

A Yuletide Epiphany at Old Burnt Bridge

by

Jason A. Beverly

Christy pointed to the school. “Aren’t we meeting Kendall there?”

I pulled into the parking lot. “Yep.”

“Why here?” Christy asked.

I shrugged. “I don’t know, but I should have stopped at that gas station back there. My car is almost empty. Anyway, there’s Kendall right there.”

“She looks so cute in that yellow dress,” Christy said. “I wonder why she wore it though.”

Mark snickered. “I wouldn’t call that thing cute.”

I reached back and slapped his knee. “Don’t be talking about my girl, bro.”

Mark laughed. “I was joking, man. Relax. I can’t wait to scare the crap out of her though.”

I shook my head. “I still don’t get why y’all want to scare her so bad.”

Christy cleared her throat. “You must forget how she scared us last year on Halloween.”

I nodded my head. “Yeah, but it is Christmas Eve.”

Christy rolled her eyes. “Come on, Evan. I know that. The timing is perfect though. She thinks we’re going to Anna’s house. She won’t expect to see a ghost girl when we make it to old Burnt Bridge.”

Mark tapped my shoulder. “She’ll get a kick out of this, man. Now, open the door for her.”

I got out the car and hugged Kendall. “You are looking fine in that dress.”

She smiled. “Thanks! I’m cold though. Let’s hurry and go!”

We had been driving for a few minutes when I reached over and caressed Kendall’s hand. “You know I ain’t ever been the praying type, but I was last night. I prayed that you’d make it back in time to hang out with us. You’re here, but you seem so distant. What’s up with you? Is it about your time at the hospital?”

Kendall sighed. “I don’t want to talk about that, Evan. I want to—”

“Please leave her alone,” Christy interrupted. “She doesn’t want to talk about that.”

I rolled my eyes. “Okay, I get it.”

When we made it to the area where Burnt Bridge once stood, Christy coughed profusely. That was my cue. I pulled to the side of the road.

I looked at Christy through the rearview mirror. “Are you okay?”

She stopped coughing. “I’m fine.”

Kendall turned around and looked at Christy. “Are you sure?”

Christy smiled. “I’m good. Let’s go.”

I turned the ignition, but the car wouldn’t start. When I turned it again, there was a loud thud on the trunk. Then it sounded like someone was walking on the roof. A human-like silhouette then ran down the front windshield and jumped off the car. Everything seemed to happen according to our plan.

Mark tapped my shoulder. “Hit the headlights!”

When I turned them on, a pale-faced girl stood there. She wore a dingy, white prom dress. Vapors billowed from her mouth. Sadness filled her face. The costume impressed me.

Kendall reached over and turned off the headlights. “You guys are just trying to scare me.”

I laughed. “We got you! Anna just helped us scare the—”

“Be quiet for a minute!” Christy shouted. “I have several missed calls from Anna. She sent me a text too.”

Kendall turned around. “What’s going on? What did she say?”

Christy dropped the phone. “She said she had to go to her grandmother’s house in Moss Point so she wouldn’t be able to help with the prank.”

Mark seemed concerned. “If that wasn’t Anna we saw, who was it?”

I turned around. “Just calm down, man!”

Mark punched the back of my seat. “Don’t tell me to calm down! Who was that girl?”

I sighed. “There has to be an explanation. Maybe Anna tricked us.”

Christy shook her head. “She wouldn’t do that, Evan. She didn’t even want to take part in this. She only did it because Kendall scared her last year too.”

A police cruiser pulled in front of us. A man exited and approached my car.

I rolled down the window. “Hey, officer. Everything is fine. We’re about to leave.”

He shined his flashlight in the car. "I'm Deputy Springer with the sheriff's office. If nothing is wrong, y'all need to get out of here. It's Christmas Eve. Go be with your families."

I turned the ignition, but the car wouldn't start. A quick glance at the fuel gauge revealed the issue.

I slapped the dashboard. "I can't believe this! We are out of gas."

Deputy Springer sighed. "I reckon I can take y'all to that gas station around the corner. There's a lot of equipment in my car, but I can fit you three in there."

His response confused me. "But it's four of us, sir."

Deputy Springer eyed me suspiciously. "What are you talking about, son? There is only you, and those two in the back. There ain't nobody else."

When I looked at the passenger's seat, Kendall wasn't there.

I turned around. "Mark, where is she? Where did she go?"

He appeared confused. "I don't know where she went, man. She was sitting there."

Deputy Springer slapped the top of my car. "Okay, what's going on?"

Christy seemed scared. "Deputy Springer, our friend was sitting there. I promise. She was there the whole time you were talking with us."

He rolled his eyes. "Young lady, no one was sitting there. I ain't crazy. No one was in that seat when I walked up to this car. Enough of this nonsense! Get in my car so I can take y'all to get gas. I'm ready to get home."

We remained shaken as we rode in the patrol car. Kendall's disappearance made no sense. Part of me hoped that she was pranking us. It was something she would do. We called her phone several times, but she didn't answer. Her mother called me though.

"Hey, Mrs. Williams," I mumbled.

"Hey, Evan. Do you have a minute to talk?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I looked at Kendall's phone and saw several missed calls from you and Christy. That prompted me to call you now instead of waiting until we got back from Atlanta."

"Atlanta?"

"Yeah, we are still at the hospital. This stuff has overwhelmed me."

"What happened? What's going on?"

“Evan, we lost Kendall earlier today. She passed away. My baby is gone!”

A tear trickled down my face. “What? That makes no sense! What happened?”

“I don’t want to get into all that right now. She lived longer than most people with her condition. My baby lived a good life.”

More tears rolled down my face. “I don’t understand, Mrs. Williams.”

“I know it’s hard to hear this news. I’m so thankful for you, Christy, and Mark though. Y’all always treated her nice. She was looking forward to getting back home to spend Christmas Eve with y’all.”

“But—”

“I’m sorry, Evan. I have to go now. My husband needs me.”

I sighed. “Okay.”

Just as my phone fell into my lap, Christy nudged me in the side. She looked terrified.

“What is it?” I asked her.

She pointed to the passenger’s side exterior mirror. “Do you see what I’m seeing? Evan, please tell me you see that.”

I looked into the mirror and saw Kendall holding hands with the ghostly girl we had seen earlier. Their bodies appeared to float freely in the cold, South Mississippi night. My deceased girlfriend seemed to protect and comfort the mythical apparition that had haunted old Burnt Bridge for years.

I will never forget the yuletide epiphany at old Burnt Bridge. We sought to scare Kendall that night but encountered her spirit and that of a teenage girl instead. It was difficult to understand how Kendall enjoyed Christmas Eve in Lamar County with us while her lifeless body laid in an Atlanta hospital. Sometimes, I catch glimpses of her and the ghostly girl whenever I drive through that area. If you’re lucky, you might even see them too. Don’t be scared though. Just accept that God’s supernatural powers can easily transcend our human understanding.