

STORYTELLER

Written by

Richard F. Russell

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Wordmstr007@gmail.com  
910-285-3321

FADE IN:

INT CORY'S KITCHEN - DAY

CORY'S MOM, 30's, pretty in a conventional way, stirs chicken soup on the stove. The house is middle class, comfortable, well maintained.

Through the back door trudges CORY, 13, a mix of teenage angst and confidence and always at odds with her mother.

CORY

Hey.

CORY'S MOM

How was school?

Cory sets her backpack on a chair, opens the fridge, and grabs a coke.

CORY

Boringggggg. Is that chicken soup?

Cory sinks onto a chair.

CORY'S MOM

For your brother. He's not feeling well.

CORY

Is he faking a tummy ache again?

CORY'S MOM

Headache and fever. He's in bed. You should say hi.

CORY

If he's really sick, I'm not going near him.

CORY'S MOM

It's just a cold.

(Beat)

They called. They want you to come over.

The news clearly upsets Cory.

CORY

I can't. I have homework.

CORY'S MOM  
You'll have to finish it when you  
get back.

CORY  
Call and tell them I can't come.

CORY'S MOM  
I already told them you're coming.

Cory leans over and gently bangs her head on the table.

CORY  
Mom, please, please don't make me.

CORY'S MOM  
They pay. Besides, they like you,  
they ask for you special.

CORY  
You know I don't like doing it.

CORY'S MOM  
But you're so good at it. That's  
why they want you.

CORY  
You don't understand. It kills me  
to do it. It kills me.

CORY'S MOM  
Spare me the drama. You're doing  
it because it's the right thing to  
do.

CORY  
Mom--

CORY'S MOM  
Enough. Go see your brother. Your  
dad will take you as soon as he  
gets home.

Beaten, Cory rises and leaves.

INT KYLE'S ROOM - DAY

Kyle, 11, lies in bed. He looks as sick as he feels. A  
glass of water by the bed. Cory knocks and opens the door.

CORY  
Hey, you awake?

Kyle's eyes open a bit and he turns to the door.

KYLE

Yeah.

Cory comes in and stands by the bed, not willing to get too close.

CORY

You really sick?

KYLE

Really sick.

CORY

You must be. Mom's making chicken soup.

KYLE

I'd rather have ice cream.

CORY

Want some water?

He nods, and she grabs the glass, helping him sip, her hand on his head.

CORY (CONT'D)

Wow, you're hot. Mom give you something?

KYLE

Yeah, but I don't think it's working. My head is killing me.

He flops back on the pillow, moaning with pain.

CORY

I have to go. Mom will be up in a bit.

He barely nods, eyes closed. Cory has never seen him this sick. She backs away and out of the room.

EXT GOOD HOPE HOSPICE - EVENING

A car pulls to the curb. Cory climbs out. She hesitates, staring at the forbidding building, the death place. Resolute, she trudges up the path, past the sign,

GOOD HOPE HOSPICE

INT GOOD HOPE HOSPICE - EVENING

The main room holds three very sick people in wheelchairs-- two WOMEN and one MAN. The mandatory TV drones, but they pay little attention. Life is running out for them.

In walk Cory and the Hospice DIRECTOR, a middle-aged man made older by his proximity to death.

DIRECTOR

Mr. Holmes asked for you.

Cory takes a look at the Old Man and shakes her head.

CORY

He's not ready.

DIRECTOR

What do you mean he's not ready?  
He asked for you.

CORY

It won't do any good. He's not  
ready to go.

DIRECTOR

I don't see how you can say that.  
He says he is.

CORY

I don't know how I know, but I  
know. He's not ready.

(beat)

But she is.

DIRECTOR

Who?

Cory doesn't answer because she's moving toward an old, worn woman, MRS. SANCHEZ, who doesn't look as if she'll die in the next hour.

CORY

Hello, my name is Cory.

MRS. SANCHEZ

Hello. I'm Edna, Edna Sanchez.

Cory pushes the wheelchair toward the door.

CORY

I'm the storyteller, Mrs. Sanchez.

MRS. SANCHEZ  
 Storyteller? That's you? I heard  
 about that, but you're so young.

CORY  
 And I think you need a story.  
 (leans over and sniffs  
 Mrs. Sanchez' hair)  
 Hmmmm, autumn, I believe you're an  
 autumn.

INT MRS. SANCHEZ ROOM - EVENING

Cory sits in the wheelchair. Mrs. Sanchez smiles from a hospital bed. Cory mugs at the ceiling camera monitoring the room and turns to Mrs. Sanchez.

CORY  
 October has arrived with a paint  
 brush that turns the woods into  
 rainbows. The smell of pumpkin  
 fills the crisp air as you stroll  
 in soft dusk. He stands at the  
 corner, leather jacket and khaki  
 pants, a slightly crooked smile.  
 He's waiting, waiting for you.

INT KYLE'S ROOM - EVENING

Cory's Mom, a half-finished soup bowl in hand, places her hand on Kyle's forehead. He's feverish. Concerned, she pats his head and rises, going to the door.

KYLE  
 Mom?

She turns.

CORY'S MOM  
 Yes?

KYLE  
 Turn out the light? It hurts my  
 eyes.

His eyes are closed, but that doesn't matter.

CORY'S MOM  
 Sure.

She flicks off the light and leaves.

INT MRS. SANCHEZ ROOM - EVENING

The positions haven't changed. Except, a tear graces Mrs. Sanchez's cheek, under eyes that no longer see, over a mouth that smiles in death. Cory's eyes are closed.

CORY

He picks up the last red leaf and gently strokes your cheek. I will be here with you always, he says, always.

She stops and opens her eyes. For a moment, an incredible sadness fills her. Then, she sees Mrs. Sanchez's smile, and Cory's OK.

CORY (CONT'D)

Welcome home, Mrs. Sanchez.

INT GOOD HOPE HOSPICE HALL - EVENING

The Director leans against the wall. A door opens, and Cory steps into the hall.

DIRECTOR

Did she?

CORY

Yes, she passed.

DIRECTOR

I didn't hear a thing.

CORY

She was happy.

Cory walks past, drained in a way.

DIRECTOR

Hey.

She turns back.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Look at me. Can you tell how long?

CORY

No. It only works at the end.

DIRECTOR

Oh, OK, thanks.

She nods, turns away, and is gone.

INT CORY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cory's Mom takes ice from the freezer and fills a plastic bag. Door opens and Cory enters.

CORY'S MOM  
How did it go?

CORY  
Mr. Holmes wasn't ready.

CORY'S MOM  
Oh, I thought--

Cory grabs a soft drink from the fridge.

CORY  
But Mrs. Sanchez was.

CORY'S MOM  
Then, you...

CORY  
Yeah, I told her a story.

Cory's Mom shudders a bit and finishes her task.

CORY (CONT'D)  
That for Kyle?

CORY'S MOM  
I'm trying to keep him cool.

CORY  
The fever's worse?

CORY'S MOM  
Fevers always get worse right  
before they break.

Cory's Mom leaves as Cory sips and watches.

INT KYLE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Kyle sleeps uneasily. Cory's Mom places the bag of ice on his forehead, making him moan. Cory enters.

CORY  
How is he?

CORY'S MOM  
Burning up. I should call the  
doctor.

Cory steps close to the bed and looks at her brother. She balls her hands into fists, then relaxes them with a sigh.

CORY  
You should leave.

CORY'S MOM  
What? Why?

CORY  
I'm going to tell Kyle a story.

Mom's face widens in disbelief.

CORY'S MOM  
No, you're not. You're not saying a word. You're going to get out of this room this instant.

Cory grabs a chair and places it by the bed.

CORY'S MOM (CONT'D)  
Did you hear me? Kyle isn't one of those. He's not ready for a story.

CORY  
It will be better with a story.

CORY'S MOM  
GET OUT! GET OUT!! YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TALK TO HIM!

Mom grabs Cory and tries to tug her out of the room. They struggle for a moment, but Cory is too strong.

CORY  
I have to help him.

CORY'S MOM  
He doesn't need your help.

CORY  
Don't you see? Without a story, he'll be scared. He might not be able to cross.

Mom glares at Cory who won't budge. Then, she runs for the door.

CORY'S MOM  
I'm calling 911. HEAR ME? 911!  
Don't you say ONE WORD!

Cory locks the door behind her mother and slips onto the chair.

CORY

(to Kyle)

The police will be here soon. I don't have much time, so I'll start in the middle, OK? Don't be afraid. The middle is a good place to start.

Kyle can't answer. She lays a hand on his shoulder.

CORY (CONT'D)

Moths dart around the outfield lights in a ceaseless roil of motion. In the stands, fans already hoarse from eight innings of noise, rise to their feet. Two outs, bases loaded, they scream for Kyle as he strides from the on-deck circle to batter's box.

On the bed, Kyle smiles. Cory closes her eyes. She begins to rock in the chair, her voice as soothing as a mother's coo.

CORY (CONT'D)

The pitcher, a fireball hurler, grins as Kyle knocks the dirt from his cleats. Kyle, the home run king...

FADE OUT.