

It started out like every other Thursday. Justin Lucker got off of work at six, and headed two towns over to visit his grandma. He stopped at her favorite burger place, and was met by the same people there that he had seen every week for almost a year.

“Good to see you again, Justin,” greeted an almost entirely bald man in an apron and visor. Marc, the man Justin knew as the owner of the small place. “Let me guess. One classic, and one double patty with jalapenos.”

“You know me too well,” Justin replied, a lighthearted chuckle escaping his lips as he took a look around the small place. It was empty, which wasn’t too unusual for a Thursday afternoon.

After a couple minutes, a paper bag was placed on the counter. Justin quickly payed, thanked Marc, and made his way out the door.

“Tell your grandmother I can’t wait to meet her,” Marc called out as Justin left the restaurant, which caused the younger man to turn back and flash a smile in response.

The drive felt shorter than it usually did, which Justin was thankful for. In what felt like an instant, he was pulling into the parking lot of the nursing home, and making his way inside. The young woman at the desk silently pushed forward the visitor’s log, and Justin was quick to write his information down and head inside.

He made his way to the room where he knew his grandmother would be staying, but was stopped by one of the nurses in the hallway. Alice, a young woman whom he knew as his grandmother’s primary caretaker.

“Justin,” she started, not even taking the time for a simple greeting. “Just to let you know, a flu has been going around the facility. I’d recommend at least keeping a little bit of distance from your grandmother.”

“Good to see you too,” Justin mused, trying to make the conversation the least bit pleasant. “I’ve got it. Keep my distance. But she’s alright, right? Did she get it?”

“Almost everyone staying here got it. But most of them are recovering just fine. I wouldn’t be too worried,” Alice concluded, before taking a step to the side to allow Justin into the room.

Upon entering the room, the sight wasn’t at all what Justin had hoped it would be. His grandmother’s skin was much paler than normal, and she was laying in her bed, as opposed to her favorite chair on the far side of the tiny room.

“Hey there, kid,” his grandmother hummed as he entered the room.

“Hey, grandma,” Justin replied. “How are you feeling tonight? Alice told me you’ve been feeling sick?”

“What, me? No, I got over that silly cold a couple days ago. I’m right as rain,” she tried to explain, but when she tried to push herself up into a sitting position, it was clear that she wasn’t being entirely honest. “What about you, though? Hope work isn’t droppin’ you dead.”

“Same as ever,” he shrugged, taking a seat in his grandmother’s usual chair. “Another day, another dime.”

“What ever happened about that thing you were tryin’ to write?” his grandmother inquired. “You used to be a gifted young author, did you ever publish any of them?”

“You know I gave that up when I got this job. It pays the bills, and writing might not do that,” Justin went on, but was cut off by the woman.

“Pays the bills, but makes you miserable. And who’s to say gettin’ your foot in the door as an author won’t also pay those bills? You know I could always pay your rent for a couple months regardless, just in case you want to see...”

Justin hung his head low as his grandmother spoke to him. The same words he heard her say countless times since he graduated college.

For a few minutes, the only sound that could be heard was the ticking of the clock above the door. Although it felt like an age for both involved. The silence was finally broken by Justin’s grandmother speaking up once more.

“You know... We’re all each other have. If anything happens to me, I don’t want you to fall into a pit of your work. You always told me that the best writin’ you did was when things were tough. I want you to take that, and run with it. Can you promise me that?”

Justin’s heart skipped a beat at the thought of anything happening, but he was quick to nod.

“I can, yeah.”

“Good. Now, tell me about that big thing you were writin’. The one about the school.”

From that point on, the night was filled with Justin talking about old stories he used to write. Before either of them knew it, the clock struck ten, and visiting hours were done. They ate, laughed, and discussed plans for when the grandmother would finally get out of this place.

“Oh, I had no clue... Aren’t you usually gone by nine?” the woman asked, and Justin nodded in response.

“Something was telling me to stay the whole time. Keep you company, y’know?”

The pair chuckled, said their goodbyes, and Justin was off once more. The drive home was long, but Justin was happy to finally get back home. He didn’t even bother really getting ready for bed, as he was tired enough to just fall in and let sleep take him.

A few hours later, Justin was awoken by the sound of his phone. He looked at his alarm clock, and it was just past two in the morning.

“Who would be calling this late?” he asked himself, as he picked up the phone and saw the caller ID. ‘Caring Assisted Living’. A pit formed in his stomach. He didn’t want to answer this call. Maybe if he ignored it, it would go away.

On the fourth ring, Justin hit the answer button, put the phone to his ears, and mumbled into the receiver.

“... Hello?”