

Here is a Texas fairy tale, set in a small town in the hill country. It comes complete with "bar-b-que", horses, football, hauntings, and many surprises between its "once upon a time" and its "happily ever after".

DEAR HARMONY

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DEAR HARMONY

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Chapter 7

Driving Sharon's SUV, Harmony pulls into the Prince Memorial Playground parking lot behind a long line of similar vehicles filled with costume clad children. She checks the rearview mirror to see other cars behind her and knows this is going to take a while.

"Grammie! I don't know why I have to do this; I'm too old for this silly stuff." James Curtis Jr. calls out from the rear seat, "I look stupid in this dumb outfit and what if some of my friends are here and see me lookin' like this?"

"If your friends are here, they'll be in dumb outfits too, so sit still till I find a parkin' place cause you're gonna stay with us and help me keep an eye on your brothers. Oh look, there's someone pullin' out now. Hold on kids, we're almost ready to go trick or treatin'!"

With the car parked, Harmony instructs her grandchildren to stay in their seats until she comes around and opens the sliding door. As soon as she can get the door open, the four boys start piling out, pushing and shoving each other out of the way. "Boys! You will stand right here by this car and not move a muscle or touch each other till I get the girls out of their carseats and come tell you we can go. Do you understand me?" She sees them all nodding and turns to get into the back of the car to release the girls.

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Beginning with Cheryl Ann, Harmony reaches over to release the seat belts, "Come on my little princess, here, you stand by Grammie till I can get your sister loose." Cheryl Ann obediently stands against the back of the front passenger seat watching her Grammie and sister. "Here we go my little punkin, don't you look like you just popped out of some farmer's field all fresh and purty!" Harmony turns with Dardanell in her left arm and motions to Cheryl Ann toward the van door. She backs out of the SUV carefully watching the baby's head so it won't bump on the car's frame and holds Cheryl Ann's hand while the little princess jumps to the ground. As Harmony closes the sliding door and hits the button on the key ring to lock the vehicle, Cheryl Ann asks, "Where boys?"

Harmony turns around to look, realizing that all four boys have disappeared. Just as she's about to dig her cell phone out of her purse, Fred walks up and lifts Cheryl Ann into the air exclaiming, "If it isn't her majesty Cheryl Ann Hager Grettz, the fairest in all the land!" Cheryl Ann smiles and giggles as Fred gently sets her down. Turning to Harmony he takes the baby's hand and gently kisses it, "And here we have the cutest punkin in the patch!" Dardanell wiggles in Harmony's arms and kicks her legs sending Harmony's purse flying and spilling its contents all over the parking area.

"Criminey Fred, now look what's happened and I don't have time for this, the boys have disappeared." Harmony sets Dardanell on the ground next to Cheryl Ann, "Princess, will you hold your sister's hand a minute while Grammie tries to clean up this mess?"

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Fred takes Harmony's elbow in his hand and leads her to stand beside the girls. "First, I'll pick all this up for you, just stand there and get your wits about you and I'll go find the boys, they're just runnin' around here lookin' for their friends and bein' typical delinquents on Halloween. I'll take care of 'em, you just tell me what they're wearin' so I'll know 'em when I see 'em."

Harmony's shoulders droop a little as she stands with the girls, "Let's see, James Curtis Jr. is that evil joker lookin' thing from the new movie and Joey Patsch Jr. is a Caribbean pirate from that other movie and Donnie Fields Jr. is a panda bear with a black sash around his waist and Harold Duncan Jr. is one of those TV power heroes, he has on a shiny black and silver bicycle helmet."

"Well," Fred assures her as he hands her the purse with all the contents safely returned to its pockets, "they should be easy enough to spot in a crowd. I've only seen about twenty of each one of those characters so far!" He laughs as she looks worried. "Don't you fret, you just take my girls to the Punkin Patch and y'all have a good time. I'll round up the hellions and have them back to the car before you get here." Just as he finishes speaking, they hear firecrackers behind one of the buildings. "See? Now I know where they are and I'll take care of 'em, you girls go have a good time." As he heads off toward the building where the noise erupted, he tosses a kiss in their direction.

Harmony throws her purse strap over her left shoulder, picks up Dardanell with her left arm and

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extends her right index finger for Cheryl Ann to hold as they head toward the area of the Punkin Patch for the younger trick or treaters. When they reach the crowded area, Harmony is greeted by familiar faces asking about her mother's health and assuring her that if there's anything Nannie needs, to call anytime and they'll be there in a heartbeat. The comfort factor of being among so many considerate and caring friends and neighbors sets Harmony's mind at rest and the stress of getting Sharon's brood here drifts away with the smell of popcorn and caramel apples floating on the evening air.

As it had been arranged earlier in the day, Harmony drives Sharon's cast of characters back to the Horeshoe Café after their adventures. Pulling into the driveway, she can see that they are not the first to arrive. With the café closed and the front door locked, they enter through the back door and march through the kitchen to the dining room where Fred has pulled some of the tables together. Sharon takes Dardanell from Harmony and pulls off the pumpkin cap that has managed to slide to a sideways position on her little head. Sharon crosses the floor with her to the playpen set up in the corner.

Cheryl Ann walks royally to her Granpa and lifts her little plastic pumpkin to show him the contents. Harmony notices that it is only half as full as it was before the trip to the café. Fred pats the chair seat to his right while listening to his granddaughter's litany, indicating Harmony should sit there.

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The four boys set their loot on the table per instructions by Fred and run out through the kitchen to play. Ardor and Tater arrive and Ardor joins them at the table while Tater takes Cheryl Ann and goes to join Dardanell in the corner. During all this activity there are conversations all around the table between family members about their Halloween activities. Patti is sipping a cup of coffee at the end of the table and anxiously watching the door.

Sharon joins them just as Ardor is giving her report. "Thistle B. had a party tonight, of course, and since Tater is too old for trick or treatin', I talked him into helpin' me at the Punkin Patch keepin' the bowls full for the ladies that were handin' out the goodies. I think he probly got his pockets filled too! I don't know where Possum disappeared to, one minute he was there and the next he was gone."

Harmony jumps into the conversation with, "Sharon, I hope your daddy told you what happened as soon as I got your car parked and opened the door! Those boys of yours are gettin' way outta hand. Ardor said last week your daddy has been threatenin' military school and I think he's onto somethin', speakin' of one minute here and the other one gone!"

Fred pats Harmony's arm, "its ok honey, that problem is soon to be taken care of and military school won't be necessary." He turns and winks toward Sharon who is rising from her chair. Catching his wink, her face reddens as she turns away and walks toward the coffeemakers as if intending to go get a fresh pot was the reason she rose from her seat in the first place.

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"What are you talkin' 'bout Fred? Does everyone know somethin' I don't?"

Harmony's question goes unanswered as Possum and Charlie come into the dining room from the kitchen in their volunteer fireman pants and boots, reeking of smoke. Possum kisses Ardor on the head as Charlie throws up his hand and greets them, "It's Halloween folks, y'all missed all the excitement."

Sharon pours them coffee as they tell of the night's events. Possum takes the lead, "I'm sorry I didn't have time to tell you I was leavin' honey but one of the guys grabbed my arm and said come on and I had to go." Ardor nods and he continues, "We were called out to that old cabin that G. Willy lived in. It was burnin' purty good by the time we got there. I reckon every man in the county was called out to help."

Mary Alice walks in and sits by Harmony as Possum is finishing his report. "I was out there too, toward the end, my ace reporter couldn't find the place so I went out there myself and took some pictures. Tell them the really good stuff Possum."

"I think Charlie can tell it better'n' me. He was there when it happened."

All eyes turn to Charlie and he shifts in his seat a few times before he begins. "I got there one of the first ones." He shifts in his seat a little more while the others all lean closer anxiously waiting for him to continue. "I, uh, that is, we, uh, heard screamin' comin' from that house. I asked the Brookshires, you

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know that old couple that owns the place, if there could be anybody in it and they said no. They said nobody even knows the place is out there, that G. Willy only found it by flyin' over the dang thing. They said the place is haunted."

Silence fills the room while his words sink into their minds. Possum grabs the coffee pot and refills Charlie's and then his own cup.

Charlie clears his throat, then adds, "I think it coulda been one of the boys doin' it just to spook everybody cause it's Halloween. Y'all don't buy all that nonsense, do ya?" He looks around the table.

Fred laughs and soon the rest join in. "Naw Charlie, we don't buy that nonsense. It was probly just one of the boys out there havin' a little fun with you fellas. Sharon, go get these boys some pie, they look like they might have worked up an appetite."

Sharon and Patti bring back two pies from the kitchen and while Sharon slices them, Patti quickly produces a stack of plates and a tray of silverware. As she serves the pie, Sharon announces, "I reckon it's a good thing G. Willy left when he did before the ghosts set his house on fire. Say, did y'all know he got married?" With her head down focusing on her pie serving she fails to notice her sister's frantic head shaking. "Its some woman he met on the internet a year or so ago, some woman my age, that old rascal!"

Mary Alice sees the color drain from Harmony's face and catches her breath loudly enough to get attention

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and then puts her hand over her face pretending to sob. She grabs Harmony's arm and in a tearful voice begs, "Harmy, come with me, please!", then pulls herself and Harmony from their seats and toward the restroom.

Ardor's voice follows them across the dining room, "We're so sorry Miss Mary Alice, Sharon doesn't always put her brain in gear before runnin' her mouth.", then turns her head to give her sister a deadly glare.

Mary Alice and Harmony disappear into the sanctuary of the restroom where no one can see who needs consoling and who needs to provide consolation.

"Harmony, are you ok?"

"I, I, I", Harmony leans against the sink facing her friend.

"Do you need to sit down?" Mary Alice guides her to a stall and helps her sit down on the toilet lid. "Can I get you something? Would you like a cold towel for your face? Anything?"

Harmony shakes her head and sits there staring at the floor in front of her. "He, he, he,...he said he wasn't the marryin' kind, he said he was a lone wolf. He, he, he lied to me all the time; it was all a lie from day one. It was all a lie from day one. It was all a lie from day one." Harmony's gaze shifts to her friend's face. "I'm the world's biggest fool, I actually thought he loved me."

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Mary Alice squats in front of Harmony and takes both her hands into her own. "Honey, Fred loves you. Fred has always loved you and will always love you. Willy G. is no good. He was no good in high school. Why do you think I dropped him after graduation? I only dated him because he was the football hero and I was the head cheerleader and everybody expected us to be together. All he ever wanted was to get into my panties and I was one of the few that said no. He played around with every female in the county except you sweetie. I told him what I'd do to him if he ever so much as touched you. He was afraid of Uncle Rich and that put the fear in him. I know you didn't know any of this but I never had the heart to tell you. When you started seein' him after you and Fred divorced, I thought you'd come to your senses sooner or later. I'm sorry it was later."

Harmony looks at Mary Alice as if seeing her for the first time. "I guess that makes me the biggest old fool in the county, don't it."

As the women stand up and wrap their arms around each other, Mary Alice gently pats Harmony on the back and assures her, "No, sweetie that just makes you a woman. We all try to love the wrong man at one time or another. Here, let's throw a little cold water on our faces and look like we've both had a good cry and get back in there before Ardor kills Sharon for blurtin' out MY hearbreakin' news!"

With laughter, that's exactly what they do. When they enter the dining room smiling, they get nods from all around the table and talk shifts to safer subjects such

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as the economy and the election and whether or not
KRK will actually close.

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