

SHOT TO THE HEART

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. COMFORTABLE RURAL HOME - EARLY EVENING

The golden light of sunset filters in. JERRY, blue collar, 50, sits in his worn recliner, sipping coffee. The room is warm and rustic. A framed PHOTO of a younger Jerry with his father nearby. Above the fireplace, a SHOTGUN, lovingly mounted.

The SOUND of a DOOR opening and closing and then...

A FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Dad? I'm home. You here?

LENA, 21, duffel bag slung over her shoulder, sporting a red sweatshirt with "STATE" displayed across the front appears in the doorway. Jerry smiles, rises with open arms.

JERRY

Lena, sweetheart! You're home!

He enfolds her in a bear hug. Lena closes her eyes and relishes the warm embrace.

LENA

You know I wouldn't miss the holidays with you.

Jerry steps back, holds her at arms length.

JERRY

Just look at you. More grown up every time I see you. The very picture of your mother.

Lena nods, smiles lovingly at him but then, something behind him catches her eye. Her mood changes instantly.

LENA

Dad! What is that?

JERRY

What is what?

He looks around, clueless.

LENA

That!

She points directly to the shotgun displayed over the fireplace.

Jerry turns to look.

JERRY

Oh honey, it's just old "Peg". I got her out, cleaned her up and decided she was too pretty to put back in the case.

He displays a far away gaze for a moment.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Looking at her brings back old memories. Good times. People that are gone now.

LENA

Dad, you know how I feel about assault weapons. And then I walk in to find...this!

She points again toward the shotgun.

JERRY

Wait just a minute there, little girl. First of all, it's a shotgun, a necessity for hunting game. And secondly, Peg is not an "assault weapon" she's how I put food on our table when you were growing up if you care to remember that. As did my Dad and his Dad before him. She's part of my history and part of this family.

LENA

Dad, those things kill people!

JERRY

Peg has never killed anyone. She hasn't even been off this property in more than fifteen years, and never shot anything more than twelve gauge birdshot at that.

LENA

It's a gun, Dad. It's not an heirloom or a family tradition. Do you know how many "active shooter" drills I've had to endure in my life?

JERRY

What in the world has gotten into you, Lena. I sent you off to college to be a teacher, like you've always dreamed, not to come home with your head filled with some sort of nonsense.

LENA

Three students were shot last semester in a dorm just down the street from me...I knew two of them. It isn't nonsense, Dad. That gun represents something, and you know it.

Her lip begins to quiver.

JERRY

Yes, it sure does. But not what you're thinking. To me it represents your grandfather's hands. His stories. The way he taught me to hunt, to be patient. To respect the land and the wildlife it provided. It's a connection to people I loved. I know you're too young to remember, but even your Mother loved to go out on the duck hunts with me.

LENA

Mom? Are you serious?

JERRY

Some of my best memories of her. There's something about the river, the quiet just before dawn. The approach of the first flock of ducks. The first rays of sunrise reflected in her eyes. I had never felt love more than I did in those moments.

Lena is silent, reflecting on the words, her eyes misty.

LENA

I understand, Dad, but things are different now.

Jerry ponders this, looks to Lena.

JERRY

Let's go out to the garage.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Dust hangs in the air freckled by the porch light through the open door. Jerry and Lena sift through old boxes. She opens a faded tin and pulls out photos: Jerry, young, holding the shotgun and a black labrador DOG, along with a young CHARLENE decked out in camo and waders.

LENA

Mom?

JERRY

Yes. Young weren't we? And that was Sal. Best duck dog ever.

Lena smiles softly, runs her finger over the photo.

Jerry looks out the garage door to the driveway. A classic convertible MUSTANG car is parked.

JERRY (CONT'D)

How's the car running?

LENA

Perfect as always. I'm the envy of anyone who sees her.

JERRY

Why do you love that car so much?

Lena looks at him questioningly.

LENA

You know why I love her. She belonged to Mom. Some of my earliest memories were riding in that car with her, top down, wind in our hair. I thought Mom looked like an angel. I just wanted to be like her.

Jerry nods.

JERRY

That's why I put her away when Charlene passed. Got her out and restored her for your eighteenth birthday...so you could have a piece of your mother that you loved.

Lena smiles softly, remembering. Jerry's face darkens.

A beat.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
Cars kill people, Lena.

Lena looks to him shocked at the statement. She knows where this is going.

LENA  
Dad! How could you even say that?  
It's not the same and you know it!

JERRY  
Maybe not. But maybe it can give  
you some needed perspective.

Lena glares at him, unconvinced. Jerry softens, pushes the box of photos closer to her again.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
Maybe if you keep looking through  
some of these old things, you may  
understand a little more.

Lena sighs, relents and continues to rummage, pausing to consider each photo. She digs deeper, finds an old crumpled paper, unfolds it.

LENA  
(reading aloud)  
"To whomever finds this - I don't  
know how to raise a daughter,  
especially not alone. I miss her  
mother every day. But maybe if I  
keep family traditions alive, teach  
her our family history, she will  
always know she belongs here..."

Jerry looks away, embarrassed.

LENA (CONT'D)  
(off his look)  
Was this about me?

JERRY  
I didn't know what I was doing half  
the time after your mother passed.  
Still don't. It was a shot to the  
heart that I never got over.

Quiet descends as Lena considers Jerry's words.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - LATER

They sit in silence over supper.

LENA

Dad, you know, I don't want to erase your memories. I just want to feel like they can... evolve. Like maybe we can build new traditions that aren't tied to...to weapons.

Jerry remains silent for a moment.

JERRY

It's hard letting go of the things that anchored you.

LENA

It's harder pretending that this is something that won't make us grow apart.

Jerry hesitates then pushes his chair back and walks out. Lena calls after him.

LENA (CONT'D)

Dad, please...wait.

INT. DEN - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Jerry removes the shotgun from the wall. Gently places it in a gun case. Locks it.

Lena walks in.

JERRY

I'm not getting rid of it. But I can put it away. Maybe remembering doesn't have to mean putting it on display.

Lena smiles, reaches out and touches his hand.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - MORNING

Jerry and Lena sit on the porch, sipping coffee. The gun, safely locked in its case is propped nearby, no longer a point of contention.

JERRY

You still have those big plans in your head of running for City Council someday?

LENA  
Sure do. Someone's gotta "cancel"  
you.

Jerry nods, chuckles. They share a warm look, then...

Jerry looks out to a JON BOAT parked behind his PICKUP TRUCK.

JERRY  
What do you say, I hook up the  
boat. We can go down to the river  
and look for a few ducks. It's just  
not the holidays without your  
mother's duck dressing.

Lena makes a "yuck" face.

LENA  
You know I always hated that.

She softens.

LENA (CONT'D)  
But you're right, it just wouldn't  
be the holidays without duck  
dressing.

Jerry is encouraged.

JERRY  
Maybe I can even show you how to  
shoot old Peg. Show you she's not  
such a bad old girl...

LENA  
Dad...

Jerry holds up his hands in defeat.

JERRY  
Okay. Okay. I just got carried  
away. Maybe next time.

Lena raises her eyebrow but smiles lovingly at him.

LENA  
Yeah, maybe next time.

Off her look, Jerry brings his coffee cup up covering his  
face and takes a long swig.

FADE OUT.

THE END