

James Stevenson

Silvery Lane

After months of deliberation Jack was finally the proud owner of a home with a cobblestone driveway. For him it wasn't so much the driveway, in fact it wasn't even the home that sat next to it. To be honest it was all about an elm tree positioned at the front of this lot that hung partially over the road.

Thirty years ago, this same tree was Jack's safe haven every Sunday and Thursday night. Jack would be sitting outside a restaurant waiting for Cassie to get out of work. About midnight she would come bursting out the door, then she would toss Jack the keys and say, "You're driving." Jack had expected as much, the passenger door was already open awaiting her arrival. After a quick kiss, he shut her door, then raced for the driver's seat of her used Buick. As soon as he pulled onto Telegraph she would hand him a paper bag that held a vanilla shake and large fries. This was Cassie's idea of distraction while she changed from her uniform into a faded pair of blue jeans and a shirt she confiscated from Jack a few months back. Sure the flannel has seen better days, but what it did have going for it was that it smelled exactly like him. Which helped Cassie sleep the other five nights that they weren't together.

Four miles, 10 minutes, and three turns later the Buick headed north towards a dark home, the one with the large elm out front. The shakes and fries had already become a memory as Jack turned the car and its headlights off. The next hour would be spent talking about their days apart, mostly it was spent complaining about their jobs. After that the next hour was spent exploring each other's innocence, then around 2 a.m. they would curl up together and fall asleep on the front seat of her small car.

At 5:30 a.m. chirping birds would always wake Jack, while his unembellished nightingale still slept soundly. Her kicked off shoes and socks littered the passenger floorboards, the top two buttons of the flannel were missing, while a lone gold chain and cross adorned her slim neck. Native blonde hair covered parts of her face and shoulders as "Love Bazaar" played softly from the back seat radio. For these two the words rang true, though to others they might be misconstrued. Four houses down a street light gave off an eerie glow as fog ran down the inside windows.

Outside rain gently moved across the glass. Looking up through the sunroof it seemed heaven had arrived, as their reflection hung proudly like a Rembrandt for all the world to see. This morning was for Jack's eyes only.

Jack could feel her heartbeat in his hand as her slow breath fluttered like a cool breeze upon his neck. Jack leaned in and kissed her sanguine lips gently, a hint of strawberries was still evident. Her blue eyes remained closed, covered by sea-blue eyeshadow. Here serenity was somehow achieved on the front seat of a Skylark, and that's exactly what happened every time they spent a night under their old tree. Outside of Cassie's car, this street, the separate cities they lived in, Jack had responsibilities. But right here, right now, nothing but opportunities. Waking up to a morning like this was sometimes indescribable, a morning like this could change a person and was what most people dreamed about. Today Jack was able to see and hold his future, the sounds of silence had never rung so loud.

As Jack's mind continued to wander, Cassie's impetuous eyes suddenly fluttered open. That look, that smile, the way she whispered "good morning" fractured his unassailable soul, supplying him with an undeniable peace. This was the routine they kept to and stuck with for many years. Nothing more, nothing less. The candor of Jack's little renegade was becoming difficult to handle. He never spoke the words he kept locked deep inside, never offered her more than she ever wanted or expected and this is why their relationship had lasted so long. Would she ever want more? He hoped someday she would.

Eventually Jack would have to take a chance and put all his cards on the table, he had to say what he kept hidden inside. He had to tell her that he loved her more than life itself, and he hoped she felt the same. Well, that day came and went, and unfortunately Cassie wasn't as receptive as Jack had hoped. Not long after that she declared it was time for her to move on, to figure out what direction her life would take, and she couldn't do that with him around. Just like that it had ended, all that was right was gone, and that was 30 years ago.

Well, about one year ago Jack woke from a dream he had about Cassie, the infamous elm tree, and their nights in her old Skylark. The exact time Jack woke from this dream—5:30 a.m., just as he had so many times when they were together. After a 29-year absence she had finally returned, at least in his dreams she had. Not knowing what to do next, Jack felt forced to return to the scene of the crime on Silvery Lane, no matter how much it may hurt.

As Jack drove to the spot where they spent so many innocuous nights, his hands started to sweat. Even his heart seemed to be afflicted. Moments later he arrived under the familiar tree. Except now he felt alone and conflicted, as a labyrinth of emotions shook Jack to his core, and Cassie, she wasn't in his life anymore.

Jack sat in his car for over an hour comparing how much the neighborhood had changed over the years. When in all likelihood it

might have just been the brightness of the afternoon sun. He was getting ready to leave when a yellow truck pulled up onto the cobblestone driveway. The driver got out and went around to the back of his truck, pulled out a yellow “for sale” sign and stuck it in a pre-dug hole in the lawn between the bungalow and tree. A home, which Jack had barely noticed until now. Jack wondered what the view from inside might be like. So he reached for his phone, dialed the realtor’s number and set an appointment for later in the week.

Today was now the big day. Jack filled out the big check, signed all the papers and collected the keys. After all that, he was finally the proud owner of a home and the tree that held so many fond memories. Standing on the porch holding the keys tightly. Jack couldn’t help but think what Cassie’s response might have been, if he had pulled onto the cobblestone drive and handed her these keys 30 years ago. Would she have accepted? Would she still have run? And why had she left in the first place? So many unanswered questions still lingered, and so far buying this new place hadn’t helped to unravel that mystery.

Jack’s plan for his first night would be to sleep in the master bedroom on a brand new king-size bed. Just him and his 4-year-old Husky named Sassy. What he was wishing was something altogether different: one more night under the stars in a black Buick and under a tree he now owned. A tree that sheltered them for years. A tree that stood the test of time, something he and Cassie had failed to achieve. As insignificant as it might seem to most, that elm was all he had left of her.

On that first night alone something happened, Cassie had once again returned to his dreams and did so every night for weeks on end. Jack woke every night at 5:30 a.m. sharp, just as he had so many years earlier. Maybe it was the birds, maybe it was something different. Maybe it was the thoughts of her that never seemed to leave. After several weeks, Jack started to think buying this place had been a huge mistake. For all these sleepless nights had started to take a toll on him both mentally and physically. Jack’s boss at work had also taken notice of his lack of production. What could Jack do now? Should he try to locate Cassie? Did she want to be found? If he did find her, would she be willing to meet him? For Jack there was no right or wrong answer, only more questions. Still something had to be done.

Finally one Thursday after tossing and turning for more than three hours, Jack couldn’t take it anymore. He jumped out of bed, put on his Crocs and a t-shirt, grabbed his car keys and said to his half sleeping dog, “Sass, are you coming?” The dog stood up, stretched, and slowly followed Jack down the hallway to the garage. When Jack reached the truck in the garage he opened the driver’s door, and Sassy jumped in. Jack followed

and closed the door of the blue F-150. Then he started the vehicle, hit the button to open the garage door, backed the truck out and parked it directly under the elm tree.

Sassy had been woken up and was ready to enjoy a ride elsewhere, anywhere; she didn't care. So when Jack turned the truck off, Sassy must have thought Jack had gone crazy. After several minutes of staring out the window, Sassy finally found a comfortable spot and laid her head on Jack's right thigh.

It was well after 2 a.m., the street was empty, a lone traffic light blinked red in the distance. Jack flipped through several stations hoping to find something to help him sleep. After failing to locate anything worth listening to, Jack pulled out *Purple Rain* and loaded it into the CD player. He then closed his eyes and tried to get comfortable in his reclined seat. Jack prayed for some real sleep, a sleep that would be the first since purchasing his own spot on Silvery Lane.

But at 5:30 a.m. Jack woke to an all too familiar sound, chirping birds, just as he had done three decades earlier. He rubbed his eyes, sat up, looked around; everything seemed the same as it had all those years before. To Jack it felt as though he had come back in time, the darkness returned him to a place he felt he never left. Looking into his rearview mirror something new was revealed, the grey in his beard, and the distinctive lines that stretched outward from the corners of his eyes which told Jack the truth about where he really was—alone!

Sassy started stretching on the front seat and looking around to see things for herself. About a minute later, Jack noticed a car parked near his rear bumper. He couldn't make out the brand, only that it was dark blue or black and seemed fairly new. The second thing Jack spotted was someone reclined in the car's driver's seat with what seemed to be blonde-colored hair. But he couldn't be sure because the glow from the car's radio didn't emit enough light.

Jack smiled, his mind raced, his heart seemed heavy. Was this a joke? Could it be the woman he longed for, for over half his life? Or was it just a coincidence? Maybe just a random stranger who happened to show up on his tailgate at this exact moment, or an answer to his prayers. Well, Jack had never been someone who believed in coincidences so he climbed from his truck as Sassy tagged along. The light from the truck seemed to stir the occupant in the car, which Jack could now see was a dark blue Buick less than one year old. When he reached the Regal's door the driver's window slowly rolled down. Jack could now clearly recognize his long lost nightingale sitting right there. The years had been kind—same hair, same blue eyes, same smile. She was beautiful.

As their eyes met Jack smiled and asked, "Is that my old shirt?" With

a straight face Cassie answered, “Yes and why are you parked in my spot?”

Jack laughed out loud which startled the dog as she gave off a soft yelp. Cassie looked out toward the dog and asked, “Who’s this?” “Oh this is Sassy, my best friend.” Jack answered. “Sassy? You gave your dog the nickname you once gave me?” she questioned.

With a puzzled look Jack answered, “What did you expect me to do, talk to myself? Besides she’s just as sassy as you ever were.” Then Jack reached into the pocket of his sweats and fished out a solemn key from his key ring and tossed it to Cassie.

“What’s this for?” She asked.

“The front door of that house, so we won’t have to sleep in a car for the rest of our lives.” Jack said slyly.

Cassie got out of the car, walked around to the passenger side rear door and opened it.

Jack asked, “What are you doing?”

“Getting your granddaughter,” she answered.

“How is that possible?” He asked.

“That’s why I left all those years ago, I was pregnant and didn’t want to burden you. We were young, and you had big plans for the future. I didn’t want you to regret your life. I have a daughter who is now 29, and this is her little girl, Shelby. She’s 6 months old. Shelby couldn’t fall asleep, so we went for a ride and ended up here.”

Jack was astonished. He didn’t know what to say or do. Cassie walked over to Jack holding the baby and asked, “Do you want to hold her?”

“I’d rather hold you first,” Jack quipped. Then he put his arms around Cassie and hugged them both.

“Do you still love me?” She asked.

“Always!” Said Jack. “Oh, and what took so long getting here?”

Cassie just smiles and said, “I didn’t have the address!”