

Laughter once more

A short story

By Allan Carter

Her vision blurred as the tears streamed from her eyes and trailed down over her red cheeks. She blinked, and unsuccessfully tried to wipe away the tears with the side of her small hand. Looking around at the familiar surroundings, the forest had seemed ominous and the large old bent tress creaking in the wind made her feel trapped and alone - completely alone.

She took a step forward and the dead leaves crackled under her feet. Suddenly a wind came up and blew through the trees. The dead leaves came alive and drifted around her feet as they headed towards the river that lay behind her.

Looking at the moon that was reflected in the quiet river, she wondered if she could ever live a life as perfect and peaceful as the white round object that silently glided along the still river. She wondered if she could ever get over her dreadful experiences. She wondered if she could ever have another man touch her. She started to cry again and fell sobbing to the ground.

She heard a noise in the dark. Freezing like a frightened animal she prayed it was nothing more than a squirrel. But she panicked.

She turned towards the river and ran. Behind her she could hear dead leaves crackling and branches snapping off the dormant trees as the animal came closer. She could hear him breathing and grunting in short gasps as he shortened the distance between the two of them.

Knowing the situation was hopeless she quickly halted and dropped to the ground covering her head with her long slender arms waiting for the beatings to begin. The figure behind her could not stop quickly enough and as his leg struck her in the back she gasped out in pain. He toppled over her and landed on the ground with his heavy legs on top of her huddled-up body.

She kept still in her fetal position wondering when he would start cursing and begin hitting her. Above her clouds covered the moon and the forest was enveloped in almost complete darkness.

She thought about running again, but with his legs over her small body she did not think she would get far. The body that half-lay on her remained motionless and she could hear the crickets and a fish splash-

ing in the river in the still darkness.

As she crouched there wondering what to do, she thought about the time her father had taken her to the exhibition on a hot summer day. She had spent the day on fun rides and sharing ice-cream with him as they played bingo under the shade of a huge, open tent. She had looked at her father as he was trying to put the markers in their right places while a fat short man with a microphone spurted out the letters and numbers. Looking at the honest concentration etched out in his face, she was filled with a sudden surge of warmth and love and she reached up and kissed her father on the nose. In surprise he spilled the cards over the trampled grass below them, and they both laughed until they were almost sick.

She remembered how happy she had been that day until her father had stopped at a building, gone in and left her in the truck.

She had sat in the truck waiting and watching the red sun drop down from her sight and she realized that she had to pee. But as she watched the men stagger out of the building where her father had entered she did not dare go in. In shame, she had peed in her pants and when her father came out he swore at her and slapped her across the face.

Taking her up a dirt road, he had thrown her in the back of the truck. He started to take off her dress and she could smell the liquor on his breath as he leaned close to her. She had closed her eyes and tried to shut out what her father was doing. She tried listening only to the wind whispering through the forest beside them, and the old trees which were creaking from the push of the invisible force.

Now her father was half way on top of her and he was not moving. With a deep breath she slid herself up from under his feet and crawled up to the front of his hefty body. She saw blood splashed over a jagged rock. She gasped and in both fear and concern touched her father, he still did not move.

Using both of her hands, she pushed his side and he slowly turned over. She watched as the blood poured from a gash in his forehead. Hesitating she wondered what to do, she slowly and cautiously placed her head on his chest. He was not breathing and she could not hear his heart beating.

Trembling she looked once more at his face and holding back the tears she kissed his nose. She could smell the familiar stench of liquor. She slowly got up, took off her coat and placed it over his bloodied head.

As the cold wind blew through her thin dress she walked over to the river and sat down in the long, prickly grass.

Listening to the crickets and a fish splashing in the river, she thought of the day she sat cuddled up to her father under the cool, shady tent while a fat, short man yelled out numbers and letters. With a smile she looked up at the moon which was slowly appearing from behind a black cloud and she heard the beautiful laughter once more.



Photo by Dave Smith