

The Orchard

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The prosecutor paced the courtroom. He gave the judge a quick nod. He then looked at the jury, sizing them up. Finally, he looked at me, sitting on the witness stand.

“Miss Rika, you are on trial for the murder of your former employer, Johnston Ryan,” the prosecutor began. “Would you please tell the jury your position at the Ryan Orchard?”

“I was the senior orchard keeper,” I nervously answered.

“How did you obtain that position?”

“My father had been the orchard keeper for many years before me. He started work there as a young boy. He lived and breathed for that orchard.”

Talking about daddy seemed to calm my nerves a little.

“Could you please tell the jury what happened to your father?”

Suddenly, talking about daddy wasn't comforting anymore, “He died.”

“Please tell the jury where he died.”

“Objection!” My lawyer demanded as he stood up. “Relevance, your Honor?”

The prosecutor was quick to defend his question. “Your Honor, Miss Rika's defense depends on the history of her father. It's only fair that I am given the opportunity to contradict it.”

“I'll allow it,” the judge declared.

“Where did your father die?” the prosecutor asked again.

“In prison.”

“And why was your father in prison?”

I was reluctant to answer, but the prosecutor was right. My defense depended on it. “Fifteen years ago, he murdered John Ryan.”

The prosecutor's eyes widened. He pretended that he was surprised, even though he already knew. It was insulting to me.

“John Ryan? The father of the man that you are accused of killing? The original owner of the same orchard? Strange coincidence, don't you think?” the prosecutor mocked.

“Some may think so.”

“Do you know why your father killed John Ryan?”

“Yes.”

“Please elaborate.”

I took a deep breath, and began my story. “My father use to sweat blood for that orchard. He did his best to produce the yields that were adequate to Mr. Ryan. Daddy could make the trees produce the sweetest apples. And the roses; the colors were brighter than anyone had ever seen. It was like he

could control the plants, and make them produce what he needed each and every week.”

“Control them?” the prosecutor interrupted. “What like mind control?”

I shrugged off the prosecutor’s remark, hoping that the jury would agree he was being overly sarcastic. “Daddy use to say that he had pricked his fingers on the thorns of bushes and plants so much, that the plants were literally feeding off his blood that spilled on the ground.”

“A little grotesque, don’t you think?”

“Not really,” I said. “Daddy had the passion for growing those plants. I’ve always thought that passion runs through your blood. He claimed it was poetic justice.”

“Did your father also have a passion for killing?”

My lawyer stood up again, “Who’s on trial here, Your Honor, Miss Rika or her father?”

“Withdrawn,” the prosecutor replied. “Miss Rika, please continue.”

I looked over to the jury, they appeared anxious to hear my story. “One day, John Ryan, and my father had an argument about the yields. John threatened to burn the orchard to the ground. My father wasn’t about to allow that, and so he killed John.”

“And you condone his actions?” the lawyer asked me.

“I don’t condone them, but I also don’t believe in destroying a persons dream,” I explained. “My father died in prison for what he did. And I fulfilled his last request; to have his ashes spread across the orchard.”

“I see. Your father finally became one with the orchard,” the prosecutor mocked me.

The prosecutor smiled at the jury, trying to turn them all against me. He’d have loved it if they laughed at me. “We talked about the similarities of this case and your fathers. You’re aware of one more similarity, are you not?”

“The police chief informed me, yes.”

“Would you mind sharing that information with the jury?”

I swallowed, “My father killed John Ryan by stabbing him the stomach with a sharp tree branch. He then hung Mr. Ryan from a vine in the same tree. It appeared as if the tree had killed him. Mr. Johnston Ryan was killed the exact same way.”

“That’s interesting. In fact, that’s more than interesting. To the naked eye, one could easily suspect that the same killer murdered both victims. But that can’t be, the original killer is already dead.” The prosecutor paced the room, rubbing the side of his head. “But, your defense is that your father, reincarnated as a tree, killed Mr. Ryan.”

“That’s correct.”

I heard the jury gasp at my claim. The judge looked at me and rolled his eyes. At that point I was sure that I’d be asked for the fourth time to take a mental evaluation, but instead the court continued.

“Why would your father want to come back from the dead and kill Mr. Johnston Ryan?” the prosecutor asked.

“Because Mr. Ryan had just made a deal to sell the orchard to a shopping mall. They were going to bulldoze the orchard to the ground, and turn it into a parking lot. I’m sure that daddy wouldn’t approve of that,” I said.

“Yes, I’m sure he wouldn’t,” the prosecutor mocked again. “But with that sale, Mr. Ryan informed you that you would no longer have a working position at the orchard?”

“That’s correct.”

“And that angered you?”

“Not at all. I own a successful flower shop downtown. I only worked the orchard for Mr. Ryan because he requested that he have the same blood working it as his father did,” I responded.

“Even with the fact that your father had killed his?”

“Both Mr. Ryan and I agreed that our father’s did not share the same feelings on everything. And we also agreed that their feud should not affect our working relationship,” I explained. “A man like that is not come by very often. Why would I kill someone like that?”

There was another sigh from the jury. I actually felt like I was about to win them over.

“You know Miss Rika, you’ve made mention of blood, and blood lines several times during this questioning. It makes you think maybe you’re right; maybe it is something in your bloodline. And maybe it’s murderous tendencies.” the prosecutor stated. “No more questions.”

I was excused from the stand, and shortly the prosecution rested its case. My lawyer closed by stating the obvious; the only reason that I was accused of any murder was because of my family history, and a very slim motive. There was not evidence of my involvement, nor could anyone place me at the crime scene. The prosecutor wanted to bring back to life a fifteen year old murder, for nostalgias sake. The prosecutor was up for election later that year, and he wanted a big win; something that made the papers.

The prosecutor made his closing arguments with more of the same. No one appeared impressed.

The jury deliberated for only an hour, and then came back with a “not guilty” verdict. Nothing could describe my joy as I walked out of the

courthouse that day. I expected an apology from the prosecutor, but he wouldn't even look at me.

That next week, I visited the orchard. Standing in front of the locked gates, I watched as a bulldozer was unloaded from a trailer. The orchard was about to be turned into a parking lot. I wanted to be there for it, and I wasn't the only one. The prosecutor approached me from out of no where.

"You know that the jury didn't believe your story," he said to me.

"They didn't believe yours either."

"What're you doing here?"

"I just wanted to see the orchard one last time," I explained. "I practically grew up in there."

"Saying goodbye to the old man, huh?" the prosecutor continued to mock me even then.

I smirked at him, "I didn't kill Mr. Ryan. I still hold firm to my story."

"Yeah. Whatever."

Soon, the bulldozer's engine was started. The operator rolled it to the other side of the gates where we were standing. He lowered the blade, and began to dig into the soil.

As the blade of the dozer pierced into the trunk of the first tree, the snapping of the branches made an eerie sound. The prosecutor looked around in a confused way. I could tell that he agreed; the snapping of the branches sounded like the shriek of a man in pain. The prosecutor looked at me as if I had set something up, but clearly I hadn't.

Suddenly, the operator of the dozer stopped the engine. "What on earth?" He climbed off the dozer.

The prosecutor and I looked through the bars of the gate, trying to see what the problem was. A dark red liquid was dripping from inside the trunk of the busted tree. The dozer operator appeared hesitant to get too close.

"What is that? Blood?" the prosecutor asked.

I turned and looked at him, "That's daddy."

END