

Chills in *S&S Takes the Fifth*

E.V. Sparrow

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Under the sun atop a soft grass hill, Eva sat on a warm and cozy towel with her friend, Kim, and rubbed the chill bumps on her arms.

Kim gazed at the clear view of their four kids in the park. She turned to Eva, “You’re cold?” “No, just chills.” Eva spied the girls, Shay and Riley, in the fenced-in sand area. Her son, Ben, rode his red bike on the bike path. He raced past the chain link fence as fast as his four-year-old legs could pedal. His friend, Josh, kept up with him.

Two other moms with three kids sat at the far side of the park, near the school. A young man sprawled out in the shade of a large elm tree and read his book.

The Spring breeze blew Shay’s sweet voice over to Eva. Then she heard a motor.

Two men in a beat-up beige truck cruised the length of the school’s big lot. They parked away from the other four cars. Their truck had no plate.

Eva’s hair raised on her neck. *That’s odd.* She pulled her knees to her chest.

Shay squealed.

“The girls got sand all over their dolls. It’s in their hair.” Kim laughed.

“They sure have fun.” Eva put her chin in her hand and eyed the men. More chills ran along her neck. *Why do I have chills?* She felt God prompt her to watch her kids. *What’s there to be scared of?* Eva watched her son, Ben, chase Josh by the bike path.

“I love the fenced-in area for the sand and swings...I feel safe here.” Kim sighed, “Eva? Hello, Eva? What’s wrong?”

The men sat still in their truck.

“I don’t know,” Eva mused. “Those men seem a bit weird.”

Kim turned her head and pulled down her visor, “You mean, those men?”

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“Let’s watch them. I don’t trust them.” *Why are they here? There’s just kids and moms.*

The man who drove the truck had a gray beard and wore a tan shirt and pants. He climbed out and walked alone fifty yards down the lot to the Men’s Rooms.

“Like that—why would he park over here, by us, and not over by the Men’s Room?” Eva asked.

“Yea, that is weird. It’s a long walk.” Kim frowned.

Tan Man came out and strolled to the end of the lot.

“*Hmm.*” Eva fixed her gaze on him in time to see him head into the tall grass along the creek. It split the park and play area from the school grounds.

“Can you see him, Eva? I lost track of him.”

“He’s down by the creek, now.” Eva raised up on her knees. Even from the top of the hill, it was hard to see him.

Tan Man climbed up the steep bank and stopped. He faced the park. He was about forty yards out.

Eva pointed. “He’s over there.”

Tan Man slid back down the creek bank and out of sight.

The kids are in the sun, while Tan Man creeps in the shade. Eva’s scalp crawled, she scanned the bank for him. “I don’t like how he acts.”

“You watch him, and I’ll watch the kids.” Kim rose to her knees, “The girls are still in the fenced-in sand area.”

Eva searched for the boys. “The boys are on the bike path on the far side of the fence. There’s that creep, back there. I guess he didn’t find what he wanted by the creek.”

Tan Man spoke to Book Man under the tree and waved his arm at the park and sand area.

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Book Man looked up, shook his head, and went back to his book.

Eva glanced at Kim, “What do you think he asked that guy?”

Kim shrugged. “Maybe he lost his dog and asked if he’d seen it?”

“I hope you’re right. Oh no—where did he go? Maybe under that bridge?” Eva pointed. “He could hide there.”

“What? Why would he hide?” Kim touched Eva’s arm, “Here comes Ben and Josh on their bikes.”

Every nerve in Eva’s being tensed. “We need to get the boys.”

Ben passed Josh at the turn and drew next to the bridge. Josh slowed his pace and fell back about ten feet.

Tan Man sprang out from under the bridge. He ran full speed at Ben’s back. Tan Man’s face held the focus of a starved lion as it stalked its prey. His prey was Eva’s son.

The scene lagged, and time froze as thoughts crashed through Eva’s mind—*He’s after my boy! I can’t get to him!* Her heart beat fast. She couldn’t breathe. She rushed to her feet.

Ben didn’t see Tan Man.

Eva found her voice, “No!” Ice cold fear swept through her body. She screamed, “Ben! Come! Now!” Ben’s sweet baby face flashed in Eva’s mind. The feel of his hugs—*God, help us!* Kim yelled, “Josh!”

Panic and rage drove Eva down the hill. Her ears rang. *Go to the truck—or Ben will be gone!* She faced the truck a few feet away, ready to pounce, but kept her son locked in her sight.

Ben won his race, but he was about to lose more—in the grasp of Tan Man’s claws. Ben hopped off his bike and knocked it over. With a broad grin, he sped to his mom.

Tan Man tripped over the bike and froze in his tracks. His face cleared. He glared at Eva and

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Kim by the hill, then jumped into his truck where his friend sat. The tires spun out when he backed up.

Thank You, God! Thank You! Eva gulped down a sob and clapped her hands over her mouth. Her body shook. Her heart raced.

Both moms tracked the truck until it turned onto the street.

Eva whirled to check once more on her kids.

Josh had grabbed Ben, and the boys brawled on the grass. They laughed. Josh yelled. “I’ll win next time!”

Shay and Riley played on the swings.

Kim clutched at Eva, “Oh my God...Thank God! Let’s call the cops.”

“Okay. Ben...honey, come see Mama.” Eva held out her arms. Her panic waned.

Ben pushed Josh off and hopped up and down. “I won the race, Mama! I want a drink. Please?”

Eva blinked back tears and squeezed her son. “Mama loves you so much.” *I never, ever, want to let go of you.* She took a deep breath. “Do you want your milk?”

“Yup,” he squirmed out of Eva’s hug.

Eva stroked Ben’s damp head. *God, You saved my son from those evil men!* With shaky hands, she poured his drink. *What would they have done?* She cringed and squeezed her eyes shut.

Ben hugged Eva’s leg with one arm while he drank.

She rubbed his back. “You came to Mama right when I called you. Good job.”

“Uh huh.” Ben looked up from his cup. His face scrunched in a milk-lipped smile.

Eva dropped to her knees and kissed Ben’s cheek.

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Ben let his mom squeeze him tight. He didn't always come right when she called him. This time, he did, and what if he hadn't?

What if Tan Man had seized hold of Ben? *Could I have stopped him?*

What if Eva had snubbed God's alert from those chills? But, by God's grace, she did heed them.