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“Grandma May”

By Sebastian Torres

“Grandma... Grandma?”

“Yes, Gavin”

“Billy pushed me.”

“He what?!”

“Pushed me.”

“Well that’s not right. Billy! Billy! Come here and own up to what you’ve done.”

The night was brisk. A wind picked up and whooshed through an open window. Grandma May sat back in her rocking chair, slumped over and knittings in her wrinkled hands. A distant hallway light flickered. And then...

A crash. A vase or something. Followed by a thud and large, exasperated exhale. Someone's last breath. Grandma didn't wake up. The noise didn't disturb her.

The following morning birds' chirpings woke Grandma May up instead. She moaned and groaned in discomfort, stood up slowly and carefully. She noticed the light.

"Shit damn."

After grabbing her glasses she waddled to turn it off. Then into the hallway. A scream soon followed. Such a horrible scream. Sobbing, yelling, cursing. A world-burning hatred. She hadn't felt this active in years. The world was distraught for Grandma May and no one was there to disrupt her agony. No one alive, that is.

Bright. Too bright.

Billy wasn't used to waking up early mornings, let alone in the summertime. But this was Grandma's summer cabin and she always ruthlessly insisted. She pulled back the covers, said something but it was too early for Billy to process the words.

Gavin didn't seem affected at all by the sun's burning brightness. Scorching beams of death. He never seemed much bothered about anything. Always an uppity attitude. Always a tender face. Billy hated it. And Grandma loved it.

"How'd you sleep last night, Gavin?" Grandma was already pampering him. Billy couldn't stand straight. The pills had been affecting him lately. First he couldn't sleep and now he can't stop wanting to sleep.

Fucking ridiculous.

"Yea, good. Grandma I was wondering when we'd be able to restock. I've run out of some things." Gavin spoke through his coffee sips. Grandma paid every attention.

“I was thinking about that. Tomorrow I suppose. Make sure to take your brother with you. Tell me if he does anything...stupid.” Grandma May whispered that last part, but Billy heard it regardless.

The door rang, startling Gavin, unaffected by Billy’s muted senses.

“Oh, it’s Roger. Gavin, I would like for you to meet him. He’s a very sweet man.” Grandma always had that elderly soft voice when speaking to Gavin. She reserved all the loud harshness of her anger for Billy when he was being a bad grandson, which was always in Grandma May’s eyes.

The door creaked open to reveal a mailman. But this one was different. Not only was he a new face, but an odd looking one too.

Roger the mailman stood tall and bony. He had the frame of a skeleton and dark circles under his wide eyes. His hands were larger than normal and his smile stretched ear to ear, even a few missing teeth.

“Roger,” Grandma welcomed. “How are you? This is my grandson Gavin.” Grandma took no time in introducing her favorite grandson. She sounded so proud.

“Nice to meet you.” Was all Gavin needed to say to make Grandma content, which of course she was.

“It’s very nice to meet you, Gavin. Your grandmother has spoken very highly of you.” Roger had a very hoarse voice. Perhaps a smoker.

“That’s funny,” Billy couldn’t help himself from interjecting from a distance.

“Our grandmother’s never mentioned you before.” Attention reached Billy, finally.

“Why you fucking-” Grandma May’s anger slipped out so easily nowadays. She used to make an effort in hiding it in front of strangers.

“Grandma!” Gavin spoke sharply. *Not in front of strangers* seemed to be the message in his eyes.

She caught on, turned back to Roger instead.

“Excuse that boy, Roger. Don’t pay him any attention. Gavin would love to see you more often,

Roger. You can spend some time - I don’t know - bonding?”

Gavin looked the most confused. Billy wasn’t totally grasping the situation but he knew something was off.

“Would you like that Gavin?” Now it was Roger that only spoke to Gavin. Gavin seemed hesitant, incredibly confused and unsure. “Uh, yeah. Why not?” was all he could say.

“Excellent. Good day.” And with that, the skeletal mailman left.

Grandma closed the front door, turned to Billy.

Here it comes.

“You fucking idiot! Embarrassing me like that!” Grandma pointed and yelled for the next hour or so. Billy heard it all. He looked to Gavin for help but he just seemed confused.

As always he had to deal with Grandma’s fury on his own. *What a brother.*

There had never been so many people on Grandma May’s cabin porch before.

She leaned on a nearby wooden chair. Blue and red flashed and lit her wrinkled face and rebounded off her thin spectacles. She was aching all over, but that didn’t matter. The day had been stressful but she was still in shock. Everything seemed a mile away. The police officers surrounding her summer cabin seemed a mile away. The detectives asking her questions seemed a mile away. The medics checking her vitals seemed a mile away. The blanket on her back even seemed a mile away.

But Billy, she knew, was nearby. He was the only thing that seemed to be within her reach.

And there he was. Slumped on the porch steps, falling asleep of course.

He's always wanting to sleep. Ever since those damn expensive pills.

To Grandma May's eyes he didn't seem to care at all. Not even a single tear. Maybe he was happy. Maybe he hated his brother more than she knew. There always seemed to be disdain but why not hatred as well. This was all Grandma May could think about. And think about it, she did. Extensively, passionately even. Eventually she came to her own conclusions.

He knows something.

“That guy seemed odd. Who even was he? *Roger.*” Billy walked the grocery store aisles. He looked all around him as he spoke. It had been months since he'd seen a pretty girl. Perhaps there was one there.

“I honestly don't know.” Gavin replied, eyes locked to the grocery list on his phone.

“One of Grandma May's friends, I guess.” Gavin concluded. Billy gave him a ‘really?’ face as soon as he said “friends.”

“Creepy dude.” Billy continued looking around, but to no avail. *This town is so boring. So isolated.*

“Hey, how come you didn't help me with May.” Billy's switch of focus caught Gavin off guard.

“What do you mean?” Gavin seemed genuinely confused, once again. It bothered Billy. Made him feel like he wasn't supposed to speak his mind.

“You fucking know what I mean.” Billy stood in Gavin's way just as Gavin was ducking his head back into the list.

“I specifically remember saying ‘have my back when it comes to grandma’ before we came here for the summer. Don't pretend you forgot.” The more Billy spoke the more angsty he grew.

“Well, I’m not sure what I’m exactly supposed to do. Especially since you start your own trouble sometimes.” Billy gave Gavin a challenging look, one ready to duke it out with a few slaps if needed.

Gavin folded. “Sometimes.” Was his defense.

“Well I know what you’re supposed to do.” Billy’s frustration mimicked Grandma’s. “You’re supposed to defend me, back me up. Be the older brother. Is that so hard? You know if I was in your position I wouldn’t let Grandma talk to you like she talks to me.” Billy made a fair point. But Gavin just brushed it off.

Billy pushed his irritation down.

“What’s been going on with you and Grandma, Gavin? You’re always with her. It’s like she’s got a leash on you. You even go into her room late at night. You think I don’t notice but I do. When I can’t sleep. Is she making you do stuff?”

“That’s enough!” Gavin nearly screamed it. It was a statement loud enough to be heard throughout the entire store.

“Leave it alone, Billy. Always sticking your nose into trouble.” Billy had never seen Gavin lash out like that, and so he kept his mouth shut. Left it, like his older brother told him to.

“Now help me with this list.”

Black covered the living room. The wake was full of muffles and sobs. But Grandma May didn’t sob. Her pain was beyond that.

Her poor Gavin. There his limp body lay, sprawled across an expensive casket. His young body laid properly organized. She adjusted her glasses and looked it up and down, until she got to his

missing head. A vacant space where his head should have been. She grinded whatever teeth she had left.

The evening was full of “sorrys” and “he was a good man” but Grandma May was getting sick of it. Her anger bubbled up but never reached the surface. Surely it would if Billy was in sight.

Instead, Billy hid away in his room. He avoided the crowd, leaving Grandma all to herself. *Gavin wouldn't have done this. Gavin would have stood by my side. Poor, sweet Gavin. Gone forever. Just like his parents.* What a tragedy.

She took her glasses off to wipe away a single tear.

“Grandma?” Billy shuffled into the living room, head ducked down. He looked distorted.

Someplace else. Grandma took it as a lack of care.

“What do you want?” Grandma May held her head high. She didn’t care if she made her estranged relationship with Billy clear to all in the room. He was a villain in her eyes. Abolished and shunned. It was decided.

“There’s someone at the door for you.” He finished, turned to waddle back to his room.

She walked over to the door, steps light. Roger stood at the frame. Almost mirroring the stance of the Grim Reaper. He cast a dark, dark shadow. A smile on his face. But Grandma May couldn’t see it without her glasses.

It was the middle of the night. Billy’s pills weren’t working this time. Instead they made him restless.

Then he heard a creak and a window tap. He sat up, stared at his window for a long time. He saw only the bushes sitting right outside his room. The wind pulled and tugged them.

Then, the creak sounded again. But this time it was outside of Billy’s room, in the hallway.

Tiptoeing used to be a lot easier for Billy when he was younger. He was shit at it now. But he snuck around anyway.

He found the hallway and kept a close eye on Gavin's closed door. Next to it was Grandma's slightly open door. A sliver of space.

Then, a groan. A struggled voice moaned, "Gav-"

Billy inched forward, squatted down. Then a figure emerged. Billy saw him through the sliver. It was Gavin, looking directly at Billy. They held eye contact. Gavin looked scared, almost ready to cry.

Billy wouldn't move an inch. Gavin grabbed the doorknob and slowly closed the door. No more sliver.

Billy didn't know what to do. So he walked back into his room and stared at the bush covered window.

That cursed hallway would always be where Gavin died. The blood could be removed, the smell too, but never the fact that he died right there. Head brutally bashed in. Grandma May still couldn't take her eyes away, nor did she try to.

"Everything okay?" Billy had that same dead and emotionless expression now always implanted onto his face. A plate full of food sat unbothered before him. Grandma May hadn't even bothered serving herself a plate.

Okay? Did he really just ask that?

"Is everything okay?!" Grandma May couldn't contain her rage. She had waited so long for the opportune moment to release all of it with no second sense of remorse. *Of course everything wasn't okay!*

“Gavin...” she started. An incoming sob cut her off.

“My grandson-”

“My brother.” Billy interjected.

“-was murdered!” She screamed at the top of her old lungs. Billy shut up.

“ ‘Okay?’ Nothing is ‘okay’!” She was a terrifying force of vengeance. A harbinger of misplaced justice.

“And you know...*you* know what *you* did!” Grandma’s voice rang like the devil’s bell.

This awoke Billy. “What I did?” He could match her angry force if he needed to. “Are you blaming me? You think I did this?” He stood up.

“Don’t you dare deny your involvement! You stand there as if Gavin didn’t have his head cracked in by your baseball bat!”

“My? -”

“Sit there as if you didn’t *murder* him. Jealous. Evil. I know you coveted what we had. You will never replace Gavin! You will never right what you did wrong. Do you hear me?!”

This broke him. He cowered, sat back down and covered his face with his hands. Billy sobbed harder than Grandma May ever had.

The old television set crackled in the background. Grandma May retreated to her landline phone. She called friendlies all night. Roger might’ve been among them. He would listen to what she had to say. Surely he would care. In her mind Billy never cared.

Every now and again Grandma May would look over to Billy, still stunted at the dinner table, and glare with hatred. She would sharply turn away any time he moved an inch. Grandma May didn’t sleep much that night. Neither did Billy.

“You left the back door open last night, Billy. Don’t let it happen again.” Grandma May woke up with an irk in her back that made today’s irritation all too easy.

“Okay.” Billy said half-heartedly as he ate his cereal at the dinner table.

Gavin came out of the bathroom, hair still wet from the shower.

“So about last night-” Billy started. Gavin immediately looked ill. He looked to Billy with eyes that said “don’t.” This upset Billy.

He jumped up, kicking back his chair.

“Grandma! What are you doing to Gavin?” He blurted out before he could think about it. Gavin turned fully petrified.

“You know what you’re doing is wrong, Grandma!” He continued. Grandma May stayed quiet; her face contorted to that of a wild beast. She held eye contact with Billy, which was astonishing seeing as her vision was all but gone. She held it anyway, as if she would attack at any moment.

“You can’t do this to him. To me. Any of it. And I’m sick of spending every day ignoring what’s happening in this fucking cabin! I can’t sleep anymore. I want to go home.” He stopped himself after that.

The room became uncomfortably silent. A long beat left the three in a standstill. Until Grandma May stood up.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about. You fucking idiot.” She walked over to Billy and stood over him, displaying ultimate authority.

“There is no home for you. Your foster parents don’t love you-”

“Grandma!” Gavin tried.

“You’re nothing, Billy. Gavin is the only blessing of this family.” She got close to Billy’s face now. “And I don’t want you to forget it.”

Billy looked up at her. He could smell the old stench in her rotting mouth. He felt sorry for Gavin. He took pity on this elder woman and left through the front door. Gavin followed him and calmed him down. But Billy would not forget the hate his Grandmother held for him.

The night was similar to Gavin's last. The window was even open. The same smell in the air. Billy packed his things into a ripped duffel bag. He had had enough. His hands shook, either with fear or with the cold. Even he didn't know. But most likely fear. Grandma was home. And he didn't have Gavin as a line of defense anymore. After her last outburst she could do anything. She hadn't taken her eyes off him since he walked through the doors.

"Leaving?" Grandma stood by Billy's bedroom door frame.

"I'm staying somewhere else tonight." Billy wouldn't look at her when he spoke. Grandma hated when he did that.

"So you're running?" Grandma May didn't even seem to recognize the words coming out of her mouth. Billy didn't know what to say; his eyes still down.

"You should be on the run. After what you did to Gavin. Who knows what could happen next?"

Cold iron chilled Grandma's wrinkled hand.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm innocent." a voice crack mid-sentence.

She walked towards Billy, arm behind her back as something dragged behind her.

"You are anything but innocent."

"Grandma, I'm sorry about what happened to Gavin. But it's not my fault. I know we weren't the closest but I could never have killed him. He was my best friend. You have to believe me." His red eyes were ready to take another beating of tears. But Grandma didn't care. Not one bit.

“No. I don’t have to believe you.”

At a glance Billy recognized his bat in her hand.

“You fucking-”

And with a smooth swipe Billy was down. His blood-driven grandmother over him, with a bloody metal bat in hand.

But that wasn’t enough.

She lifted it again. For some reason it wasn’t heavy at all. It came down a lot faster.

And again, and again, and again.

Up and down Grandma May pummeled Billy’s face in. His feet twitched at each strike. The sound of bones and brains swished together. Grandma May was out of breath, but she didn’t slow. Not until she was sure. Not until she was satisfied.

By the twenty-third strike she was sure. Billy was dead. Gavin was avenged.

She dropped the metal bat, stood up straight to catch her breath and then...

A bush rustled. Right outside of Billy’s bedroom window. The bush shook, masking a chuckle. Grandma looked hard outside, but she couldn’t see with her old eyes that evil mailman Roger was watching. A smile on his face and a camera in hand.

But although she couldn’t see him, she was sure to hear him. For his laugh only grew.

And with it, she bellowed a sob. “My boy!”

She cradled the bloody mangled body of Billy’s corpse. She seemed as if she already regretted it. She swayed and rocked Billy’s body, crying and crying. And then, red and blue lights flashed outside. She knew, and yet she wouldn’t move.

“My boy! I love my boy!” Was all she said, over and over again. And while the sirens silenced all that was left was a loud sob, and a sniveling chuckle in the backdrop.