

CLINGING TO DOORS



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by Dillon Hamilton

Families rarely flee their homes in the sunshine, but the Sigurdsson's did precisely that. Storms and sieges seemed more appropriate times to make mad dashes to greener pastures and these pastures were forecasted to have a week's worth of rain upon their arrival. But here, in the Willamette Valley pines had their cloudy curtain drawn back early and no morning mists for relief.

"All it would take is one slummer to toss his unfinished joint on the wrong pine needle pile and we'd all go up, today," Granny Sigurdsson complained and fanned herself with ten pages of directions she had printed off.

Her son, Mick Sigurdsson, was on top of a tarp-covered heap of belongings, tying them down with rope, when he asked, "That's how you think those wildfires start? By accident?"

"How should I know how these things start? You see a tinderbox and kids playing with fire around it and you know something is bound to happen. Shouldn't we stay and water down the edge of the property?" Granny asked.

"It's not ours anymore. We should have been gone last week. We're leaving, today, Mom."

"If we didn't sell, then we wouldn't have to leave so quickly. Your father left me enough to have a house here and in Oklahoma."

"We had to sell."

"I don't see why! Your father built most of this with his own hands."

"You know why we had to sell."

"Yeah, you quit your job."

“It was either quit now or get fired later.”

Granny began to pace the gravel drive in her flats but didn't seem to feel a thing. “Six generations on both sides have lived here and you leave it without finding a job some place else. Wouldn't be surprised if it took you four weeks to get to where you're going.”

“Why do you say that, Mom?”

She stopped pacing and used the papers to point at him. “'Cause you're leaving with your pants around your ankles. It's shameful!”

Mick cinched a rope, tied a knot, and hopped out of the bed of his truck near the opposite fender well and out of her sight. He walked around the bed, testing each rope he had tied. Granny leaned against the bed with her shoulder, barring him from checking the last two ropes.

“It's sold and our other house is bought and paid for. No going back now,” Mick said.

Lena Sigurdsson shimmied through the front door with her baby, Rose, on her hip and dragging a wheeled suitcase behind her. “I can't relay all of that. Come tell him yourself!” She yelled back into the house. “Dad, I forgot one. Sorry!”

Mick clenched his jaw and strummed the rope closest to him. “I guess it can go in the cab. You'll have to see if Granny minds though. She'll be the one riding next to it.”

“I don't mind, Lena, because I'm not going.”

“Not this again Granny,” Lena begged.

“I agree. Children regress on these decisions. Adults should not,” Mick said. He tried to sidestep his mother.

Granny crossed her arms and did so awkwardly with the papers in hand. She blocked his path a painful shuffle over the gravel. “The man who quits his job without another one to go to wants to lecture me about adulthood?”

“Daniel had to quit his job too, Granny. This isn’t a normal move,” Lena argued. She set Rose down. The sixteen-month-old picked up a chunk of gravel and threw it behind her head, meaning to throw it in front of herself, and said something incoherent. Granny almost broke her protest at the sight but hardened her resolve for her cause once the moment had passed.

“Micky, this is my home. You should understand that better than most. Your father carried me through the threshold when it was completed and he died in the back bedroom and I intend to do the same,” Granny said.

“If you stay here, it’ll be sooner rather than later,” Lena said.

“I have no interest in extending my years if it means I flee what all this family has built at the first sign of trouble. I mean to stay and fight for what is mine,” Granny said. She shoved past Mick and went to sulk near the tailgate for two reasons. The tailgate placed an object between her and her opponents, but not too much to continue the argument, and the sun now shone warmest there.

“I’ll deal with this later,” Mick said, returning to the house to round up the rest of the family and check each room for forgotten boxes or bags. Lena followed. Granny whirled to make another point against the “deserters”, a point that stung and cut them to the quick, spilling all the lily in their livers, but they were gone.

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“What an awful last meal,” Granny complained. She slumped in the patio chair. Mick dropped four bags of takeout on the patio table and returned to the car to grab all the drinks. There seventeen Sigurdsson’s in total under the pergola that Mick was saddened he could not take with him. His father had built it, using only Japanese woodworking tools and methods as a personal challenge, and Mick could not have been prouder. Now, in Mick’s mind, the pergola

and the house it was attached to were reserved for the futility and fire that engulfed the heart of the city.

“Takeout is for those too lazy to learn to cook or those chained to their desks, and since none of you have jobs, we know where you all fall,” Granny said.

“The cookware is already in the U-Haul. We’re not getting it back out for this,” Willa, Mick’s wife, said.

“That’s another thing. You’re paying a fortune for this U-Haul. Why aren’t we waiting until the rates fall?” Granny asked.

“Because they’re only predicted to rise,” Daniel, Lena’s husband, said. “Loads of Oregonians have the same idea as us.”

Granny struggled to sit straight in her chair. “There’s not enough men left to stay and hash it out with these knuckleheads living in the highway medians,” she said.

“That would be easy enough, but it’s not them we have to worry about, yet. It’s their enablers,” Daniel retorted.

“No need to educate me,” Granny said. “I know how it all works and I still strongly disagree with what you are all doing.”

Mick turned the corner of the house, walking like a duck and carrying three trays of soft drinks, stacked one atop the other. “The top tray holds the smoothies and I forget about the rest,” he said, as he sat them down.

“Did you remember my kombucha?” Lena asked.

“Darn! I knew I forgot something. I’ll go get you some!” Mick turned to leave.

“No, don’t worry about it, Dad. I can just have water.”

“I’m sorry, Lena,” he looked to Willa, “Has the blessing been said, yet?”

“No,” Willa said.

“Mom, would you like to say the blessing?” Mick asked Granny.

Granny frowned and shook her head. “Why would I? It’s no longer my house. You’re the man here. You say it.”

Mick smirked and said, “I will.” He prayed a brief prayer. He covered all of their earnest needs and adorations that he could remember. Deep groanings took care of what he forgot to pray for, and most of that was for Granny. All of God’s people said what they should have, and then they ate in somber quiet for a time. Mick broke the silence.

“Everyone be sure to use the bathroom before we go. We’re only making one stop before we get to Ogden,” he said.

“My bladder would need three stops, if I were going,” Granny said.

“Stop it, Granny,” Willa lashed out with her tongue. “You’ve been at this for weeks, but we all know you were the first one packed. You knew this was coming.”

“I knew it was coming, but I’m not afraid of it.”

Lena started in with an index finger and crass word, but Mick stopped her. “You are afraid of leaving. None of us are,” he said with firm plushness.