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## June, the Other, and the Oak Tree

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# June, the Other, and the Oak Tree

Haleigh Casto

Her glasses slipped down the bridge of her nose as she peered at the letter. The handwriting was beautiful, obviously of an educated girl. Of course, she came from a family far wealthier than the one June had created in their little company house. She only just caught her glasses as they made their way to clatter onto the pages that laid across her dining room table.

June wondered if the girl looked anything like her. Did she have the same dark hair as June? Maybe Edward complemented her amber eyes, like he had June's all those years ago. Did he hold up his glass of whiskey and make a comment on the similarity between the drink and her eyes? Their neighbor, Rebecca, caught her husband cheating on her a few summers ago, and she always said that girl could have been her sister. Did this girl look like she could be the sister June never had? Was she as tall as June? Was her nose upturned like June's? Maybe she carried herself the same way.

“June?”

“No.” He shook her from her thoughts, but she still couldn't bring herself to look up from the pages to meet the eyes of her husband. Her husband. Edward was a good man and father of all six of her kids. She thought he was a good man. She thought he just went to the mines, to the store, and home. Sure, he would go out, but she'd be damned if she had ever thought he was likely to do something like this.

“June, please. Just look at me, Juney.” He had taken to throwing himself at her feet. He was on his knees rocked back to rest against his heels and peering up at her, his hands gripping the arm of the dining room chair she was sitting in. She could see the black tucked into his knuckles and dusted across his honey colored hair.

“She’s pregnant, Ed.” She said it with force, more to the papers than to him on her left.  
“She is pregnant with your kid.”

“I’m sorry, Juney. It was a mistake.” He cued up his crying as he continued to plead with the side of her face. He was pushing and pulling on the dining room chair she was in with every sob, causing the legs to squeal. “Please, June. Believe me. I was drunk and she was offering. It was her, draping herself over me.”

“Divorce me,” she said, an eerie calmness in her tone.

“What?”

For the first time since he walked into the kitchen, June met his eyes. Maybe this other woman’s baby would have those eyes. Maybe they would share those same blue eyes with her eldest son and middle daughter.

“I said, divorce me.”

“I heard what you said, but why did you say that?” His eyes were glassier, more fearful, light eyebrows pitched upward in surprise.

“Divorce me and go marry that girl.” She said it with force, turning her entire body to him. “You divorce me and go marry that girl.”

“I don’t love her, June. I love you.”

“Well, too bad, Ed.” She pushed her chair back, freeing the arm from his grasp. “You didn’t love me enough not to have sex with another woman.”

“I was-”

“Drunk, I know.” She was to her feet now, pacing, wringing her hands to keep from throttling him. She could feel her braid whipping around with every turn she made. “Hell, I guess the term woman is a little loose, Ed. She’s barely 18! That’s a girl.”

“I didn’t know-”

She snapped to him. “I don’t care. You realize, she is closer to your daughter’s age than to yours.” She could feel the heat boiling her belly. She’s never been an angry person, but he wasn’t always a cheater. “Hell, Matthew could bring home an 18-year-old girl, and we wouldn’t bat a damn eye.”

“June.”

“No.” She paused, narrowing his eyes at him. He looked pathetic, kneeling on their linoleum floor, tear tracks cutting through the fine layer of coal dust on his face. “You are going to divorce me, and you are going to go marry her.”

“Why? Why leave? I love you, June. And, I love our kids. And-”

“I’ll tell you why, Ed.” Her hands articulated her points. “You divorce me, I live fine. I know how to make my money and keep my life stable. Divorced women have just as many rights as widows now. As for 18-year-old unmarried mothers, well, she ain’t going to make it past 18. As for that baby, well, society will damn near kill it, even if she is from money. There’s no validity in a bastard child, especially when that kid’s momma is a kid herself, no matter how much money they’re from!”

“She ain’t from money,” Ed said quietly.

“Oh, so you know she ain’t from money, but you didn’t know she was 18?” June asked, her lips pursed tightly as she watched him squirm.

“She was at the bar down in Lynch. Ain’t nobody from money coming down to Lynch for a glass,” Ed said to the floor.

“She would if the tap is cheap and they don’t ask for age. Honestly Ed, are you stupid or did you forget that you were a kid once too?”

Ed looked up to her, she apparently struck a never. “I’m not stupid, I just made a mistake.”

“Which is exactly why you are going to divorce me and marry her. Mistakes have consequences, you twit.”

Ed was to his feet, his eyes wide as he came closer to June's face. "You can't call me stupid in my own house and you can't tell me what to do. You can't force me out of here and you can't force me to marry her."

"I can't force ya; you're right. I'll tell you what I can do, Ed." She said, with a pointed jab to his chest. "I can bring that girl into my home, offer her a sisterhood, help her raise your spawn all they while your ass is out underneath the oak tree."

Ed gasped, moving back from her. "You are threatening to kill me?"

She couldn't help the laugh that fell from her lips as she caught Ed eyeing the hunting rifle Matthew had propped up by the pantry. "I never said anything about killing you, but it will sure as hell be a tragedy that such a loving wife, as myself, would be without my husband. I would be heartbroken, but boy, would I be better off living on your pension and my boarding house. And hell, ain't nobody goin' question it."

"And what about her? I run off, leave you. How are you going to know I go to her? How are you going to explain a girl and a baby in this house?"

June gave another laugh, straightened her back and smiled at him. "Poor girl lost her husband in a mine. She couldn't live alone. I was so heartbroken at the loss of my own husband, that we bonded, and I took her in. I love her company and well, it takes a community to raise a baby."

"That didn't answer-"

"Don't interrupt me, Ed. As for knowing if you go to her, well," June held up the paper. "We are in communication with one another, and you can bet your ass that I will know if you go to her. Hell, I doubt she'll even want you. If you do run off without marrying her, you best hope I never find you."

"Because you'll kill me?" Ed asked.

"I never said anything about killing, but I can haul your ass back to that oak tree dead or alive."

“So, I can leave and marry her and never see our kids again, or I can leave and hope you never find me, or you can *kill* me right now?” The word *kill* sounded as though it itself had the potential to kill him.

“I’ll give ya till noon. I gave you my demand and the conscience.” June turned her back on him, fanning her hands over her skirt as she moved from the kitchen. “But I’ll let you think on it for the night. Hope the living room couch treats you well.”