

The Mourning of Pear

Lockie Hunter

PearDaddy is dead. PearDaddy is dead and you flatly don't care. PearDaddy is dead, and you feel just awful about not caring, but you can't drive a tear even when you pull on your arm hair real hard.

This morning they came and got you and all your cousins and piled you in the back of the longest cleanest black car you had ever seen. The man driving was awful nice and he was full of tissues and hard candy for all the grieving grandbabies. That was supposed to include you, and you looked at the tears being nicely produced by your cousins as pretty as you please, and you pulled on your arm hair again. If you could have gotten to your newly forming armpit hair fuzz and pulled one of those, that would really sting, but your mother had you smothered in an excess of black lace. Who in the world even makes black lace? And you thought of that doll that BabaShy got you for Christmas this year. The one that she ordered as part of that dolls of different countries series. You had picked Miss Canada last year and you were so disappointed 'cause her outfit was plain and the doll was very white and simply looked like everyone else you knew. So this year you had picked Miss Spain, figuring she would be all exotic and stuff, and sure enough you were right. She came dressed in black lace with a big funny hat. She even had tiny stockings. The ones that only come up to the thighs, not the big ol' everyday pantyhose that you see your mom struggling to put on before church. These tiny ones had a black band across each thigh that BabaShy called a corset, and then she blushed and said something to Mother about the doll being a little too real for her tastes.

You were parading this very same doll around and deciding that she must be a dancer in that getup, so you were twirling her down the hallway and saying, "I am the queen of Spain with my garters and my high hat." You spun and spun until you fell down giggling. Then BabaShy came in and said that all of us girls need to quit squealing as PearDaddy had a headache.

See now that was the problem. PearDaddy always had a headache. He never was any fun. You refused to smile when women you recognize but can't name put their hands on your head and pat you like a dog. Neighbor women. But you gave Mrs. Nobles a big smile, and you twisted back and forth to show off the lace of your black dress. You knew that Mrs. Nobles would make dumplings for when you all go back to the house later. Mrs. Nobles placed a gloved hand to her throat and told you how sorry she is, and you wanted to cry, just for Mrs. Nobles, 'cause you knew she was expecting it, but still you couldn't cry for PearDaddy. It would be like crying for a stranger. A stranger that never laughed, or ever even played a game with you. He just was not any fun at all. Not one iota, your mother would say.

It is an overcast day which suits a funeral. Wouldn't it be funny, you think, if it was a bright sunny day? It would seem ill-fitting. Like wearing your Mother's high heels. God knows to make it sunny on Easter but rainy on funerals. It's only proper. The preacher says ashes to ashes, and then BabaShy places a purple flower on the coffin, and now you see how old she looks and how sad. When did this happen? She looks much older than this morning at the funeral parlor. And you only now notice how white she is, how all your mother's olive coloring must have come from PearDaddy. PearDaddy was once BabaShy's suitor, courting this impossibly white woman. Was she always this white? You don't recall ever even seeing PearDaddy leaving that musty wing chair. He maybe said two words to you in all of your years. How did this man ever woo any woman? It has started to drizzle and you bow your head and look at the big hole they made for him and hope enough rain water will form on your head to fall and look like an actual tear.

But now you see Mother with your two aunts holding BabaShy up like she's about to pass out or something, and it just about breaks your heart. Will BabaShy keep the big house all alone? She's too old to find another husband. Is this it then for her? You taste salt in your mouth and realize you are crying at last.

Great Aunt Pearl sits down next to you and you notice her folding chair sinks into the mud a good half foot from her weight. She is wearing an orange hat and you think it doesn't suit the occasion,

like if the sun was shining. She leans in close and you worry her chair will all but sink completely.

"Did you girls get to eat any of those blueberry pancakes your mother made?" Pearl doesn't even whisper.

You just stare at BabaShy.

"How old are you now Marie?" she says loud as can be.

Get away from me; can't you see I'm grieving for my dear PearDaddy? This is what you want to say, but all you say is "I'm eleven now, ma'am."

"Look at you now, crying up a storm," Pearl says and laughs a high laugh. "Shoot child. You won't see many here crying. And I'll tell you why right now. Your dear PearDaddy never was any fun."

You pinch a glance at BabaShy and think that perhaps fun is not the most central thing to be in this wide world.

A long time resident of the American South, **Lockie Hunter** now lives in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, where she is enrolled as an MFA student in the creative writing program at Emerson College. Her fiction and humor essays can be found in the pages of *The Emerson Review*, *The Morning News*, and in a special upcoming Appalachian edition of *Southern Hum*. Lockie is currently working on a Southern novel that she hopes will help to preserve some of the eccentricities and joy of her family and hometown.

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