embarrassment from my classmates would make everything far too worse. My father was at work while my sister was in school. At that point in my life, everything felt pointless. I figured I was only there to protect Julie. After hours of cleaning I finally sat on the couch in the living room. I stared outside the window praying he wouldn't return home. Anxiety was the only emotion I felt. I went to my room to lay down. I remember that same yellow dress had still been on my pillow where I left it. Just as I grabbed it I began to relax. Just as I thought of the dress, I wondered if any of her other clothes would have the same effect. So I ran to her closet. Immediately I found loads of clothes. In the back of all her clothing and toys I found a solid green dress that had a tag with the initials A.C. I remembered the dress from when I was little. My mom wore the same dress all the time. In fact I recall her sewing it. I was filled with joy when I found it. I slipped it on top of my shirt and shorts and felt the warm hug from my mother's arms. It was a feeling I hadn't experienced in a long time. From that day on, the dress was with me wherever I went.

On a cold day in the month of December, I remembered all the Christmas lights and the warm feeling of Christmas spirit. As I strolled down the boardwalk looking at all the new clothes in the frilly boutiques, one very bright, fun shop caught my eye. It was called vintage express. It reminded me of all the clothes my sister wore. It brought strong feelings to my attention but a numb sensation of protection. I purchased a light yellow dress with pink daisies. I intended to wear it on the days my father was at work. My stash of secret clothing was kept in a little brown suitcase underneath my bed.

One afternoon I came home exhausted from school. I closed the door gently and hollered "I'm home!" with a large exhale. I turned facing the brown couch and saw Julie sitting with a doll gripped in her palm. She had a red face as if she had been crying for the last few hours. She sat silent.

"Everything ok?" I said blankly. She glared at me with her eyes blood shot red.

"Daddy left me alone, I didn't know where you were?" she said. I felt so guilty for not being home earlier.

“I’m sorry sissy, it won’t happen again. You wanna play a wonderful game of checkers?” I replied.

“No let’s play dress-up.” She stood up and walked me to our bedroom and pointed to a brown suitcase. I remembered the panic rush came to me.

“What were you doing in my room?!”

From that moment on it was complete chaos. It was as if every nightmare I ever had, had come true. I couldn’t explain my reasoning. Every day she stared at me as if I were an alien. I began to feel uncomfortable in my own home. I couldn’t help but cry profusely.

Months later I believe she had forgotten about our little secret from dad. I had no intention of ever telling her again.

I remember when I was eighteen and I finally moved out; one of the best days of my life.

Years later in life, I met a young woman name Rose, though she was certainly an eye catcher she had a rather plain personality. In my mid- thirties we married. Not surprisingly, it wasn’t long till we divorced. We had nothing in common and I feel that I was with her only to avoid being alone.

I never had another relationship again. After the divorce I was diagnosed with depression which led to suicidal thoughts when I was alone. I believed every word my father said to me as a child which made me feel worthless. I began to think of myself as a waste of life. I was put on medication from the doctors I was recommended to. I refused to take it. Dr. Howard assisted in the care and transition toward recommending a nursing home. I fought it bitterly at first, but knowing I had abandoned my family and relationships long ago, it seemed to be the most caring thing to me in a long time. So I followed his advice.

I was put in a nursing home for the mentally disabled. Life in the solitude area of the white room was tolerable. I found a small amount of consolation. I had a light green dress that lay against the cushion of my black chair. Every now and then I looked at my mother’s dress and wondered how she was living without us. When the nurses pass by they ask the history behind

the dress. I always respond with “it’s a symbol of protection” while thinking I’m crazy, they nod their heads in belief.

The real meaning behind the dress is protection against my father.