

TRAGEDY AT SUNRISE

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(Some of the names have been changed in this story.)

Years ago my friend, George Dennon, and I worked one summer in the hay fields together. We were partners and contracted cutting and bailing hay for so much per ton. We bailed hay all over the country that summer. We contracted two big meadows that made over three hundred tons of hay each...Now that's a lot of hay by any man's standards. George had a new automatic, self-tying Case hay bailer, so George ran the bailer and I ran the side delivery hay rake.

One of the guys that hauled hay rode to work with me every day. He would meet me at the crossroads at 7:00 each morning. One morning he wasn't there so I went to his house to get him. I thought maybe he had just overslept. When I got to his place, he wasn't there either. I asked his wife, Claudia, where Charley was at. She said, "There has been a killing over there this morning." and she pointed over at a little run down farm house that set far back in the field maybe one half mile away. She said, "Charley is over there." That was where Jim Anderson lived. There was a woman named Katie that had been living with him about two years. Jim and Katie weren't married - just a common law marriage I suppose. Jim's brother, Tom, had come to visit him a day or two before and was still there. Tom was on a wild, crazy drunk. He had been drinking for two weeks or more. Tom and his wife were separated and in the process of getting a divorce. Tom seemed to be all torn up about that and was crazed with rot-gut whiskey and out of control. There were three neighbor boys there and they had been playing cards and drinking moonshine whiskey all night. They were pretty drunk. Somewhere around sunrise, Katie said something to Tom that he didn't like. He pulled out a 22 pistol and shot Katie dead right where she was at. I came upon the scene less than two hours after Katie had been killed. I went into the little unkempt house. The smell of whiskey and cigarette smoke was stifling. Tom was staggering around bragging about how he had "killed himself a woman this morning". He hadn't shaved in weeks, was crazy drunk and looked like he had come back from the dead. A while later he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Bill, you are my kind of people." I said to Tom, "I sure hope I am not." His brother, Jim,

didn't seem to be mad or put out with him for killing his common law wife. Jim and three other guys were still playing cards and drinking rot-gut whiskey. They were laughing and carrying on as if nothing had happened. I walked over to where Katie was at. She was laying on her back on the bed, all sprawled out. Her mouth was open and was covered with flies. She had on a faded white blouse that was unbuttoned down the front. She was not wearing a bra so I could see a small hole about the size of a kitchen match head in her chest. The bullet had gone right between her breasts and there was a small trickle of dried blood there. I felt sorry for poor Katie. She was only about forty years old when she was killed. No one seemed to care that she has lost out in life that summer morning. Her life had been taken from her so carelessly and cruelly without a cause or reason. She had not harmed anyone and Katie wasn't drinking - she didn't drink. I looked around some and found an old blanket and covered Katie up with it. Then the sheriff came and arrested Tom, putting the handcuffs on him and taking him away. Three days later I went to Katie's funeral. I didn't know anyone there and felt a little out of place. It was a very small funeral and there weren't any tears. Seems no one was much concerned about the sad fate that had befallen Katie in her tragic death. Katie and her husband had come out in our part of the country to live on a small farm nearby four years before this. Then about two years later, Katie left her husband and went over to live with Jim Anderson. She seemed to be crazy about Jim. I would see them together at different places. Katie never had any children and Jim had never been married. They seemed to be happy with each other. I knew the Anderson family quite well - There were three boys and two girls in their family who were all older than me.

A few weeks later Tom went to court. He was on trial for first degree murder. I thought sure the judge would throw the book at him. The trial date was set for 10:00 on Tuesday morning. I got there about thirty minutes early, but it was all over and the people were leaving. I asked a fellow what had happened and why the trial was over. He said he

really didn't know. But Tom was sentenced to four years in prison even though he was tried with first degree murder. I thought this was very strange. Tom had a sister in California and I think she must have come up with some money and bought the judge off. It was a little over two years later that I was eating lunch at an eating establishment on east 15th Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The waitress went in the back to get some ice and when she opened those swing bat-wing doors, I thought I saw Tom Anderson there with a white apron on, humped over a big sink washing dishes. I got up from my table and walked over to the swing doors and said, "Tom Anderson, is that you?" He looked over at me and smiled and said, "Yes, it is." I said, "Tom, have you done all of your time at the big house?" He said, "Yes, I have." Now I have given this matter a lot of thought over the passing years - he had committed cold blooded murder any way I looked at it. Even to this day it still doesn't seem fair to me that Katie should pay the price and lose her life just because Tom was on a wild drinking spree. If Katie had been important, I'm sure things would have been different in court that morning. His two year imprisonment makes one wonder about justice in our courts and our judges who can be bought off. Tom Anderson is still living today. He must be in his mid-eighties by now. His brother Jim died in Phoenix, Arizona many years ago.

The old Anderson home place is just a little over one mile east on my home where I live today. I go down that old winding country road quite a lot and as I am passing, I look far back in the field where the little shotgun house once stood for many years. The little house is gone now, rotted away over the passing years. The weeds and brush have reclaimed the land and you would never know that a house was there. I sometimes think of Katie as I am passing by and how she lost her life on that warm summer morning.

Now George and I had a good summer. We bailed hay right up until old Jack Frost came along. Now this winds up a story that happened in those old hills of Oklahoma over thirty-five years ago. Where you can still hear a lonesome whippoorwill calling for his mate on a distant hillside, far, far away just before sunrise.

P.S. Tom Anderson died March of 1995 at the age of 86 after this story was written.