

A Car Ride and Conversation

written by

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EXT. PARKING LOT-DAY

COURTNEY, late 20's, dressed casually in a college hoodie, hair in a loose ponytail, opens back passenger car door and loads in heavy bags with some effort. Inside the bags are bulk protein shakes, Pedialyte.

GRANDPA HENRY, early to mid 70's, moves slow, a little bent over, full head of greying hair, clear smile lines. He is wearing comfortable but slightly oversized clothes and loads grocery bags into the other car seat. His bags are bulky with Depends, other sanitary items.

Grandpa Henry gets into the passenger side seat with a groan and awkwardly tilts his head back to speak to Courtney.

GRANDPA HENRY

You alright back there?

COURTNEY

Yup, fine. Playing my own game of Tetris. Just a sec.

GRANDPA HENRY

(Laughing)

Well don't be too long. I can't leave your Aunt Helen alone with Gracie for too long. Hard to tell who would drive the other one nuts first.

INT. INSIDE CAR-DAY

Courtney gets into the driver's seat and starts the car. A look in the rear view mirror shows a tight frown, a nervous tension in her face.

Henry seems content to look past the passenger window, scratching absently at a dried spill on his pants.

GRANDPA HENRY

Maybe we could have a cup of coffee on the patio when we get back. If Grandma Gracie is up for it. She loves these sunny days and we don't get out as much as we used to.

Courtney drives with both hands on the wheel, focused ahead. She glances at her grandpa and sucks on the inside of her cheek.

COURTNEY

That would be nice. Hey, Grandpa?  
There's something I've been wanting  
to talk to you about. Ask you.  
Well, me and mom.

Grandpa Henry stays quiet for a long moment and only makes a noise of acknowledgement when Courtney looks away from the road to him.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)

Grandpa?

GRANDPA HENRY

Yeah, I'm listening.

Grandpa Henry continues looking out the window, one hand gripping tight on his thigh. Courtney takes a deep breath.

COURTNEY

I guess, first of all, thank you  
for taking such good care of  
Grandma Gracie. It feels a little  
silly to say, because I know you're  
not doing it for me, but I still  
think it should be said, you know?  
Mom appreciates it too and I'm sure  
Grandma does, even if she's not  
really in a state to say so.

Courtney shakes her head and refocuses on the tough conversation.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)

We're just worried. About you.  
Worried that you're taking on too  
much.

GRANDPA HENRY

I'm doing alright.

The reply is automatic, anticipated. Courtney huffs a laugh.

COURTNEY

(Doubtful)  
Would you tell us if you weren't?

GRANDPA HENRY

(Laughing)  
No, probably not.

COURTNEY

Then you can see why we might be  
worried, right?

GRANDPA HENRY

You don't need to worry about me.  
I've got sisters for that.

Courtney smiles and nudges him, acknowledging the joke, then sober again.

COURTNEY

It's just that after her fall last winter... It seems like the ship has officially sailed. Grandma's not really going to 'get better' from here on out.

She laughs, an awkward outburst from build up of emotion rather than from amusement. The sadness is clear in her eyes and voice.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)

Sorry. Obviously you know that.  
Probably better than the rest of us.

Courtney looks over, hoping her topic of conversation hasn't caused her grandpa discomfort. Grandpa Henry is still looking out the window, but doesn't seem distressed at all. Courtney waits a moment and then seems to realize that she hasn't actually gotten to the point yet.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)

...Mom and I were wondering if maybe it was time to get her to a nursing home? Somewhere where you wouldn't have to watch her all the time. Or help her get up at night. Or wash the laundry all the time.

Courtney's voice gets softer, more reluctant, as she gets closer to the crux of the matter.

Grandpa Henry finally looks over at her and offers a smile.

GRANDPA HENRY

I don't mind helping her get up at night. Or washing the laundry. Once she's in her chair by the TV, she's usually set for the day.

COURTNEY

(Resigned)

I know you don't mind, Grandpa. But you're getting older too. Between your back and your hearing...

Courtney takes a deep breath and goes for it.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)

What if something happened? If she fell. Could you get her up without hurting yourself? Or if she got up to check the front door in the middle of the night, and you didn't hear her? I don't want you to wake up one morning and-- I can't imagine that for you.

Courtney blinks back tears and wipes her face with a sleeve, eyes focused on the road. Grandpa Henry has turned in his seat and watches her quietly. His tone is kind, his face almost serene.

GRANDPA HENRY

I'm not going to put her in a nursing home. She's better with me, in her own home. She's lived in our house for the last 40 years. I'm not going to put her someplace different now.

Courtney stops at a stop sign, takes a shaky breath and looks at her Grandpa. There's a struggle on her face.

COURTNEY

I get that. I do. I can see why you would want that for her. But is it better for her health and safety? And what about for you? We don't want you to wear yourself out, or get hurt. You're working so hard for her, all day, everyday.

GRANDPA HENRY

(Automatic response again,  
but more because it's  
obvious to him)

Well, I love her. That's part of the deal. She's still the Gracie I fell in love with. I read her old letters and remember her as she was. And I still love her.

Courtney hesitates then continues to drive.

COURTNEY

If something did happen... If she fell and...got hurt. I wouldn't want you to blame yourself.

GRANDPA HENRY  
 (Assured)  
 I wouldn't.

COURTNEY  
 (Surprised, dubious)  
 You wouldn't?

GRANDPA HENRY  
 I wouldn't. I didn't with Lorraine,  
 I wouldn't with Gracie.

They sit quietly for a moment.

COURTNEY  
 You were the one driving, right?  
 That night when...

GRANDPA HENRY  
 (Matter-of-fact)  
 I was.

The car is quiet for a few moments until Courtney pulls into a driveway and parks. Neither move to leave the vehicle. Courtney sighs heavily, throat tight.

COURTNEY  
 It's not fair that you have to do  
 this twice.

GRANDPA HENRY  
 (Chuckles)  
 Maybe not. But I got to love and be  
 loved by two incredible women. That  
 feels pretty lucky to me.

Courtney sniffles and Grandpa Henry puts a hand on her leg and squeezes it gently. Courtney puts her hand over his and squeezes back.

GRANDPA HENRY (CONT'D)  
 I should get in there before your  
 aunt sees us lollygagging out here.  
 You've got the other bags?

Courtney lets out a wet laugh and nods.

COURTNEY  
 Yup, no problem. Go calm the  
 crowds. I'll be in in a minute.

Grandpa Henry smiles and gets out of the car slowly, groaning as he does, and pulls the lighter bags from the backseat. He shuts the door and gives a little wave through the window.

Courtney checks her face in the mirror, hoping she doesn't look like she's been crying. Then she watches Grandpa Henry move slowly up the walkway to the front door of the house.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)

I hope I find someone who loves me  
as much as you love her.

EXT. OUTSIDE GRANDPA HOUSE-DAY

Then she gets out of the car, grabs the heavy bags from the back and shuts the door with her butt. She goes up the walkway and bangs the screen door with her elbow for help.

COURTNEY

Delivery! Oh, hi Aunt Helen! Hi  
Grandma Gracie, how are you doing  
today?

The door shuts behind her and we see people hugging through the front window.

FIN