**Still Here**

 “Still here, kid?”

“Still here, old man?”

“Eh, as long as Linda there stays here,” he stares at her with…a smile? Damn, old man can smile.

“Yeah she’s a beauty, a YOUNG beauty,” I reply, trying to hold in a laugh.

“Shut it boy.”

I smirked at old man Davis, leaning back against the wall. Will I end up like him?

“Whatcha staring like that for boy, didn’t your parents teach you it’s rude to stare?”

“Considering they’re dead, no they didn’t,” I replied casually. Yeah, maybe I’ll end up like him.

“Ha-ha, well there’s the answer for your bad manners.”

“Does this mean your parents were dead too when you were young?”

Maybe that wasn’t the right thing to say, I think as old man Davis glares back at me. I glance away, searching for Linda. Hazel eyes, brown hair, 5ft 6, she’s a damn beauty. I wonder why her parents named her Linda; she seems more of a Maya or possibly a Rebecca.  Linda seems boring, plain.

”So, old man Davis, wh-“

“Don’t call me that!”

“Fine. Davey wh-“

“Quit it boy!”

“…What are your plans for today?”

“Nothing.”

“Did you eat lunch already?”

“No.”

“Well are you hungry?”

“No.”

Sometimes I wonder why I still make an effort with old man Davis. He’s constantly in a bad mood, throwing negative comments at everything, even himself*. Kind of like you.* I walk away from him, leaving him in his own misery. I always wonder why retirement homes have an old feeling to them and it’s not cause’ of the people in it. The walls are always light beige, sometimes white and there has to be wallpaper. Perhaps this is why old man Davis is always grumpy. The aroma here is dull. Nothing bright, just plain. I catch Mary’s eye as I walk my way to Linda.

“Hey Mary, how’s life treating you today,” I reply with fake amusement.

“Still alive, aren’t I?” she replies back.

 It’s the same damn answer every single day. Every. Single. Day. No need to wonder why her family left her here. Her life is as dead as she will be in a couple of years. Shit, that was harsh. *Tone it down boy, remember, positive.*

“Sure thing Mary, sure thing,” I continue on my way, as if I hadn’t just insulted her.

Mary’s a nice lady. Nice. Right… You know those people who act nice and innocent but when they’re not satisfied, they turn their manicured nails into claws? Well that’s Mary. I wonder if she was always like that or did she turn this way after seeing the wallpaper in this room. Or maybe it’s the thousands of damn fake flowers. They couldn’t even bring in real flowers. Maybe it’ll be more depressing. After a while, they wrinkle and die, kind of like us. I guess having fake flowers isn’t a bad thing after all.

I finally reach Linda. Sometimes I wonder why she comes here every day if she’s on her phone most of the time. Isn’t the purpose of being here to talk with the elderly?

“Hey Linda,” I say casually, as I lean against the desk in front of her. This is how cool people act, right?

When she doesn’t answer, I wonder if she’s mad at me…wait I didn’t even do anything. Is she that into her phone? Damn, maybe I should speak a bit louder.

“HEY LINDA!” I almost yell, not thinking about it. I can see Mary giving me the stink eye. She’s not one to talk. The lady barely hears you when you’re talking to her but she can hear me across the room.

“Oh! Hi, you scared me a bit,” she replies back, staring with wide eyes. Yeah, well if you got off that phone of yours…

“Sorry about that. I was just trying to get your attention.” Wait, shit, did I sound desperate?

“Oh,” she answers me, as if I’m bothering her.

“Yeah, so how’s it going? Life treating you good?” I try to answer nonchalantly.

“Yup, everything great,” she answers with a bored tone.

This was one of the reasons I haven’t asked Linda to go on a date with me. *Yeah that’s the reason.* She never really knew how to keep a conversation going. If you didn’t start it or keep it going, she would be just staring at her damn phone like she is now. Maybe it’s just me. Am I boring? Is she not interested in me enough to be at least friends? And as I take a glance at her phone, curious as to what is so important on that damn phone, I realize something life changing. Her parents named her the right name.

“Okay, well bye Linda. I can see that staring at a blank phone is more fun than me.”

“Hmm yeah later,” she murmured back. *Linda the anti-social.*

I turn away from her as I glance around the room. *Why am I even here?* It seems I disappoint every single person here. Its 10:30 in the morning, from what the clock is showing, and I haven’t even eaten breakfast. Neither has old man Davis. I look around for him and finally see him playing checkers with Jimmy John. Huh, I thought they disliked each other. Ha, memory loss…

“Dear, be a doll and help me set these tables,” Suzy calls at me, while pointing to the tables.

“Sure thing suga’,” I answer back, holding in a laugh as she gives me a dirty look.

I always hated the saying, “be a doll”. It’s as if they’re saying be a damn fake plastic doll that only moves if the owner moves them and says what the owner tells them to. Is it just me who thinks this or am I speaking for many? I wouldn’t have replied back with suga’ if Suzy was a nice lady and not a demanding old hag. *Tone it down, be positive.* Suzy’s the manager of this depressing place and tries to be nice, key word, tries. I think she’s around forty-three so she’ll end up here in about thirty years. Maybe that’s why she’s mean. She works somewhere she’s going to end up. How sad, spending your whole life here, literally. Sometimes I believe this place does bring your mood down. *Then why are you still here?*

I begin to help set the tables. Not a difficult task, but still needs two to finish quickly. There are about twenty tables that need to be set, the table cloth and all that crap.

“Hey suga’?” I snigger.

“Yes *doll*,” she replies back with a triumphant smile. I narrow my eyes at her. Huh, so she does know I hate being called that.

“Why are we setting up these tables? There’s plenty tables in the dining room area.”

“Have you forgotten? The weekly visit? It’s today *doll*.” Is she going to stop calling me that?

“Oh yeah,” I grumbled. These damn visits irritate me.

I forgot about that. Every week, family of the elders come and drop in and visit. This needs to be done once a week because apparently, visiting family is mandatory once a week. I mean shouldn’t you be visiting the elders more than once a week? Is this why most of the elders are grumpy? I mean if my parents or grandparents were in an elders’ home I would visit them more than once a week, make many memories before they pass away.

“You can leave now,” Suzy commands me, snapping me out of my thoughts.

I jump, startled. Oh, everything’s finished.

“Hmm, you’re welcome, Suzy,” I chimed in.

“Yeah, thanks doll.”

“Hag…,” I mumbled under my breath. *Why am I still here?*

Again, I turn and glance around. What to do, what to do… The kitchen door stops my wandering eyes and I begin to walk towards it. I open the door and see our head chef running around, trying to stay composed. He’s been working here for about ten years and cooks a mean lasagna. He’s always frantic on the days of visit, trying to make everything perfect.

“Hey Chef, what’s on the menu today?”

“Shut up and come help me boy.” Well then...

“Sure, sure. What do you need me to do?” I ask right away, not wanting to stress him more.

“Grate the cheese, peel the oranges and cut those vegetables,” he commanded. Where's the please?

I don’t mind helping him. It’s actually pretty fun. Maybe I should become a chef. I could end up like that chef who insults everyone’s cooking and makes millions.

“Anything else chef?” I ask, hoping he says no.

“No that's all, now scram, boy!"

“Yeah, you’re welcome by the way,” I grumbled, walking out of the kitchen. *Why am I still here?*

Heading towards the couch, I glance at the wooden clock on the wall again. Damn, its 11:20 already. They should be arriving any minute. I always wondered why everyone was nervous on visit days. Suzy always made a fuss about everything being neat, clean and tidy, while the chef needed to learn a new recipe every week. Linda, well Linda just stays the same. I always pondered why I make an effort with today. Suzy thinks I’m here to show off what a ‘kind and loving’ boy I am, but what she doesn’t know is that I question myself with the same damn question every day. I could be doing homework, or hanging with friends, or getting a job where I can actually make money or even go to the gym.

“Let’s go boy! They’re arriving now,” Suzy hisses while giving me the death glare. What the hell did I do?

“Sure thing suga!” I sang, while walking towards the door. Why she wanted us to greet everyone in, I’ll never know.

Fifteen minutes of fake smiles, ‘enthusiastic’ welcomes and unwanted hugs, everyone was inside, greeting each other. And as I look around the room, skimming over everyone reuniting with their loved ones, my eyes catch a sight that makes my heart drop. It’s days like today that make me realize. Heading towards old man Davis, I finally realize why I’m still here.

“Still up for that lunch, old man.”

“Yeah, I’m still up, kid.”

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