

A Fierce Love

Grayson Hayes sat on the bench overlooking the lake, watching the sun dapple and ripple the water. A gentle breeze lifted tufts of his graying hair. He held a yellow legal pad in his left hand like it was a life preserver.

by CHRIS FABRY

“IT’S ALL IN HERE,” he said, his blue eyes twinkling. “I’ve got a whopper of a story. I just need to get it down on the page. That’s the trick, getting it out of here.” He pointed to his chest. “And the only way to do that is to sit in the chair and do the work.”

A fly-fishing rod sat propped against the bench. There was no line or lure, just the lonely soldier of a pole.

Grayson turned to the woman beside him. She wore blue jeans and a sweater. She had blue eyes, brown hair, and a fair complexion. And a killer smile, like some movie star. She looked young to Grayson.

“How old are you? I can’t tell how old people are anymore.”

“How old do you think I am?”

“I don’t know. Maybe 30?”

The woman nodded. “You’re close.”

“The Lord was in His 30s. He got a lot done in three decades.” He glanced at her, then back at the lake. “I’d ask your name, but I’m not good with them anymore.”

“I understand. I have a hard time remembering names too.” She crossed her legs and stared at the water, as if it were too difficult to look Grayson in the eyes. Then she broke the silence. “What’s your story about?”

“What story is that?”

She pointed at the legal pad. “The one in there.”
“Oh, that one.” Grayson shook his head. “It’s about everything in the world. All the bad and the good and what’s between. What’s deep inside that rises to the surface. You see, I put things down in here that come back to me. Things I don’t want to forget. The hopes and dreams and fears.”

“That sounds like a complicated story. Who’s it about?”

Grayson turned and gave her a hard look. “I don’t talk about my stories before I write them. If you talk about them, they lose all the steam. You never get them out.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry about. It’s just the way it is. I’m not trying to be mean.”

“I know.”

“You see, I have this disease. At least that’s what the doctors say. I don’t really feel any different. It’s got something to do with the computer upstairs.” He pointed at his head. “It’s got a bug in it.”

“Alzheimer’s.”

“That’s it. You know about it?” Grayson sat straight. “You don’t have it, do you?”

“No. I’ve just heard about it.”

He sighed heavily and sat back. “Well, that’s good.”

Grayson leafed through his legal pad, as if reaching, searching for something he wasn't sure he would find. "I got notes in here and ideas. Sometimes during the night I'll wake up and jot them down. Dreams and things that scare me. Wake me up in a sweat. But that's what a good story will do. It'll deal with the scary things, the struggle. I believe the tension you have in your life moves you forward if you let it."

"What's your biggest fear?"

"I've got so many it's hard to give a pecking order. But the one that comes to mind ..."

"Sometimes love is difficult because you don't know how to love. You don't know what it looks like."

A red bird flew past them, and Grayson tracked it to a tree by the lake. He studied the bright plumage. "I used to think people who died turned into other things. A red bird was somebody you used to know and care about who was watching over you. And it was a sign when you saw one."

"You don't think that anymore?"

"No, that's not the way it works. Souls of people don't become something else. Some probably think that. But people are people, and they don't turn into birds or angels or rocks. Now, that red bird is part of God's creation. And you can learn something from studying a creature like that. Why did God create something so pretty?"

The woman kept her eyes on the bird as it flitted from branch to branch. Then it flew to a house and lit on the roof.

"See that house down there?" Grayson said. "Looks more like a cottage, doesn't it?"

"It's nice."

"Have you been inside it?"

"Sure have. It has a great view of the lake, especially the loft upstairs. It's a writing loft."

"Is that so? A writer lives there? I wonder if I've read anything by him. Or maybe it's a her. Is it a woman writer?"

"No, a man lives there."

"Well, I need to meet this fellow. Do you know him?"

"I do. He lives there with his wife. And she loves him fiercely."

"Is that so? Why do you say it like that? *Fiercely*? Love is supposed to be tender and gentle, isn't it?"

"Sure. But there's also a fierce kind of love. *Long-suffering* is the word I would use."

"That sounds biblical. And it sounds like a hard kind of love. Costly."

"Sometimes love is difficult because you don't know how to love. You don't know what it looks like."

"Are these nice people, the ones who live over there?"

"I'd say so."

Grayson scratched at his whiskers. "Somebody asked me the other day what state I live in. I told them I live in the state of confusion." He shook his head and chuckled. "Wish I had a nickel for everything I've forgotten. I'd be a rich man."

"You are a rich man, Grayson."

"How do you figure that?"

"Some people are rich because they have a big bank account. Lots of land. Other people are rich because ..."

The woman stopped speaking when Grayson put his legal pad down and stood. He looked quickly to his left, then his right.

"What's wrong?" she said.

"My dog. He was right here a minute ago." Grayson shielded his eyes from the sun on the water and took a deep breath, as if to yell something. But he let the air out without speaking.

"You mean Dubose?" the woman said.

"That's his name. How did you know that?"

"I've seen you here with him. He's a good friend of yours, isn't he?"

"Where'd he go? I'd better not lose that dog."

He turned and looked up the hill behind him.

"If I do ..."



"Do you think God can forgive the sins you can't remember?"

The woman glanced toward a knoll behind them with freshly turned earth. She paused, then smiled. "I'm sure he'll be along soon. Probably out hunting rabbits."

Grayson laughed. "That would be just like him. Chasing something he could never catch. And not knowing what to do with it if he did." Grayson pulled at his ear.

"Sit down, Grayson."

He looked at her, then plopped onto the bench. "The way I look at it, dogs are more faithful than a lot of people. At least the ones I've met. But I'll tell you one thing — you can't find a dog as faithful as old Dubose."

"You two have been through a lot together."

Grayson's eyes watered. "Yes, ma'am. We have. There'll never be another dog like that, I don't think." A moment later he glanced at the woman. "What were we talking about?"

"What you're afraid of."

"Yeah, right. Let me ask you something. Do you believe in God?"

She nodded.

"Do you think God can forgive the sins you can't remember?"

"Is that what scares you the most?"

He pulled at his ear. Then he reached for the yellow legal pad and held on.

And like a red bird that had flown, he was gone again. ☁

Editor's Note: Chris Fabry's short story gives us an inside look at his new novel, *Saving Grayson*, a hopeful story of a journey to right unknown wrongs and of holding on to what you know even when it feels like everything is slipping away.

CHRIS FABRY is an award-winning author of more than 80 books, including *Saving Grayson*, available for preorder now. Chris is also host of Chris Fabry Live on Moody Radio. Find out more at ChrisFabry.com.

