

TUESDAY NIGHT WITH GRANDMA

The big engine of the car growled like a chained beast. Kevin gunned the power, making six-year old Danny jump and clutch Humps even tighter to his chest.

“Not a word about this to mom or dad.” Susan kneeled down to look little Danny straight into the eye. “I’ll be back long before they get home, and if you’re a good boy, I’ll take you to the fair next week.”

Danny didn’t say anything. He knew that he and Grandma were not supposed to be left alone, but he wanted to be a good boy and do as he was told.

“Come on!” Kevin shouted from the car. “We’re missing valuable screwing time!”

“Do we have a deal?” Susan ignored Kevin, giving Danny all her attention, if only for the moment. Danny nodded silently.

“Great, I’ll see you later, kidlet.” She gave Humps the camel a friend pat, then turned and ran toward to the car, leaving Danny alone at front door.

As Kevin’s car spewed a rooster-tail of gravel and dirt. Danny closed the door as Kevin and Susan sped away into the night.

From the front door Danny looked straight ahead to the staircase climbing to the second floor. His room was at the top of the stair, right there on the left, but to get there he would have to go past Grandma's room, directly across from his. Danny stood for a long time wishing Susan would come back. Maybe Grandma was asleep. Then he could run to his room and stay there until mom and dad got home. Slowly, Danny started climbing the stairs, one hand on the rail like mom taught him, the other holding onto Humps.

At the top of the flight, Danny looked into Grandma's room to see if she were sleeping.

The room was dark, except for a light by Grandma's head, making her look white, like a ghost. Danny started for his room and his toys when Grandma called out to him.

"Danny! Come here, Snuggems."

Danny thought about running to his room and locking the door, but dad would get very mad if he did that, so he turned around and walked into Grandma's room.

He never liked Grandma's room. It smelled like someone took a bathroom and mixed it with a doctor's office. He had to come here everyday and visit with his Grandma at least once. he was going to thank mom someday. She kept saying so.

Grandma looked like she was made of construction paper that had gotten wet and left out to dry in the sun. Her skin was gray, with deep wrinkles that folded on themselves. Danny sometimes thought that Grandma had

enough skin for three people. And her skin was rough and dry, not like mom's skin at all.

"Did Susan run off again?" Grandma turned her head and looked at Danny. Danny felt like she was looking straight through him. Like maybe grandma was seeing things only she could see. Danny hugged his stuffed camel closer to him and buried his face in Humps' neck.

"It's okay, Danny, you won't get into trouble telling your old granny." Her voice was raspy and weak; it almost sounded like the leaves when dad raked them in fall. Danny looked up from Humps and nodded his head.

"Have a seat, I'll keep you company until your mom and dad get home."

Danny did as he was told and climbed into the chair next to Grandma's bed. Grandma was too old to sit up and hold Danny in his lap, so she just turned her head and watched from her sickbed.

Grandma didn't have any teeth, and her lips smacked continually. Even when she wasn't talking, she moved her mouth like she was eating something. Her eyes were worse. One eye was filmed over, milky white like a marble. The other was a pale blue, the same blue that blind people on TV had. It was like Grandma shouldn't be seeing at all, but she kept looking at you all the same.

"I used to be pretty once." Danny sat still and didn't say anything. His Grandma often talked about things he never understood. "Oh the boys would come for miles and do whatever I wanted."

Grandma started coughing, deep rasping hacks that sounded like something was tearing deep inside her.

“It’s such a damn waste. I’m not ready to die yet, Danny. It’s not fair!” Grandma had been angry before, Danny had heard her yell at mom and dad, but he had never heard her this mad before. It scared him more than her eyes, her mouth, even more than the doctors office smell.

“Just when you start to figure it all out, your body starts going. Then the bones start breaking, and the cancers start eating you alive.” Grandma wasn’t talking to Danny anymore, she was just yelling in the hoarse, raspy voice of hers. “I’m not going! Death can sneak into this room, and I’m not going!”

Danny tried to move further back in the chair, further away from Grandma. She didn’t notice.

“I’m too stubborn! I’ve never been denied anything I fought for, and I won’t be denied this!”

She started coughing again, this time the coughs got stronger, until her whole body was shaking with their force. Danny got out of his chair and ran to the door of the room, but stopped right there.

Grandma was still now. She wasn’t coughing, or smacking her lips, or doing anything. Danny knew something had changed; this was something different. Slowly he moved back to his grandmother.

Her mouth was open, and so were her eyes. Danny reached up and shook her, but she didn’t move or say anything. Danny knew what death was. Snowball had died, and now so had Grandma.

Tearing streaming from his eyes, Danny ran out of the room, across the hall, and into his room. Danny threw himself on his bed and cried, desperately wishing that mom and dad, or even Susan was home.

It seemed like a long time later when Danny heard Grandma get out of the bed.

First, he thought it was Susan, and he turned and started to run downstairs to find her, but through Grandma's open door, he saw her getting out of the bed. Grandma never got of her bed! Danny watched with tears and cries in his throat, as Grandma pulled the hose away from her nose, and stumbled towards him.

"Come give your Grandma a kiss, Snuggems."

She shambled towards his room, her feet barely lifting from the hard wood floor. Her skin fell loosely on her bones, and her eye did not seem to track with anything at all. She reached out with her arms, long and bony, for a hug that filled Danny with terror.

"It's okay, Danny. We'll be together, I'll make you all grown up and you can make me alive, and young."

Danny ran through the door and slammed it shut. He turned and vaulted over his bed and hid behind it in the corner of the room. Peeping out, just over the cover and pillows, he waited for Grandma to go away.

She didn't go away. He listened as her footsteps, dragging across the smooth floor, drew closer to his door. Tears streaming down his face he watched as the knob turned, and the door swung open.

“You’re not being a good little boy.”

Her voice was old. Older than anything anyone had ever heard before. It was the voice of everything that hid in the dark, of a powerful and eternal anger. Grandma moved into the room, her legs jerking slightly, as if she were a puppet. Danny tried to squeeze himself further into the corner.

“Just one little kiss. Can’t you give your Granny that?”

She moved around to the foot of the bed, then grasped the bedpost and tried to pull the bed out of her way. It was far too heavy for her to move. Giving up on the direct approach, she climbed on the bed and began crawling towards Danny.

Danny’s terror boiled up inside him. He dropped down on his stomach, and began crawling as fast as he could under the bed. He heard Grandma growl like a mean dog, and he could feel her weight shift as she tried to head him off on the far side of the bed.

Danny crawled faster than he had ever crawled before. He got out from under the bed, climbed to his feet and tried to dash out of his room. He fell as he felt her boney fingers clamp around his foot, yanking it out from under him.

“I’m going to eat you all up!”

Danny thrashed and kicked as she dragged him back towards the bed. He screamed and cried, but she didn’t care, and there was no one to hear him. Then, his booty slipped off his foot, and he was free again, only for a moment, but free. Propelled by panic, he jumped to his feet and dashed out of the room.

He scrambled down the stairs as fast as he could, gripping the banister to keep himself from falling headlong down the flight.

“Come back here you little bastard!”

Danny ignored her, just as he had so often ignored Susan, and ran out the front door of his home.

He leapt off the porch and kept running, across the gravel driveway and into the dark wood, that surrounded the house. Hide and seek! He was good at that, sometimes even dad couldn't find him. He knew he could hide from Grandma. Crawling under a bush, Danny curled up tight, pulling his knees to his face. Sucking his thumb, he watched the front door.

Grandma soon appeared. Her gown blowing back and forth in the wind. She peered intently into the night with her one clear eye. Danny held his breath. Not a sound. Don't move at all. That was how you won at hide and seek. Grandma moved to the edge of the porch, and steadying herself on the rail, sniffed the air.

“I can smell you.” She twisted her head this way and that, like a bird, until Danny thought it would fall off. “Little legs can't run very far.”

She moved off the porch, slowly, tasting the air before each step. Sometimes she stepped the wrong way, but she kept getting closer to him. Bit by bit she moved towards him. Three steps in the right direction, two steps in the wrong one.

“I don't have time for this!” She was getting angry. “I can taste your life from here. I can smell your blood. Please, won't you share it with your old

granny?” She was pleading now, her voice seemed to pull at his heart. He was being a bad boy, and he knew it.

“Wasn’t I always good to you, you little shit!”

Grandma’s anger hardened him. But still she was getting closer. This wasn’t like playing with dad. Danny knew that if he got caught, it was going to be very bad for him. He looked past Grandma and saw that the door to the house was still open. He jumped up and ran out of his cover, flying past Grandma in a flash. She spun about, trying to grab him, but lost her balance and fell to the ground.

Danny heard her curse and growl, a deep base sound, but he kept running, not looking back. He climbed the steps of the porch and sped through the front door.

He slammed and locked the front door, twisting the dead-bolt, just like mom had showed him. Never open the door while they were gone. That’s what mom and dad said, and now he was going to be a good boy.

Danny ran back to the kitchen, but that door was already locked. Breathing so hard it hurt, he ran down into the basement. The deep dark shadows didn’t seem so scary anymore, not now. The one door down here was locked too. Danny sat down on the dirt floor of the basement and gasped. Then he cried. From the front door he could hear Grandma beating on the door. Cursing and pleading for him to let her in. After a long time he got up and snuck back to the living room.

“Please.” Grandma was begging, her voice getting softer with each plea. “Let me in. Don’t kill me, Danny.”

Danny tiptoed through the living room, never turning his back to the front door, and moved to the stairs. Then, climbing the stairs backwards, he slowly ascended the staircase, getting closer and closer to his room.

When he reached the top of the staircase, he turned and fled into his room. Squeezing Humps so tight that Danny was afraid he was going to tear the camel in half, he threw himself on the bed and cried himself to sleep.

The ear-splitting roar of Kevin’s car woke Danny up. Flinging his bedroom door open, he flew to mom and dad’s room and watched the car skid to a halt in front of the house.

“Shit!” Susan screamed. “What the hell is Grandma doing out here?” Susan ran from Kevin’s car, her long hair trailing behind her as she sprinted for the porch.

“No!” Danny screamed and pounded his tiny fists on the window, but Susan didn’t hear him and ran onto the porch.

“Fuck, she’s dead!” Hysteria gave Susan’s voice a hard brittle edge.

“I was never here.” Kevin backed away from the porch, never having closed even half the distance between his car and the house.

“Don’t go, Kevin!” Susan stepped out from under the porch’s roof, her arms stretched out as if she could grab him from yards away and hold him there. Kevin, ignored her, turned and ran for his car. Susan, cursing, got pelted with a rain of gravel and dirt as he sped away into the night.

Susan turned and ran to the door, in moments she was in the downstairs hallway. Danny ran from mom and dad's bedroom, and darted down the flight to stairs to his sister.

"Grandma..." Danny tried to speak, but tears and terror stole his voice.

"I know kidlet, I know." Susan took Danny in her arms and hugged him tightly, so tightly Danny thought he would break.

"She tried to eat me!" Danny cried into Susan's shoulder. Through the open door he could see Grandma, face down on the porch.

"Hush. It's okay, everything is going to be okay." Susan picked up her baby brother and carried him with her into the living room.

"Let's call mom and dad. It's going to be a long night."

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Danny was curled up in his mothers lap, Humps and mom providing the ultimate in security and safety. The entire living room was bathed in the flashing red lights of the ambulance. Dad came into the room, carrying a glass in each hand.

"Here Danny, drink this for your dad." He handed Danny the smaller of the two cups. It smelled strong, like medicine. He turned his face up and away.

"It's a little nyquil," Dad said to mom. "It won't hurt him and he needs his sleep."

"Go on honey, this will help." Mom's eyes were warm and blue like a sunny sky. Her make-up was streaked from tears, but she tried to give Danny a smile. Danny took the cup in both hands and drank it, to make mom happy.

“She tried to eat me.” Danny said yet again, but they still didn’t believe him. He knew they never would.

“Damn, that girl!” Dad stalked back across the living room. “She not going out again until she’s fifty!” He drank from his own glass, it didn’t seem to make him feel any better.

“Come on, Danny, Let’s get you to bed.” Mom picked Danny up, and carried him to his room. Outside the ambulance switched of its red light and drove away.

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It was sometime late when Susan enter Danny’s room. Silently, on cat feet, she crossed to the little figure in the bed. Danny wasn’t sleeping, his father’s mild drugging had long since worn off. He pulled the cover up to his face, peeking out just over the edge of the comforter. Susan reached and firmly pulled the covers away from Danny.

“Snuggems, we’re going to have so much fun.” Her voice was raspy, like the dry rustle of leaves being raked.

THE END