

The Day She Died

By Bill Garrison

Chapter 1

Darkness pulled at John Michaels. It weighed him down like an anchor. Tendrils of memories and light penetrated his subconscious and lifted him toward the noise hammering against his mind.

Buzz, buzz, buzz, followed by heavy silence, not the usual “Dora the Explorer” from the living room television.

Would today be any better, or would Renee still not look him in the eyes?

The musty smell of dirty laundry wafted to his nose. Twisted covers. Brightness.

Brightness! Why hadn’t Renee or the kids awakened him?

He threw the covers aside and swung his feet to the floor. He sat at the edge of the bed and looked around in stunned silence.

Heart pounding, he tried to make sense of the sight before him. This had to be a dream. But dreams were never this real, the smells never this strong, the colors never this bright. He squeezed his eyes shut, but he knew nothing would change. This was real.

Buzz, buzz, buzz.

He shut off the alarm.

He sat on a twin bed in a small apartment. Not just any apartment. His old Village Square efficiency, the place he lived during the fall of 1992.

Could it be an elaborate prank? Would Dennis do something like this? Would Renee let him?

John stepped to the window. Overgrown weeds shot up through cracked asphalt. His dark-gray 1988 Grand Am with the racing pinstripe, a car he’d relegated to the junk pile many years ago, sat in perfect condition to left of the front door.

He turned back to the room and took it all in. The bed with its sagging mattress also served as chair and couch. The ironing board, a permanent fixture along the wall, doubled as more shelf space.

The dirty laundry formed a pile in the corner between the bed and the wall. His pride and joy during college, a Compaq 386 computer, sat on top of a rickety computer desk that had taken him hours to put together. A TV rested on a milk crate with a VCR perched on top. It had been luxury . . . twenty-two years ago.

Clicking at the window made him jump.

The window air conditioning unit powered up and began delivering ice cold air.

This wasn’t a joke. It was his old apartment.

The phone sitting on the dresser rang.

John stared at it. Four rings. Five. Six. No answering machine. No Caller ID.

Should he answer it? He shrugged. Why not? “Hello.”

“Are you coming over or what?” He recognized the voice right away. Dennis Vance. Music pounded in the background, the Fresh Prince’s “Summertime.”

“Um, sure. What time?”

“Now would be good. Don’t forget the money. I have the tickets.” Dennis hung up.

Tickets?

A memory slammed into his mind. *The Red River Rivalry*. The Oklahoma Sooners vs. Texas Longhorns football game at the Texas State Fair. Dennis had gotten him seats on the forty-five yard line. His hand tightened around the phone.

No! It couldn’t be.

He swallowed, and his gaze darted around the room for anything that would tell him the date. He dropped the receiver on the dresser. His trembling fingers grabbed the *Oklahoma Daily*, the college newspaper, off the kitchen counter. A cockroach scurried away.

His heart pounded as he focused on the date.

October 9, 1992.

The day Kim disappeared.

The worst day of his life, and he was living it again.

He slammed his fist into the refrigerator. The appliance shook, and a framed picture of his parents and siblings fell from the wall onto the vinyl kitchenette floor. The glass shattered. He shook the pain out of his hand. You didn’t feel pain in dreams.

He grabbed a pair of Levi’s off the floor and pulled them on. They fastened easily, a sensation he hadn’t experienced in a while. After putting on a Sooners sweatshirt, he stepped into the tiny bathroom.

He leaned toward the mirror and stopped cold. A smooth face with thick, dark hair stared back at him. No wrinkles and no gray. Somehow, someone or something had reached into the life of John Michaels, forty-five-year-old coffee shop owner, and transported him back into the life and body of a twenty-three-year-old college student.

How had this happened? And why? Fear stole into his heart, but he pushed it away. He had a chance to make a difference, to change the past.

He grabbed his watch off the ironing board. Two-fifteen. The tickets could wait. He still had time. He took his wallet and keys from the ironing board but couldn’t find his phone. He threw clothes and papers across the room looking for it. He’d lost the stupid thing again.

No, wait. He halted his frenzied search. He didn’t have a cell phone in 1992. No one did. He picked up the cordless phone again. His fingers clenched the receiver as he dialed Kim’s number from memory, even after so many years.

The phone rang. And rang again. No answer.

“I can do this. I can do this.” Where would Kim be? Another memory hit him. The police had talked to all of her acquaintances, but never figured out her exact movements that day. Except for one thing . . . she had last been seen going to Gittinger Hall on the South Oval of the University of Oklahoma campus.