

Tom Klein
Little Nell

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by Tom Klein

This was a writing assignment found in Stephen King's book 'On Writing'. It is an excerpt from a non-existent book. The situation is based on a very general definition of circumstance and I'm to see how it plays out.

You'll recognize the plot, you've seen it a thousand times. That's not the point. The point is that you enjoy five minutes of reading.

*I hope you do.
Tom Klein*

As Richard Weldon woke, his forehead and cheeks worked to pull his eyes open. His allergies had sealed them shut overnight in response to the breeze through the bedroom window. Even before prying open his eyelids he could tell the sun was up. That was a good sign he was late for something.

Taking a deep breath to calm down he rubbed his eyes open starting to think about today's schedule. He no longer had the luxury of a professional secretary to prepare everything for him. He was a one man show now.

"Crap!," he said. The big Friday contract meeting on the Ridgfield Mall was today. It was too important to come in late or unprepared. Mr. Perkins had 37 acres of rock strewn soil alongside highway 116 and the Ridgfield Group wanted to buy it at 'bad farmland' prices.

The details of his presentation started swimming around inside his head but by the time Dick could focus his eyes enough to recognize his twirling ceiling fan, his brain sorted out fact and fiction. His mind was no longer planning today's meeting, it was replaying yesterday's success. Richard Weldon, Attorney at Law, with his 'big city' negotiations skills, landed Mr. Perkins quite a sum for his land. It was enough that Dick's very small slice of a

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very big pie would provide food and shelter for some time to come.

“Its Saturday...” Dick said out loud and relaxed back into the pillow. “God bless Saturday.”

“And God bless Mommy and Daddy” he heard from a little voice next to his head.

He rolled to his side and smiled at Nell, his three year old daughter, clutching Captain Jack. The Captain was a mangy old stuffed bunny, named by his ex-wife after her favorite flavor of rum. Nell held him tight against her blue flowered gown, waiting patiently for her Daddy to wake up.

“Are you awake Daddy?” she asked.

“Yes sugar.”

“Cap’n needs to have a quiet time,” she said holding him up for her father to see. These words forced out the last of the cobwebs and Dick was wide awake now. Nell was potty trained but still had the occasional accident. The time between the first warning of ‘quiet time’ to the actual event was short at this age. He’d have to move quick or clean up the mess.

Dick spun his six foot frame out of bed and took Nell’s hand leading the way. “We’ll use Daddy’s bathroom this morning honey,” he said opening the door to the small master bath.

In front of the shower stall was a child’s portable potty, its lid open and ready for use. Nell set Cap’n down on the stone tile

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next to her. She hiked up her night gown and pulled down her Barbie big-girl pants. The result mooned her father with the two cutest little globes of flesh. Then realizing she was pointed in the wrong direction, shuffled her feet like an old woman to spin around and sit down.

A few seconds later, Dick heard the faint echo of 'doo-doo balls' dropping into the plastic bowl below her. He stepped to the sink to start the hot water running and pulled a fresh wash cloth out from the vanity below. "We're going to Aunt Sophie's today," as he swished his hand under the cool water. "Your cousin Madison is having a birthday party. Remember?"

"Will Mommy be there?" Nell asked, looking up through her blond curls.

He turned off the water and sat down on the lid of his commode facing Nell. "No sugar, Mommy has gone away for a long long time. She can't come to Madison's party."

"Aunt Soapy says it's because Mommy was bad," scrunching up her face to push.

Dick made a mental note to remind his sister to watch what she said about his ex-wife in front of Nell. "Mommy needs special help and the doctors are making her better. The illness that Mommy has is bad, but Mommy's not bad."

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Nell's face turned red as she pushed again. When she relaxed she held up her left arm. The three inch pink scar was still visible on her bicep. "Is that why Mommy hurt me?"

Dick's eyes watered as her question made him relive that horrible night. Jane, his ex-wife couldn't take his 80 hour weeks at the New York law firm. After Nell arrived it only got worse. He split his life between work, his daughter and his wife, with each spot on the list getting less time than the one before it.

He'd come home late one night to the sound of screaming coming from both of his girls. Jane had sliced several deep wounds on her own arms in addition to the one cut on Nell's. This breakdown led to her full time residence at the Greater Bridgeport Mental Health facility.

"Mommy is very sick and I'm sure she loves you very much. But sugar, she won't be at Madison's party," he said shaking his head no. He saw the letdown in Nell's face so he brighten her spirits, "But do you know who will be there? Your cousin Jimmy and Emily and... and... a clown."

Nell smiled at the clown. She half closed her eyes to the sound of trickling water and when it stopped she motioned for her daddy to help clean her up. "When can we leave Daddy? I wanna see the clown."

Late Saturday afternoon Dick pulled the Cherokee into the long driveway of his one story brick home. Nell was fast asleep in the child seat behind him.

He'd laughed to himself as he looked in the rearview mirror seeing his little angel dreaming away. He grew up out here in rural Connecticut and always focused on making his way to the big city. But now he knew better and it was the perfect place to raise Little Nell.

Living back home meant smaller clients, smaller paychecks but closer family and more time with Nell. It was hard being a single parent but being the best lawyer in four counties netted a good living with the flexibility of being a good father.

The button on the mirror opened the door to the attached garage and he pulled in shutting off the engine. He grabbed some stuff from the passenger seat as he got out with his arms full. Balancing for a moment he slowly closed the door behind him with his right foot. He looked at the door to the kitchen and back at Nell. Getting his priorities straight, he dumped his keys, food from the party and a few prizes that Nell won on the workbench in front of him and opened the rear door of the SUV.

Taking his time not to wake her, he lifted the sleeping Nell out of the car seat. The sugar and fresh air had taken its toll and she was down for the count. Carrying her sleeping form through

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the kitchen and down the hall, he tucked her in her bed under the Buzz Lightyear blanket.

She'd had played hard today and if her father was quiet enough, he could squeeze in a well deserved nap too.

Dick returned to the garage and walked past the car to check the mailbox out front. It took a little over a minute as he walked almost the length of a football field to get there. He had about six acres surrounding their home. It would be a perfect place for a big dog, like his childhood chocolate lab, Brownie. With Nell's birthday coming up in about six weeks, he figured it would be the right time to get her a puppy.

Going back through the garage he retrieved the prizes and food, closing the garage door and going inside. After putting the stuff away, Dick grabbed a beer from the fridge and walked into the family room. Sitting in his favorite chair, he switched through the channels, stopping to watch the Mets baseball game. He took a long pull from the beer, kicked out his foot rest and leaned back to relax.

He was asleep in minutes.

The Mets game was interrupted by loud music as the screen flashed 'Special Report'. But it didn't wake him from his nap.

The news anchor's voice was accompanied by the sounds of Dick's snoring. "Three patients went missing earlier today at

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the Bridgeport Mental Hospital,” the man read from his teleprompter. “Two women have been apprehended and returned. A third, has alluded authorities throughout the day. If you see this woman,” the screen filled with a photo his ex-wife’s face, “Jane Weldon, please call the State Police immediately.”

There was an interview and some more photos but eventually the sounds returned to the Mets now winning in the seventh inning.

Richard kept snoring catching up on well deserved rest.

“Daddy, are you awake?” he heard through his dream. Two small hands rocked his right arm.

“Yes sugar...” he said his mind climbing out of his nap. Just past his arm he found the wide eyes of his daughter. “You have to go potty?” he asked seeing the worry in her eyes.

“No,” she said stopping rocking her hands on his arm.

“Did you have an accident?” trying to discern the reason for her worried look.

“No,” she said gripping her small hands into his flesh.

“Then What’s the matter Nell?” he asked as his daughter’s pants became wet with the release of her bladder.

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His mouth formed the next question but he never said a word. His scream accompanied the searing hot pain radiating from this left thigh.

Nell's fingernails drew blood on his right arm as Dick jerked away. His eyes focused on the butcher knife buried deep in his leg. There were blood covered hands on the hilt struggling to pull it out for a second cut.

As his eyes followed the arms up to the face, both of his girls said in unison, "Mommy's home."