

# Green Trees

by Lisa K. Stephenson

Her ambrosial cachinnation was distinguishable from an outlying distance. A pulchritudinous woman with the ability to play God, breathing life into that around her, and by that, I mean me. I was the Eve to her Adam despite our chronological dawning. My baby sister was as distinct as they came, for without her I would continue to be nothing more than the rib inside of a chest. Still, my words, my thoughts, my expressions of good faith will never be enough to describe her.

SITTING ON MY PORCH rocking my chair on this hot summer day reminds me of the good ol' days. The days filled with laughter and commotion as the children frolicked outside and climbed the trees in search of new drivers and customers. Now, being the owner of the newly renovated cottage bought from a terminally ill gentleman by the name of Kansas Hendricks—a place meant to be a chance to start anew and tear away from the outside world long enough to find ourselves—became my biggest regret. Peter and I were looking for a reason to love one another again after all we had been through.

My cottage now remained the same as it was fifteen years ago. A large yellow brick home, with an extended fireplace, four bedrooms, and two and a half bathrooms. Through my sickness I have spent months working effortlessly to bring this cottage up to modern standards, and now it is finally there, and despite all the hurt and hardships that took place here I am proud to call this home—the crimson tiles, the marble-like counters, and the fresh scent of oak which always graced my nostrils each morning.

The view from the porch is nothing fancy; three oak trees stand healthy, tall, and wide overlooking the long, desolate road extending out about two miles down to the neighbors. The dirt that picks up every time someone drives by is enough to cause your eyes to burn. During the on-season customers would drive up and the children would yell, “Auntie, Auntie, someone here to buy from you!” I would run outside, leaving my pot on the stove, damn near almost burning the place down. Elated someone had come by to buy some of that there fresh vegetation I had worked so hard to produce.

Each time someone came, I remembered the pain I felt each time they left, thinking to myself, when will another come and how much vegetation am I going to have to waste until then? Business was slow and aside from his leaving I hated that man for convincing me to grow vegetation and sell produce. That was all I had become, a fat, ugly, produce-selling woman all alone raising kids that weren't even mine.

Each day I would fall deeper into my depression. Feeling unwanted and unloved. Feeling the need to take my life but telling myself that that is a sin. Entering heaven would no longer be an option if I ended the one life that the almighty had given me. I had so much to complain about, yet so much to be grateful for. Some of those days were rough and miserable, but they were still good. God made them good. It was a time when my faith had been restored so frequently, I realized there had to be a God. Each time I cried and questioned his almighty he would show me a sign or speak to my spirit, ensuring me of better days to come. Hearing him, and hearing those children play, made them days good ol' days.

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Despite my eyesight becoming poor I can see the man treading in the hot sun with his briefcase, stepping lightly, passing the overpopulated cornfield. The South Carolina sun was always one to reckon with, reaching a high of 105 degrees today. Fanning profusely, I watch the stiffness of the trees directly parallel to the porch, and the long, uninhabited road flickering, covered in sand and dust. The man growing weary as he reaches for the handkerchief in his left suit pocket to begin wiping his forehead copiously; thinking to himself what a bad idea it was to have put on this three-piece suit with such an ornate necktie. Watching him fold his handkerchief, placing it into his back pocket, I can tell he is a traveler, must be from the east because he treads in disbelief, not sure if it is the sun he is feeling, for he had no idea the sun could be so cruel to shine without remorse. Not a cloud in sight to ease the scorching. Biting my lip, I can see him becoming more pronounced as he reaches closer and closer in view. Now stepping firmly onto my land, he begins lightly gasping, drawing for air as his pace slows and he comes to a halt five feet from my porch steps. A tall dark-skinned African-American man, with squinting eyes, looking at me he speaks.

“Morning, ma’am, my name, eh, Washington Clarke and I’m looking for a woman by the name of uh, Ms. Vernetta Robinson.” Fidgety little guy, he can’t stay still. Rubbing his eyes, twitching his fingers, swatting away the pesky bees while wiping the tears of discomfort caused by the sun as they flow freely down his left and right cheek. I resist the urge to scream, *STAY STILL, YOUNG MAN, STAY STILL*, all while realizing that despite my having raised an abundance of children, he is not one of them.

I hold my head high, glancing at this ol’ Washington, thinking to myself, what could a man this handsome want with an old gal such as myself? But I need not worry, he seems harmless.

“I am Ms. Vernetta, now what do you want? No produce be sold on this land no mo’.”

He smiled a beautiful smile, undoubtedly handsome, once again removing his handkerchief, this time from his back pocket, wiping his cheeks, lips, neck, and eyelids.

WASHINGTON CLARKE: “Hello, Ms. Vernetta, the pleasure is all mine. You are truly much more beautiful in person.”