A Week In The Life Of An Old Man

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"June 23, 2031

Art came by with the kids today. They'll be here for a week or so. It's nice to have family that cares enough to spend their vacation with an old guy like me. Now I know how my grandmother must have felt when my parents brought Paul, Annette and myself to visit, except we saw her every day."

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by Tom Frisk

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Art's wife, Val, looked frazzled. Must have been the long trip with three kids in the back of the boat. Nv, but she'll feel better tomorrow. My boy sure has good taste in ladies. Even when she's worn out, there's a dance of electricity in her eyes.

Kathy started to baby Art as soon as he walked in the door. "Oh, look at you! You poor thing! Doesn't Val feed you?" She said it jokingly, but both gave her a dirty look. Guess she wasn't in the mood for kidding around tonight.

June 24, 2031

Russ stopped over to have a beer this afternoon. More like he wanted to see my grandchildren - didn't even finish his bottle.

They climbed all over him and played with his long white beard and overall straps when he sat down. telling him how much they'd missed their Uncle Jess. I started calling him that when his beard started to grow. Kids don't know the joke behind his nickname, and it's funny to see him look at me when they call him that.

Towards evening, Julia, Russ' wife, came over and joined the women for gossip in the kitchen while we men grabbed the kids and built a fire on the metal float. It was time for the family tradition to continue: horror stories for the kids by firelight.

Dad used to tell my friends and me stories. All of them involved the same woman, Dracula, and Jaws. Without fail, he'd involve all three of them. And without fail, all of us would be quiet as he told his stories. Then all of a sudden, a blood-curdling scream from hell! "AAaaaaaaaaaah!"

Just before he'd let out the yell, he'd grab the nearest kid, making claw of his hands, and swoop, sending the kid into a screaming panic, which sent the other kids into fits. Story-time chain reaction, he'd call it.

I did the same tonight. But when I set the story up, Joey's, Art's oldest, asked me who 007 was. So I spent the first half hour on exposition. Once that was over, I made up a story and grabbed Joey when it was time for the yell. He got so scared he jumped right off the float into the water.

I'm glad he wasn't hurt. As it was, his pants and shirt were partially dissolved before we got him out. But he didn't even suffer a skin rash. It must be nice to have young skin.

"Kath heard the commotion and ran to the Aow of our boat and screamed what was all the racker. "Relax," I told her. "I'm 007! I have a license to chill!"

She wasn't amused, but it's nice to know I still got it.

June 25, 2031

Seems all my friends want to see my grandchildren before they take off. Kevin stopped by with Christine this morning on their way to the mall. Poor guy, it told him that if women want to shop, that's their business and it isn't a man's place to act like he's happy in a women's clothing store.

After they left, Joey climbed on my lap and asked me why all the grown-ups call me Elvis. My God. How does one explain The King to someone who's never heard of him? I told him to look at the faded velvet painting on the wall by my sofa. When he came back, I tried to explain to him that he was a singer. "Like Axl Rose?" he asked. No, I told him.

I asked him if he'd ever heard of Michael Jackson. He said, "Oh, you mean old folks' music!" So there I was, giving a 6-year-old a lesson in the history of Rock 'n' Roll.

He asked me what made Elvis so special. So I took him down to my den and placed my Elvis' Greatest Hits CD in the machine. Thank God he knew what that was. I'd have had hell to invent something that would make CDs obsolete. I set it to "Jail House Rock," and then paused the machine. "Hold on, Joey, Grandpa will be right back," I slipped into my sequined billy jump suit and started the machine, lip-synching the song.

"Bowww-bowww! (Pause) Bow! Boom! Bowww-bowww! (Pause)

Bow! Boom! Bowww-bowww! (Pause) Bowww-bowww! (Pause)

After I was done, we watched one of Elvis' movies on the laser disc machine. Joey started his lip when Val told him it was bed time and said, "That's alright, Mom!" She gave me the strangest look. Can't say I blame her. If I was her and saw my child sitting next to some old coot dressed like The King of Rock 'n' Roll, I'd be a little worried, too.

June 26, 2031

Joey sure is inquisitive. Good thing his brother and sister still can't talk yet. But I bet Janie and Michael will be asking questions before too long.

Today Joey asked me what Elvis was standing near in the movie we saw yesterday. "You know," he said, nodding his head, "those tall brown things with green hair growing out of them." I felt a lump in my throat.

I was once a kid, too. And that wasn't green hair.

That's what were known as leaves. They grabbed the sun's rays and made its food.

"Oh, Grandpa," he said, "not eating. You're fibbing." The lump grew bigger.

How could I make him believe me? Grown-ups destroyed the vegetation and wild life long before he was born. And now he's paying for it.

He'll never know the joy of fishing the water fell into the river, nor walking in a park, nor having a dog, nor even climbing up those tall brown things with green hair. He won't even know what it's like to live on something that doesn't float.

He'll never know the joy of eating fresh food from a garden he worked on. My grandson will only eat that tasteless synthetic stuff from cans.

June 27, 2031

Art, Val and the kids left today. I felt like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz when I hugged Joey. I got the feeling he might feel the Scarecrow too, if he only knew who he was.

I can't help but think Art and Val are negotiating prime information in bringing up their kids. Surely they could have shown pictures of when they were young. But maybe they figure what the kids don't know won't hurt them. Maybe they figure that the past that was might have well not happened, for all intents and purposes. Maybe they figured that it's a grandparent's Job to keep the past alive. Maybe not. Maybe they left because I was filling Joey's head with so much of what might as well be a Carpathian Dracula, and 007 story. Trees, fishing, being Elvis—they're not real to him. They never will be. Maybe Joey will only remember his grandfather as some old coot in a sequined jumpsuit who told tall tales.
A Week in the Life of an Old Man  
by Tom Frisk

June 23, 2001

Art came by with the kids today. They'll be here for a week or so. It's nice to have family that cares enough to spend their vacation with an old guy like me. Now I know how my grandmother must have felt when my parents brought Paul, Jennifer and myself to visit, except we saw her every day.

Art's wife, Val, looked frazzled. Must have been the long trip with three kids in the back of the boat. Ah, but she'll feel better tomorrow. My boy sure has good taste in ladies. Even when she was worn out, there's a dance of electricity in her eyes.

Kathy started to baby Art as soon as he walked in the door. "Oh, look at you! You poor thing! Doesn't Val feed you?" She said it jokingly, but Val gave her a dirty look. Guess she wasn't in the mood for kidding around tonight.

June 24, 2001

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They climbed all over him and played with his long white beard and overalls when he sat down, telling him how much they'd missed their Uncle Jessie. I started calling him when his beard started to gray. Kids don't know the joke behind his nickname, and it's funny to see him look at me when they call him that.

Toward evening, Julia, Russ' wife, came over and joined the women for gossip in the kitchen while we men grabbed the kids and built a fire on the metal float. It was time for the family tradition to continue: horror stories for the kids by firelight.

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Just before he'd let out the yell, he'd grab the nearest kid, making claw of his hands, and swoop, sending the kids into a screaming panic, which sent the other kids into fits. Storytime chain reaction, he'd call it.

I did the same tonight. But when I set the story up, Joey, Art's oldest, asked me who 007 was. So I spent the first half hour on exposition. Once that was over, I made up a story and grabbed Joey when it was time for the yell. He got so scared he jumped right off the float into the water.

I'm glad he wasn't hurt. As it was, his pants and shirt were partially dissolved before we got him out. But he didn't even suffer a skin rash. It must be nice to have young skin.

Kath heard the commotion and ran to the Aow of our boat house and screamed what was all the racket. "Melax," I told her. "I'm 007! I have a license to chill!"

She wasn't amused, but it's nice to know I still got it.

June 25, 2001

Seems all my friends want to see my grandchildren before they take off. Kevin stopped by with Christine this morning on their way to the mall. Poor guy, I told him that if women want to shop, that's their business and it isn't a man's place to act like he's happy in a women's clothing store.

They left after they left. Joey a couple hours later. The King to the King of Oz -- they're not real to him. They never will be. Maybe Joey will only remember his grandfather as some old coot in a sequined jumpsuit who told tall tales.