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New Pink Coat

by Julie Bertacchi

(English 1101)

On a crisp fall day in September 1984, I was sitting on the couch in the family room when I heard voices outside. Intrigued, I jumped up and bolted to the window. Looking through the glass, I saw my two brothers and two girlfriends in the park across the street. I couldn't wait to join everyone there, but before I went outside I wanted to put on my new pink coat.

Earlier in the day, my mom and I had gone shopping for my new winter coat at "Stevens" in LaGrange, a store which handled merchandise exclusively for women and children. Enjoying our conversation in the car, we drove to "Stevens" in anticipation of finding just the right coat for me. Once there, we went down the curved wooden stairs that led to the "kids" section. We eyed racks of coats in a maze of blues, greens, reds, pinks and plaids. However, it didn't take long for me to find the perfect coat. The zippered satin pink coat, short in length, had a hood trimmed with faux fur, two side slits for pockets, and its quilted lining was white and as soft as velvet. I quickly put on this majestic coat and felt like a queen. My servants would surround me to grant my every wish, I thought. I couldn't contain my excitement in finding this coat, and let my mom know this was the perfect coat for me. My mom agreed, her face expressing sheer delight with my selection. We purchased the coat and drove straight home. As we were driving, my mom told me it might be a few weeks before I needed to wear my new coat. Immediately, thoughts began to swirl in my head of that cold, winter day I would be able to wear the pink coat. When we got home I hung the coat up in the basement closet.

Later that afternoon, hearing laughter drifting through the windows, I became anxious to get to the park. I also knew I wasn't going to wait for the right weather to wear my brand new coat. In fact, I ran down to the basement, opened the closet door, yanked my pink coat off the hanger, ripped the tags off of the sleeve, put on the coat, zipped it up, and briskly made my way out the door. As the door slammed behind me, I yelled to my mom that I was going to the park to play. Running down the cement driveway, I had to be careful not to trip or fall or I could ruin my coat. I made it to the curb without incident and crossed the street to the park.

The park was small and triangular in shape with rounded curbs. The trees on its perimeter were beginning to turn from green to yellow and red. The green grass was beginning to show spots of beige. The baseball diamond was made by feet that matted the grass from baseball pick-up games. Making my way towards everyone I stopped quickly as a squirrel scampered by, its chubby cheeks filled with acorns. My brothers and girlfriends were by an old oak tree. As I looked at this beautiful tree, it was scared but still strong. The trunk of the gentle giant was stripped of its bark. Engravings from passers-by withstood the test of time. Children climbed the tree without ever caring if a limb would become bruised. Birds usually sang from its branches but now there was a stillness in the air. A feeling of discomfort overwhelmed me. I saw a grotesque knob protruding from the mouth of the trunk. I heard my brothers taunting my girlfriends to jump from the tree. My girlfriends, meek in nature, were kindly explaining to my brothers that their mother won't let them jump from this gruesome tree. My brothers continued to badger the girls as they saw me approach. "My sister will jump from this tree; she's not afraid," Tim boasted, puffing out his chest like a rooster on a fence rail. "Won't you, sis? Won't you climb up here and jump from this tree?" "I can't, Tim, I have my new coat on and I can't get it dirty," I said. "Ah, come on," Tim said. "You won't wreck your coat. Show Patti and Jackie you're not afraid!" Reluctantly, I began climbing the tree not letting my coat catch

on any branch or leaf. I knew how angry my mom would be if anything happened to this coat. As I took my position for jumping off the tree I pleaded with my brothers not to let anything happen to my coat. I steadied myself between two massive limbs.

I gazed down to the dirt ground below. Sunlight peeked through the trees, providing the perfect landing spot. Smiling at my friends, I saw the jealousy in their eyes as they awaited my take-off. I knew I could jump from this tree without incident. I had done it a hundred times. I spread my arms like eagles' wings and took a deep breath. Jumping off the tree, I was airborne for a fleeting moment. Suddenly, my hood caught on the knob of the tree. What was happening? My feet were not touching the ground! My body was swinging in mid-air! My eyes looked upward and as the broad leaves parted, I saw the heavens. Gazing down at my friends, I caught the look of horror in their eyes. Instantly, I felt the seams of my coat splitting. I heard the ripping of the inside lining. Tears began rolling down my cheeks. "Help!" I said in vain. Doesn't anyone hear my plea? After what seemed like hours, my brothers released my hood from the knob that wanted my soul. One foot crashed to the bare gray ground followed by the second. As I lay on the ground, Patti and Jackie rushed over to me to make sure that I was not hurt. Looking up at my brothers, I saw two hyenas in that creepy tree; their sides splitting from laughter. "Funny! You think this is funny!" I screamed through the tears. "What am I going to do?" I sobbed. "Mom is going to kill me!" Silence. Just silence. From two brothers that were supposed to protect their little sister.

Patti and Jackie helped me up and brushed off the gray dust from my coat. Jackie suggested we go across the street to their house so I could calm down. Feeling scared and heartbroken, Jackie put her arm around me as we walked from the park. Sitting on the porch of her quaint white and red two story house, I began to collect myself. Jackie suggested we talk to her mom about my coat. "She knows how to sew," she said. "She will fix the seams and your mom won't know. She won't tell her." Mrs. Landis appeared at the porch door with an engaging smile. Mrs. Landis had an immense figure, salt and pepper hair, and brown eyes. The three of us, speaking wildly at once, told Mrs. Landis how the brothers bullied their sister to jump from the tree. Her forgiving voice enthusiastically commanded I take off my coat and give it to her. She would fix it in a jiffy and no one would ever know it ripped. In an instant, she vanished. I heard her footsteps scurry on creaking floorboards towards the sewing room in the back of the house with the pink coat.

Waiting for my coat to be tailored, we passed the time jumping rope on the cement driveway. Minutes passed quickly, and then Mrs. Landis called for me to come back to the porch and get my coat. Feeling hopeful, I ran back to the porch, looked over my new pink coat and gave Mrs. Landis a great big bear hug. I couldn't be more grateful. She saved me from a fate worse than death. I heard my mom's faint voice calling my brothers and me to come home. Leaving the Landis' house I chose to walk the short distance home on the sidewalk. Looking into the park, I spied my brothers still enjoying their time with the guiltless tree.