

WHEN GARDENS KILL

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT./EXT. TRUCK - DAY

It's a half ton chevy truck - 1982 vintage, John Deere green, with red dingle balls, a gas guzzler, everything modern society dislikes.

Inside the cab, FRED JOYNER, 30, a weary farmer, grabs the stick shift and slams 'er into gear. With loud protests from years of overwork and minimum maintenance, the chevy creeps slowly inside the family garden. It's harvest time.

FRED JOYNER

(hollers)

Ya know, Brenda, how many times
have I told ya I'm not just some
country bumpkin?

Sitting beside Fred is his long-suffering wife, BRENDA JOYNER, 23, as she hangs on for dear life. An attractive woman, with brown hair and big brown eyes, we notice Brenda's hair, nails and clothing hasn't seen a fashion makeover in several years. No Kardashian glamour here.

Brenda has a black eye and several bruises can be seen on her face and body. Band aids cover her right forearm.

BRENDA JOYNER

(stutters)

I, I, I.... nnnnnever

FRED JOYNER

Zip it.

Suddenly the chevy lurches and speeds ahead as the engine revs.

Fred's baseball cap flies off his head as his upper body jerks toward the steering wheel. Wrinkles and frowns showcase Fred's face - the years ain't been easy. Dressed in typical denim overalls and a plaid shirt, Fred's clothing hasn't seen a washer and dryer for several weeks. Fred could care less.

Brenda nervously glances over her shoulder and looks back into the truck bed with concern.

FRED JOYNER (CONT'D)

Why I remember my Dad, wouldn't
take crap from anybody. He'd beat
the shit out of anyone that tried -
including his own family.

(MORE)

FRED JOYNER (CONT'D)

Many's the frickin' day I went to school after he knocked my block off.

We see LADY, 13, a well bred, intelligent german shepherd, as she lays in the truck bed. As far as dogs go, Lady's the best. Dedicated, damn smart and well-behaved, she's got great qualities for a farm dog. But Lady's tethered to a massive metal chain, with only two feet of freedom.

BRENDA JOYNER

Lookie here, LLLLLLLady's not gonna run away. She lllllllloves us. Can't ya chill Fred, farm life's not that bad?

Fred scratches his head.

FRED JOYNER

It's gettin' so a farmer can't make any returns to earn a decent livin'. Bankers today, they got no ethics, no character. They're stealin' from me, plain and simple.

BRENDA JOYNER

Now FFFFred...

Fred slams on the brakes and Linda nearly goes through the windshield.

FRED JOYNER

Forget about it. Don't worry that empty little head of yours.

Fred picks up speed and Lady gets bumped around as the truck accelerates.

Brenda turns back, and worries about Lady. As Brenda leans into Fred in order to stabilize herself, there's a loud grunt and wallop as Fred shoves her aside - she smacks into the passenger door. Linda ricochets back and forth, then wraps her arms around herself for protection

BRENDA JOYNER.

FFFFFred, I've been checking - now you take the nnnnnnew chevy trucks, why they're making a ffffffour cylinder engine. I hear they promise more miles per gallon. Could be a money saver for us yeah?

FRED JOYNER

Hey, hey, hey, Brenda, new ain't
always better. Is it clear what
I'm sayin'?

BRENDA JOYNER

Nature of the beast, wwwwhat do I
know?

FRED JOYNER

Don't you be talking about nature.
Ahhhh, nature between man and a
woman, why you can't hide it.
Who's that guy you flirted with
last night? It's a wrong
situation, woman. You ain't gonna
get away with it.

Brenda shrinks down in her seat. She pulls her hair in
frustration, then resigns herself to the fact this is a
continuing saga. Fred grabs Brenda's arm and twists it
behind her back. Brenda winces.

BRENDA JOYNER

You know HHHHHank, he's Shirley's
husband - from work.

FRED JOYNER

Ya know I'm a patient man. Sure
I'll wait for the day when you
stop your cheatin' ways - flirtin'
and chasin' with other men. But I
ain't that generous.

Fred swings his right arm and whacks Brenda on the shoulder.
A second swing of his fist hits Brenda right between the
eyes.

Brenda rubs her shoulder and begins to cry. Fred softens.

FRED JOYNER (CONT'D)

Why, when I first checked out this
chevy, I pretty much knew right
away. You was only 15, I was 21.
I'm talkin' about the body of a
real thoroughbred. Ya know -
sculpted lines, classic stylin', a
full-bodied hood ornament.

BRENDA JOYNER

Fred, we're mmmmmmmmissin' out on
an ideal life. I'm talkin' kids, a
family, growin' old together.
Peace and harmony.

FRED JOYNER
Don't start singin' the blues
again.

BRENDA JOYNER
Bbbbbbbut.

In order to get to a more neutral topic, Brenda leans toward Fred, stretches her hand and places it on the gear knob of the stick shift. She holds it for a second, then hesitates.

BRENDA JOYNER (CONT'D)
I just can't get a hhhhhandle on
this here standard transmission...

FRED JOYNER
Woman, don' cha know nothin? Look
it here, I leave it in neutral,
keep the motor running, just give
the shift a tiny tap downward, and
it pops into drive. Like magic.

BRENDA JOYNER
Yyyyyyyeah, a tiny tap. A tiny tap.

The back window to the truck cap is wide open. Lady hears everything.

FRED JOYNER
Jeez. Even a child could do it.
Heck, Lady could tap it better than
you.

Fred steers the truck toward the right and heads for the potatoes. Now this ain't a garden for city slickers. There's row upon row of carrots, turnips, beets and potatoes.

Fred gears down, parks the truck and puts the truck in neutral, leaves it running.

It's a pleasant spot close by an apple tree with a run-down picket fence that encloses a portion of the garden.

Lady barks with excitement.

Fred leaps out of the cab and reaches into the back for his shovel.

Lady barks again.

FRED JOYNER (CONT'D)
Shut yer yap, ya damn dog or you'll
feel the butt of this here shovel.

Fred waves the shovel in a threatening manner. Lady cowers.

He digs a wide circumference around the first plant, turns over the soil.

Brenda joins Fred and they work for several minutes digging potatoes.

Lady continues to bark, wants to join them.

FRED JOYNER (CONT'D)

It's a bad feelin', it just ain't a good thing. Now you take that new manager down at the bank. He's wantin' more collateral, more security. Sure they want everybody to be friends - no way I'm givin' in to 'em. What'd ya think about gettin' a second job, Brenda? Wuddya say, kiddo?

Brenda pauses.

BRENDA JOYNER

Uhhhhh, I'll think about it. Bbbbbbbut if we're gonna bang away at this debt, I've got a big commute to work everyday. So I figure maybe we rrrrrrent a small apartment in town. We could rent out the farm house, just for a year, till we get back on our feet. But I wanna hear your side of the story...

FRED JOYNER

Last I heard, I was still running this here farm. Yeah, sure, you head to the city, gonna meet up with your boyfriend?

BRENDA JOYNER

Nnnnnnnno.

FRED JOYNER

This is just a damn mess, is all...

Fred takes his frustration out of Brenda - gives her a shove and she falls to the ground.

BRENDA JOYNER

Bbbbbbbbut.

FRED JOYNER
I'm the boss.

With that, Fred drops his shovel, approaches Brenda and picks her up, but then kicks the back of her knees, she drops, head first.

FRED JOYNER (CONT'D)
If you decide to stick it out on
your own, woman, I'll find ya. And
it won't be pretty. Now, make
yourself useful, bring me the
burlap bags.

Brenda dusts herself off, and heads to the chevy. Lady barks with anticipation.

FRED JOYNER (CONT'D)
Quit yer yappin', you damn dog.

Fred shakes his fist at Lady.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - DAY

Brenda gathers up burlap bags from the back of the half ton. But she looks at Lady and goes over and unchains her. Lady jumps out of the truck and heads to the garden.

BREND A JOYNER
C'mon Lady, you cccccccan help us.

FRED JOYNER
No way in hell. As long as her
barking keeps up, she ain't no good
for anyone. Find her a new home.

BREND A JOYNER
Nnnnnnnnever.

Brenda grabs Lady by her collar, then whispers in her ear.

BREND A JOYNER (CONT'D)
It's okay, baby. Tttttell you
what, why don't you climb into the
cab, then Daddy can't hear or see
you.

Brenda opens the door and Lady jumps in. Brenda points out the stick shift, and looks at Lady.

BREND A JOYNER (CONT'D)
Careful Lady, watch that stick
shift. It takes only a tiny tap...

Brenda hugs Lady, then heads back to the garden. When Brenda's back is turned, Lady moves over to the driver's seat. She sits quietly for a couple of minutes - like she's deep in thought.

With upmost precision, Lady places her paw on the gear knob of the stick shift.

She positions it there for a minute or two.

Lady lets out a low, mean growl and moves her paw in a downward motion - just a slight tap to the stick shift.

EXT. GARDEN - RESUMING

As she struggles with the burlap bags, Brenda looks up and sees the chevy give a huge jolt, a big thump and then slowly wrench forward. In a minute, the chevy passes Brenda.

BRENDA JOYNER
Wwwwwwhat the hell?

Bent over and busy picking potatoes, Fred doesn't see the chevy slowly make its way toward him. Brenda opens her mouth to scream. Instead, she covers her mouth with her hand. She's rooted to the spot.

The chevy barrels its way toward Fred.

At the last second, Fred hears the chevy when it's two feet away. But when trying to run to safety, Fred stumbles and falls.

Too late.

At that moment, the chevy plows into Fred and pins him against the picket fence.

There's a sharp intake of breath. Fred thrashes and struggles his body in animalistic terror. Then silence.

Fred's dead. Brenda turns to look at Lady in the truck as she sits up proudly in the driver's seat.

BRENDA JOYNER (CONT'D)
Just a tttttiny tap. A tttttiny tap.

Brenda makes her way to the truck and gives Lady a huge hug.

FADE OUT.