

Fathers and Fools  
by Renata Kell

The bitter cold bites at Carla's toes in every step she takes on this broken-down country road. She tugs at her flannel shirt fighting off the chill of emotions ready to surface at any moment.

This has got to be the dumbest thing I have ever done. Why should I give a damn about that stupid S.O.B's. last wishes? What did he ever do for me, except dump his DNA into a woman who was gone before the stretch marks faded? How dare he bitch for seventeen years about a no-good dad who left him before he was outa diapers then ask me to find him after leaving me!

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A distant clanging and rattling snap Carla out of her thoughts. As she turns to see what is making the noise, she is forced to shield her eyes from the bright headlights nearing. The dark blue rust bucket comes to a labored stop screeching the last ten feet.

"What the heck are you doing out here, young lady? You looking to get yourself missing or something?"

After surveying her options, Carla decides the old guy is harmless.

"I'm just heading to Landers Point up yonder, mister. Do you think I can hitch a ride?"

"Well, I stopped didn't I." "Hop on in."

Grateful for the heat of the bucking bronco, Carla turns to the driver and says,

"Thank you, mister."

"No thanks needed, little lady. Happy to help. What you doing out here in the middle of the dream hour, anyway?"

“It sure as shit aint my choice,” declares Carla. Just taking care of some family shit for my no-good father that up and kicked the bucket.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, honey. My condolences.”

“Thanks, but none needed. That stupid ass drank himself to death in self-pity.”

Carla stares out the window in silence watching the endless fields bounce by.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” asks the driver.

“No sir, this is a stupid idea anyways.” Says Carla, “But the old man made me promise.”

Carla Pulls a letter from the pocket on her flannel shirt.

“I should never have agreed to deliver this letter to my worthless grandpa who left before my dad could even walk, but seeing he was on his last breath, what could I do?”

The driver turns to Carla just as she wipes a single tear from her face.

“You want some hot chocolate,” says the driver reaching for his thermos.

“No offense sir but not interested in getting drugged.”

Breaking out in laughter the driver takes a swig of the thermos.

“You’re a firecracker.”

The laughter of the driver puts a slight smile on Carla’s face. She feels a little silly and yet comfortable with this old coot.

“Well, little lady I don’t know your story, but it sounds like your dad had his reasons.”

“I don’t care about his reasons. I’m just here to do what my dad never had the guts to do.”

“I will never understand how anyone could ever leave their child,” says the driver.

Carla catches a glimpse of sadness in his face that seems to steal him away in thought.

“You ok mister?”

“Yeah, just thinking. You see, I had a child once, but he died when I was stationed overseas. The misses couldn’t handle it and ran off before I could get home. I spent my life trying to find her and when I did, two years ago, all I could do is leave flowers on her headstone.”

Shaking it off as the lights from Landers Point emerge from the dark sky, the driver turns to Carla,

“Is there someplace I can drop you, little lady?”

“Know where I can find a cheap hotel for the night?”

“I know just the place.” Responds the driver.

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The hotel vacancy sign flickers and the parking lot sits empty as they pull into the Landers Inn.

Carla jumps out of the truck and turns to the driver but before she has a chance to say thanks he boasts,

“I know you’ll do your pa right, little firecracker. You give that grandpa what he has coming,” he says with a smile.

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about that mister. When I’m done with him, he’ll have my words to haunt him right into his grave.”

The driver lets out a thunderous laughter,

“Oh, I believe that.”

He Pauses then continues,

“Well, If you ever get back this way, look me up and let me know how it went. The name is reverend Charles. Just ask anyone and they’ll tell you how to find me.”

“Will do,” smiles Carla, “but I don’t think I’ll be back anytime soon,” she says with a tad bit of sadness in her voice.

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Drinking her coffee in the morning light Carla stares at the only thing she has to track down her dead-beat grandpa. The faded picture of the white and blue house with the words Landers Point on the back stares back at her with urgency.

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The warm morning sun is a welcome change from last night as she rounds the corner and passes the church. According to the hotel receptionist the house should be right next door. A smile crosses her face as she recognizes the reverend's truck in the church drive. She moves quickly to avoid being seen by the reverend. She creeps through the overgrown yard and up the steps of the porch. Just as she reaches out to knock on the door the reverend flings open the door.

“Well hey there little lady. You forget something?”

Carla’s face turns pale white as tears stream down her face. She reaches in her pocket and pulls out the letter.

Handing the letter to the reverend she says,

“I believe this is for you, Grandpa.”

The End

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