

Gramps' Money

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“Jimmy, I told you not to bring me near these people. They’re crazy; want me in a home! I am home!” My grandfather was always a man of defiance, even if his mind wasn’t in the right places.

“My names not Jimmy, Gramps. It’s Jason,” I said, my hands tightly seizing his wheel chair as he tried to wheel away. Where did he think he was going? Only way for him to retreat from suburbia would’ve been to hope a car hit him. Fat chance it would kill him, though. Judging by the speed that most cars traveled through my Aunt Shelly’s development, you’d be more likely to die from a toddler on a ‘Big Wheel.’

“Yeah, yeah, alright, Jim. Make this quick. I’ve got a hot date tonight.”

The worst part was Thanksgiving had been this way for the past two years, and it didn’t seem like it was going to be any better this year. I would wheel Gramps into the house filled with my relatives. He the honey, and they the bees, they would swarm mindlessly to him, knowing that like honey, he was rich. It was the same thing every single year and there was no way it was going to change now.

No one cared that the poor old man lost his hair. No one cared that he could barely see, even with his giant, round spectacles. My own mother, the very fruit of his loins, had become greedy and naive. The end result was that I was forced to watch my grandfather and wheel him about. Funny how paying her son to stay at home and watch her father instead of job searching seemed the better choice than letting me get my life on the move. Although, I must admit the first six months out of college didn’t go so well with the economy. Now that I think about it, I was stuck.

I made it up the porch thanks to a makeshift wheelchair ramp made out of wood and cinderblocks. Gramps barely seemed to notice. The standard issue middleclass house was packed to the brim with people. My entrance was noticed. My mom pressed on my father’s arm, and then strode over to Gramps and I. Her hair was packed neatly in a bun. Red lips and face doused in makeup, I almost thought she was a different woman. Then, she opened her mouth.

“How’s Dad doing, Jason? He have a moment of coherence yet?” My mom leaned in and planted a kiss on her father’s cheek.

“Mmm, how’re ya’ doing, sexy? Why don’t you leave your man and I’ll show you a true night in town,” my grandfather proclaimed after returning the kiss.

“I’ll take that as a no. Has he been trouble, Jason?”

I nearly forgot my mom was addressing me. My eyes embarked on an epic journey across the kitchen and living room. Every last money-hungry relative was there. Guess news of my grandfather’s worsening dementia was enough to bring some of the more distant family members to town. “What’re the Hendersons doing here?”

“Y’know how they are. Started showing up last year, remember? Since your cousin Cathy’s parents got divorced, her father is getting desperate.”

“Where’s my damned cat at?” Gramps interrupted. I shook my head.

“So, is that why everyone’s here?”

My mom turned to a nearby mirror and adjusted her hair. “Well, it depends. I’m sure some are here for the food and family.”

Funny how food was first.

I sighed and started to wheel past my mom. “Do me a favor, Mom, and keep them off of Gramps. I don’t think his meds have been working.”

A tight pain pulsed through my arm. Her grip was tighter than I thought, seizing me like a hawk snatches a mouse. “He hasn’t mentioned the will at all? Try asking him about it, okay, honey?”

I tugged my arm free and managed a shrug. “Yeah, sure.” Before I knew it, I was lost in a sea of crazed relatives.

There were the twins: Gem and Jules, both twelve, and both old enough to know that their Gramps was wealthy enough to buy them all the ponies in the world. The blonde devils made sure to make their appearance, as they did every year for the past year. I swear by all that is awesome, that their parents told them how to conduct themselves in front of their grandfather. Normally, the pair was prissy, bratty, and downright nasty to everyone. I remember the spoiled kids used to pick on some of the other younger cousins for not having nice enough clothes. To their misfortune, in response to their bows and attempts to compliment him, Gramps called them “little harlots.” He then continued his greeting by mocking their short skirts and saying if they wanted to be handled by a big man in a dark alley, they were on the right path.

I snickered, but when tears fell, I knew to get the hell out of dodge. After all, I was an accomplice. This old fart was going to cause a lynching in the first five minutes. As soon as I left the twins, I found myself greeted by Uncle Phil. It had been so long since I saw him that I couldn’t tell if it was actually Phil or the thing that ate Phil. His beard stuck off of plump cheeks, his scraggly hair hugged his fat head and traveled halfway down his back. As if the ensemble wasn’t complete, he

attempted to wear a button up shirt which was only able to be buttoned halfway. I could tell an attempt was made at some point to keep it buttoned as the remaining top buttons were nowhere to be found.

“Happy Thanksgiving, Jason!” I was soon lost in his rolls as he hugged me. I pulled away and went to return the greeting but he immediately turned to my grandfather who merely played with his sleeves.

Gramps never responded to Phil. Mumbling curses, he stomped away and then pretended that he just got Gramps to remember his name. The idiot was caught in his lie though, for everyone knew that the only person Gramps even remembered was my cousin Danny. Speaking of Danny...

“Hey, Jason, Gramps, how’re you?” the dirty-blonde, football playing, straight A student, epitome of the golden child, made his way over in all of his “muscular glory.” I swear, the family parted like the Red Sea just to say hi to him and let him pass. I got a full scholarship to Rider and this prick gets one to Notre Dame, but only he gets recognition? Go figure. Maybe it was because his nose was permanently covered in crap for all the brown-nosing he did.

“Fine. Just trying to get Gramps through here alive, you?” I let go of the wheelchair and rubbed my neck nervously as he towered over me.

“I’m doing good. Oh, happy Thanksgiving by the way. It’s nuts this year ain’t it?”

I wanted a cig. I wanted one even more when Gramps, with old man strength, punched Danny in the stomach to get his attention.

“Danny, my son, how are you? Married yet? I want grand-kids, damnit!”

Great, I thought, now Danny moved up to son status. Awesome.

“I’m working on it, Gramps. But hey, I told you, I’m your *GRAND*son, not your son. ‘least you remember my name though, right?”

“Now that’s not true, I remember your cousin Jimmy as well,” my grandfather replied and patted my back with a shaking hand.

Danny laughed. I wanted to flip him off. Cancer-sticks were calling my name. I bit my lip. “Hey, uh, can you watch him for a couple mins? I need a smoke.”

“Still smoking? Thought you quit.” Danny turned my grandfather around to take him into the living room.

“I did. But it didn’t quit me. I’ll be back,” I said stubbornly. Danny told me it was no hurry and that he’d show Gramps to everyone else awhile. I almost laughed. *Show*. What was he, an object? A commodity? Was there a price tag sitting on his bald head?

I shook off the comment. I suppose it wasn't fair to judge so prematurely. After all, Danny meant well. Both of us grew up together in front of Gramps' eyes. Sure we both competed for his attention over the years, but we both loved him and at least I took care of him. I always had that over him, right? Then I remembered that Gramps only knew Danny's name.

Thinking only made the urge to smoke stronger and thus I darted outside, pulling my lighter out in midstride. I plopped the white death between my lips and lit it. I breathed in. Exhaled. "Another Thanksgiving. Yay."

I must have lost track of time because before I knew it, the sky was beginning to darken and my aunt Jessica grabbed my shoulder. I nearly rolled off the porch in shock. "Jesus Christ. You a ninja or something?"

"Oh, sorry, Jason. Came out to tell you it's dinner. Everyone's gathered up."

I looked to my cigarette. They never lasted that long. Then I realized I had actually gone through three of them. "Damn." I looked up at her. Her short fire red hair looked as if it was handled with more care than the Declaration of Independence. Did any of our family need money? My eyes then flashed to the wine glass in her hand. That explained why she was chipper. Normally her mousey voice was screeching in anger at her toddlers. "See you got some happy juice there."

"What was that?"

"Said you got some happy juice," I reaffirmed, pointing at the glass.

She managed a high-pitched laugh and waved her hand. God if sounds could kill. I thought the glass was going to shatter in her hand. "You're funny, Jason. Y'know that? Say, how's the computer design thing going?"

"Graphic Design?"

"Sure, that!"

I jammed my hands in my pockets. "Meh. Okay. I mean, I've been taking care of Gramps, so...I haven't really had the time to search—"

"So, can you make his will?"

My eyes widened for a moment. "Wait, what?"

"Y'know, Grandpa Joe's will?"

"No, I don't know. Are you implying that I forge it?"

She laughed again. "No I'm saying that you fill in the lines that aren't filled in...but kind of, help him write it."

I assume by the blank stare on my face she made up her next response. “I’m kidding, I’m kidding. Jeeze, no one takes a joke around here.”

I tried to laugh, but alas, I’m about as good of an actor as that werewolf dude from *Twilight*. “Ah, gotcha. Funny, but umm, let’s go inside.” I didn’t realize the proposal was deadly until she almost tripped over her high-heels. Thanks to a quick save on my part she only spilled a little wine on the white porch and then pulled herself into the house.

Dinner had to be the most awkward part—as it always was. Normally, there was only enough seats for the most adult of the adults, and the rest of us had to sit on the couches or with at the plastic little kids’ table. Normally fate placed me on a couch, but this year, with the surplus of people, after the food was passed around, I found myself sitting at the plastic table; the Hendersons took up the couch and some of the floor, not to mention that the little kids preferred carpet rather than rough plastic.

I looked to Gramps. He sat next to me in his chair, occasionally flicking his eyes at me as he played with his wheel chair. Eventually, he stared into the distance. I cut a piece of turkey with my fork and devoured it before looking back at him. No change. It was then, after close examination, I realized what he was searching for.

At the dinner table, the family discussed my grandfather’s will and how he never left one. My grandmother didn’t either and the money and items were fought over drastically six years ago. My parents covered up their reason for the discussion by the quick wits of my father. Adjusting his tie he cut himself a piece of ham and shrugged. “I just don’t see why we should all get angry again. If he has the will, well, then everything is clearly stated as to what belongs to who.”

My grandfather’s brows curiously lowered. He interjected, laughing. “Oh yes, that’s right, I forgot my wallet at the shed! I’ll get it, love!”

There was an awkward silence. The discussion continued. It moved onto who would do what with the money. A couple of minutes passed and he interrupted again. “That’s like the time I got shot in the foot in ‘NAM!”

“Dad, you never were in Vietnam. You were in the bed those years because you threw your back out playing horseshoes,” my mother replied indignantly.

“You don’t know nothing, you devil woman! You’re trying to get me to cheat on my wife is all,” my grandfather refuted. Too bad he was a wee bit off topic. Again, the family moved on and the discussion became more heated as it shifted to what who would do with what.

Voices began to rise a bit. Even Danny, ‘innocent,’ ‘memorable,’ Danny, the golden child, managed to add in his two cents. Apparently he would pay off his college loans and buy a mustang. He’d probably go to Disney World with this “babe” he met in Jersey. Somehow the discussion crossed paths with me. I almost choked on a carrot.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“Yeah, Jason, what would you do, huh?” my uncle Phil asked.

Finally, I was noticed. Too bad I didn’t want to be. “I dunno. You guys are all talking about stuff I don’t know about. I mean with money I guess I’d save it? Pay the rent? Not sure. Never really thought about it.”

Just like that, the discussion moved on—my statements had very little relevance or importance to their dreams. Just as the voices grew louder and more violent, my grandfather spoke. “I need to piss!”

Silence took another seat at the table. My mom looked to me. “Jason, sweetie, take care of that, will you?”

“Yeah, Jimmy, take me to piss!”

All eyes were on me. I didn’t look at any of them, but I could feel it. Placing down my utensils, I almost fell pulling my legs out from the kids’ table. Void of emotion, I wheeled my grandfather to the bathroom. I shut the door.

“Alright, let’s get you up,” I said, reaching for his wrists.

He pulled them away. “Pen.”

I raised a brow. “What?”

“You deaf, Jason? Pen, boy.”

I don’t know if he actually knew that I always carried a pen on me for notes. Last time I told him that was the only semi-coherent day of his I could remember in years. “Uh, yeah, sure. You remembered my name.”

“I remember a lot.” He pulled out a slip and took the pen from me. I peered over the chair but he shot me a glance and I backed off. “Gramps?” My grandfather turned his chair the to best of his ability and showed me the work he had done. It was a check, with my name on it.

“What is this?”

“Your money. If you drive me to my lawyer’s tomorrow, you’ll get the rest of it.”

Was I dreaming? “Umm, wait, heh, I’m not sure what’s going on here. I can’t take this. Gramps, don’t you have to piss?”

“Yes, but this is more important. Boy, do we have a deal?”

“I don’t really understand what’s going on, Gramps. Umm, why are you giving this to me? Do you even have alzheimer’s or dementia?”

“If you don’t know the answer to those questions, then you don’t deserve the money. Now do we have a deal? And get out of the bathroom. I’ve gotta do my business!”

With strength I haven’t felt in a very long time—not since Danny and I used to hang on his arms and he’d lift us both off the ground—he pushed me out before I could fully open the door. As it shut behind me, I looked at the check. There was \$80,000 with my name on it.