

First Time

by Trini

Part 1 of 3

This fictional story is a completely imagined situation between what could be construed as real people. The author makes no claim as to the actual lives of the people mentioned herein. Style: URP Fic ~ Rating: PG

It seems like they've been standing there talking for hours about the piles of furniture and trash strewn all over his back yard. She wonders if he'll get around to mentioning the dogs. They've been neighbors for years and have always gotten along well. They both know it's because she's such a genuinely nice person. Anyone else would have contacted the health department and reported his property as a health hazard a long time ago. Her driveway overlooks his back yard and every time she leaves the house she follows the same routine: first, she unlocks and opens her car door, leans against the inside of the door while she makes a quick visual sweep of their yard taking a mental inventory of everything there. She knows exactly how many sofas, end tables, flattened bike tires and splintered skateboards were there the last time she went out to get in her car. Nothing new has been added since a bank of seats from their old van appeared on their patio one morning, propped up against the wall of the house. They gave the van away a few months later, apparently missing some passenger seats. She'd love to ask him why he didn't put the seats back in the van when he got rid of it, but resists the urge. She's sure she's better off not knowing. She tells herself that things could be worse: they could have kept the van. Immediately she conjures up an image of a navy and silver van carcass plopped in the middle of their backyard, rusting away, home to scores of possums and raccoons and goodness knows what else.

She's not certain why he's suddenly inspired to do something about the awful condition of his property. His yard's been an eyesore for years. She wonders what happened to get him going. She starts to ask him if something specific triggered this sudden impulse to clean up around the house, but she stops short. He probably doesn't know himself. He tells her that she's endured the blight of being his next-door-neighbor long enough and proposes swift action. He wants to put up a privacy fence that will run the length of her driveway thus blocking any view of his back yard. She is grateful. She listens politely to more details of his privacy-fence proposal nodding her head often, not so much in agreement—she really doesn't like the idea of a privacy fence, she'd rather he just clean up the yard—but more as a sort of positive reinforcement which she hopes will encourage him to talk about the dogs. His three freakishly-large dogs often run loose and terrorize the neighborhood. She doesn't know how long his neighborliness will last and feels she should strike while the iron is hot. If he doesn't bring up the dogs, she will.

She loved animals. At one time she seriously considered studying veterinary medicine. Decided against it because she knew she couldn't bear their suffering. The tenderness and concern for animals that stirred so deeply in her heart and emotions sometimes perplexed her, other times overwhelmed her. As silly as it sounds oftentimes she felt as if God designed her that way, like it was part of her biological makeup. All the more alarming and surprising then this intense dislike she had for his dogs. They'd bitten several neighborhood people and terrorized many more including her friend Lily who'd come for a quiet visit. Lily had lost her mother a few months earlier and was in need of rest and relaxation. She pulls into the driveway, tired from the long drive and happy at the thought of getting out of the car. She turns the ignition key to the off position, opens the door and just as she closes the door and starts to move toward the trunk of the car, the "Hollywood Hills' hounds from Hell" appear, and snapping and snarling they "triangulate" her as she tries to maneuver her way to the house. She can't get to the trunk to get her luggage. When she tries to make a dash for the front door the dog, who she later learns is called "Frank", gets hold of her skirt, shaking his head ferociously and growling fiercely while the other two dogs continue to snap and bark. Lily finally frees herself from the freakishly-large jaws of Frank, but not before he manages to kill her skirt with his freakishly-large teeth. This sudden memory of poor Lily shaking and frightened, skirt in tatters, makes her angry.

His dogs are a menace. No, she doesn't really want a privacy fence. Besides it would obstruct the view of the large banyan tree, the one the cardinals nest in every year, something she looks forward to seeing every spring. As he continues making apologies to her for his Beverly Hillbilly lifestyle, she thinks she should tell him that she prefers not to have a privacy fence. She can live with his yard the way it is. But not his dogs. Not running loose. She hears herself telling him that the fence isn't necessary. In an uncharacteristically stern voice she says that his dogs cannot continue to run loose the way they have in the past. He has to address that right away. It's unacceptable to the entire neighborhood. He stares at her for a moment, his lower jaw slackens and he swallows hard several times. He sighs, purses his lips, looks down at the ground. Immediately regret overwhelms her. She wants so badly to take those words back. She wants to touch him, hug him, something but she can't move. Finally, he looks up at her and he takes her hands in his and while he holds them, he apologizes to her. Her eyes well up with tears. So do his. She knows she's on the verge of an all-out cry and has to do something fast. "Do you like figs? I've got so many fresh figs that I can't possibly use." He smiles and says that his entire family loves figs. They start to walk toward the back of her house as he describes to her one of his favorite fig dishes. As they near the tree, his hands and arms start moving as he demonstrates the best way to get the figs from the higher branches.

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