

Full House

Grandpa stops talking whenever dad gets home. Which is funny because up until then he never shuts up about anything. *Monho, I like my eggs fried and a little brown around the edge. Monho, fix your bed, no one is going to do it for you. Monho, you bow when you greet older people on the street- don't just say 'hi'. Monho, when I was your age we didn't have those screen bricks and we were much, much happier.* Grandpa lies a lot. Now that I'm twelve I can sometimes pick the lies out. He definitely does not like his eggs fried – he likes them most scrambled, the way I usually make them for myself. He just doesn't like admitting it.

When the whole virus thing started, Mom and Dad fought a lot about whether or not Grandpa should stay with us until things got better. *He's happy where he is, Yan,* dad would say. *But where he is isn't very safe for him right now, Hui,* mom would say. It was very hard to sleep. What was frustrating was that I knew he knew that we all knew Grandpa was going to move in, no matter what. He did two weeks later. With a suitcase behind him, Grandpa was forced to move in with us here in Tuen Mun. The day he arrived was strange. Mom went to go get him cause Dad 'did not want to be stuck in a vehicle with the man', so the whole morning Dad and

I were tasked with making the place look nice.

“Yan, you know the floors could be sparkling and he would still comment on how dirty it is.”

“Yes, but if I think everything is nice and clean, I’ll know it’s his fault if he complains, not ours.”

“Seriously?”

Mom gave him that glare of hers.

“It’s not too late to back out,” Dad made one last plea. She continued to glare until she made her way out of the front door. Dad looked absolutely defeated and pissed, but we still cleaned the entire house—every single inch—until it looked like we didn’t even live here.

“See Mon, now if grandpa makes Mom mad, she’ll have no one to blame but herself,” he told me as he poured us both a nice tall glass of water. He always talks like that when it comes to Mom. He always says things that sound mean but does things for her that aren’t. I asked him why Mom wanted Grandpa around if he always makes her mad, too. Dad took a big gulp before telling me that Mom’s parents died before I was born, so being around Grandpa makes her feel like a daughter again. I nodded. I figured if my parents died, I would also want to be around Grandpa. I would want to be around him 24/7. Dad made me do a quick shower and told me to dress in the nicest sleep clothes I owned before he rushed to do the same. By the time we were both good and ready, the doorbell rang, and Grandpa had arrived. He shuffled in behind Mom, scanning the place as if we weren’t standing right there, and said, “Your windows look dirty.” I felt Dad twitch next to me.

For the first month or two it was pretty bad. Our place isn’t that big. We have a living room that is also a dining room and a kitchen, plus two bedrooms. That’s

it. And since Mom and Dad were working from home at the time it was a train wreck. Not a day went by where they weren't screaming at each other and Dad had to go take his 'mandated walks'. It was even worse 'cause me and Grandpa took their room while Mom and Dad had to squeeze into mine, so Dad was always cranky. The tiniest thing could start an entire avalanche.

"Did you guys get new plates?"

"No, we did not get new plates."

"But I swear you had white ones with blue swirls on them."

"Nope. They were always just white."

"No. You got new plates."

"Jesus dad, we didn't get new plates!"

"You rude, ungrateful brat! How dare you raise your voice at me!" At that point in the argument, I shoved the rest of my dinner into my mouth with one scoop and quickly fled for cover in the bedroom. After those months though, things let up. Mom and Dad were allowed to go back to work again and I guess since nights are the only times they can unwind, Grandpa takes it upon himself to stay absolutely silent when they get home. I used to think it was out of spite, his cold shoulder, but on one of our daily round-the-block trips he let something slip about Dad.

"You slept during class, didn't you."

"What? No I didn't!" I really thought my mask hid my bad poker face.

"You can't lie to your elder."

"...Fine. How did you know?"

"Because your hair sticks up the same way your Dad's does whenever he falls asleep at a desk. I never told him that that's how I could always tell that he was sleeping rather than doing his homework, so for a while he thought that I just had an incredible sixth sense."

“Sixth sense?”

“An extra sense for knowing when your Dad was being a lazy butt.” Grandpa chuckled. He never talked about Dad with me. Never ever. So when he did *and* he let out a little laugh, I knew that he wasn’t silent out of spite. Not at all. Ever since then, Grandpa started to become more and more loose lipped with Dad stories. There was one where six-year-old Dad dropped his ice-cream and took a huge bite out of Auntie’s without her looking. One where ten-year-old Dad got an F on his schoolwork and he tried to flush it down the toilet, making it overflow and flood the bathroom. Another one where fifteen-year-old Dad beat up this dude for picking on Auntie, only to find out that Auntie was the one that was bullying him- the guy was just sticking up for himself for the first time and Dad so happened to see.

I used to hate these walks with Grandpa because he would nag me about one thing or another. But then I started to look forward to them ‘cause Grandpa looked different when he told these stories. His eyes would twinkle. They never twinkled. Now that I think about it, I don’t think I ever heard Grandpa genuinely laugh until then. Sitting-Grandpa felt like a completely different person compared to walking-Grandpa. I couldn’t understand why there had to be a difference. If I loved walking-Grandpa, and Dad loved me, shouldn’t Dad also love walking-Grandpa? Why did sitting-Grandpa have to be a thing? Once I asked him, “Why does Dad hate you so much?” Which was the wrong thing to ask, because just like that, the twinkle was gone. I had never seen anything like it before. His eyes... They looked as if they weren’t his at all. It scared me.

“You shouldn’t poke your nose where it doesn’t belong.”

“But-”

“Monho,” he said, which was scarier because he has a harsh way of saying just my name when he was about to lose it. Dad does the same thing. I shut up the

rest of the way home that day.

I saw Grandpa cry for the first time when it was raining pretty bad outside. It had been raining for a day or two straight, so we hadn't been able to go walking. Grandpa was wound up pretty tight because of that. He began nit-picking at everything I did the day of The Big Cry. First, he refused to eat the scrambled eggs I made him, going off about how he asked for 'goddamn sunny-side-up' (when we both knew that he preferred my scrambled over all the other kinds of 'goddamn' eggs). Then he told me off for not taking enough notes during my online classes. After I showered, he went on and on about how I should still be brushing my hair even if I'm sitting on my butt the whole day. Then he threw a fit about how I didn't fold his clothes nicely and that they were all wrinkled and ugly and unfit to wear and if I didn't re-iron them, he was gonna—

“Gonna what! What are you gonna do?” I asked. Or yelled. I forgot. But the look of shock on his face was massive. He stuttered, “I'm going to... Going to—”

“Gonna what? You're not my father, you can't do anything to me.” Well, I was wrong. He slapped me. Fast and hard.

I had never been slapped before.

I ran and locked myself in the bedroom. It must have been a good hour or so of me sitting against the door, crying. The tears just came and came and came. They wouldn't stop. Not when Grandpa knocked the first time (“Monho? Monho come out right now”). Or the second time (“Monho, come out right this instant”). Or even the third time (“Monho, please... Please open the door”). After the third, he didn't knock again. I hugged my knees to my chest, beginning to feel all cried out. It was

when I was only sniffing did I realize... I wasn't the only one sniffing. I pressed my ear up against the door, the wood warm from my sweaty back.

The weeping was soft. Almost too soft. It had a weird sort of heaving noise where some breaths would be silent, others would be loud, and a few would be huge gasps that rang through the entire apartment. I got up, hesitant to unlock the door, but I did, and I quietly opened it - just a little. Peeking out, I see a sliver of my grandpa, seated at our small dining table. I couldn't see his head, but his back looked as if were shaking.

No... Is he? No...

Nervous, I carefully walked out until I could see him fully. I don't really know why I felt nervous. Maybe it was because he could've hit me again. Or maybe it was because Grandpa never got sad, so if he was sad maybe it was a different kind of Sad. One that even adults couldn't fix. His head was buried in his hands and the thin strands of his white hair looked messy and unkempt. Bent over the dining table he looked so small, as if I could place him in my hand and—if I held on just a little too tight—break him. It made my heart hurt. He sobbed into his palms, trying to snuff the sound out before they got too far ahead of him. I walked over, the pain in my chest growing the closer I got. My mind tried to throw together words to say like 'are you okay', 'what's wrong', and 'I'm sorry I talked back'. But none of them made it to my mouth. Instead, I wrapped my arms tightly around him. His entire being tensed for a second, mid-sob. It was like I stopped time or pressed pause during a movie or something. But then the second passed, and he fell apart.

We cried together like that for a long time.

Afterwards, we sat together in silence, watching the rain clear up outside the window.

"He hates me, doesn't he?" He asked. He didn't have to say who. I knew. Dad

does hate him, but I couldn't exactly say that. Not when he had just broken down the way he did. That seemed kinda mean. So I told him that Dad never *said* that he hated him. Grandpa looked down at his hands for a moment, then painfully whispered, "But he does." I stayed quiet. I didn't know what to tell him. Lying didn't really seem like an option that time. Instead, I thought about it for a good while, going over everything front to back. These were the facts: 1. Dad hated him. 2. They fought a lot. 3. They were stuck together in our tiny apartment. 4. Grandpa also hated...

"Do you still love him? Even if he hates you?" I watched his face carefully so no lie could pass by me this time. He took a moment, brows drawn down and eyes squinted.

"... He's family. He's my son." *Truth*. I had to think about that. It didn't make any sense to me. Why would a person still love someone who didn't love them back? Wouldn't there be nothing there to love? But then I imagined what it would be like if Dad hated me. Like, *really* hated me. I wondered if I would still love him. I'm not sure about how long it took me to think it over, but by the end I came to the conclusion that I would still love him somehow. Deep down.

Hidden.

"I don't think he knows," I said. Grandpa didn't reply after that. He doesn't say anything about The Big Cry for weeks.

Today Grandpa stopped talking when dad got home. It was the usual cold shoulder routine, nothing out of the ordinary. But at dinner something happened. On normal days, Grandpa would finish his food, say goodnight, then make his way into the

bedroom. But today, as he was saying goodnight, he paused behind Dad. I watched, confused for a moment. Then, he placed his hand on dad's shoulder and gave it a tight squeeze. Dad automatically sat straight up in his chair, frozen as Grandpa took his hand back and left for bed. It was only after the door clicked shut that Dad relaxed and looked at Mom with his brow furrowed.

That was weird, his eyes said.

Yeah, that was, her eyes said.

He looked down at his plate. It was almost as if I could hear his thoughts circling around his head. *What was that about, why did he do that, did I do something for him, does he want something?* All these questions without answers, but at the end, Dad did a half smile before continuing to eat and I thought that was really something.