

GRANDPA'S STORY

written by

Steven Sallie

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EXT. HIGHWAY - MORNING

It's early. Just past dawn. Traffic is bumper to bumper.

INT. ALAN'S CAR - MORNING

ALAN, about 40, drives. His wife, KATE, late 30s, rides shotgun.

In the backseat is:

ERIC, 13, staring out the window. He looks like he'd rather be anywhere else in the entire world.

ERIC

You know, I'm so glad I get to spend my Christmas Eve with two old people instead of at John's party.

Kate smirks. Looks over her shoulder at Eric.

KATE

Be nice.

ERIC

Sorry. You guys told me not to lie.

Alan looks glances at Eric in the rear view mirror.

ALAN

We visit your grandparents two or three times a year. It won't kill you to spend some time with them.

ERIC

I don't know. It might. I think it's possible to die of boredom.

KATE

It's not that boring over there.

ERIC

Mom, they don't even have wifi.

Kate puts on a look of over the top, faux concern.

KATE

Oh my god. No wifi? How are you gonna make it?

ERIC

I know!

Kate and Alan laugh.

Eric folds his arms.

ERIC
It's not funny.

ALAN
I thought it was funny.

KATE
Me too.

ERIC
I'm serious! What am I suppose to do with no internet?

ALAN
I don't know. Why don't you get some fresh air and actually have a face-to-face conversation with someone?

ERIC
What kind of life is that?

EXT. ARTHUR & GAIL'S HOUSE - DAY

An older, charming, ranch house in the suburbs.

ARTHUR and GAIL, both 70s, stand on the porch, watching Alan's car pull into the driveway.

They're beaming from ear to ear. Arthur waves.

Alan and Kate get out quickly, returning Arthur and Gail's smiles.

Eric gets out slowly, like he's going to his execution. Follows his parents towards the porch.

Gail heads down the stairs.

ARTHUR
Be careful, Gail. You're gonna break a hip.

GAIL
Hush.

Gail wraps her arms around Alan. Kisses his cheek.

GAIL
How was traffic?

ALAN
It was okay, mom.

GAIL
Are you sure there weren't any wrecks? You know how people get around the holidays.

ALAN
It was fine.

Gail lets go of Alan and moves to Kate. Hugs her.

GAIL
How are you doing, sweetheart?

KATE
I'm doing good.

Gail turns to Eric. Puts her hands on her hips.

GAIL
And who's this beanpole? It can't be my grandson. Last time I saw him he was a foot shorter.

KATE
I know. He's growing like a weed.

ARTHUR
(to Alan)
Pretty soon he'll be standing eye to eye with you.

Gail embraces Eric, nearly knocking him over.

GAIL
You're getting so big. You have to stop growing, now.

ERIC
I'll get right on that, grandma.

INT. ARTHUR & GAIL'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eric sits on the couch, sandwiched between his parents. Arthur sits in his recliner. Gail is slouched back in a chair by the window.

Eric turns back and forth, catching bits and pieces of overlapping conversations --

GAIL

I ran into Kristen at the store yesterday. She's the one who got the eye job. And she thinks no one can tell. I said her eyes are drawn back so tight she can't even blink.

KATE

It'll be harder for her to look down her nose at people now.

They share a laugh.

ARTHUR

...and I told him it was probably his transmission. The thing's shot.

ALAN

Ouch. I had to replace the transmission in my work truck last month. Damn thing was almost more than the truck.

Eric looks at the wall clock. Listens to the slow TICK TICK TICK. Ready to lose it.

Finally, Eric stands up.

All eyes turn to him.

ERIC

I gotta go to the bathroom.

INT. ARTHUR & GAIL'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

Eric washes his hands. Takes a seat on the side of the tub. He can still hear their conversation downstairs.

INT. ARTHUR & GAIL'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Eric moseys down the hall. He passes an open door. Stops, taking it in. Peeks inside --

A room lined with built in bookshelves, crammed tightly with books. Various framed photos and army medals.

Intrigued, Eric enters.

INT. ARTHUR & GAIL'S HOUSE, DEN - DAY

Eric stairs, open mouthed, at the contents of the room. Running his hand over Arthur's medals.

One stands out -- THE PURPLE HEART.

Eric takes it in, curiosity building.

ARTHUR (O.S.)
Get lost on your way to the
bathroom?

Eric turns, startled.

Arthur stands in the doorway, hands in his pockets, a grin on his face.

ERIC
Sorry, I just --

ARTHUR
It's okay, relax. You're not in
trouble. I figured you were tired
of listening to the old people
yammering on.

Eric smirks. Not sure if that was a joke or not. He raises the Purple Heart.

ERIC
I didn't know you got a Purple
Heart, grandpa.

Arthur enters the room. Takes the medal. Looks down at it, reliving memories.

ARTHUR
I got this in 1966, during the
Vietnam War. Me and a friend of
mine, Charlie Pierce, had a
grenade explode near our foxhole.
We took off running in different
directions. I heard another
grenade go off behind me...

Arthur hesitates. Even after all these years, the wounds are still there.

ARTHUR
...then I heard Charlie scream.
Some shrapnel went into his leg.

Eric takes a seat in the corner, his interest peaked.

ERIC
What did you do?

ARTHUR
Well, I had a choice: I could either leave my best friend to die, or, I could go back and get him. So I crawled back to him. He was surprised to see me -- I think he thought the blast had got me.
(beat)
So I grabbed my friend and carried him out of there. As we were moving back to the foxhole, another grenade went off behind us. I took shrapnel in the back and shoulder. Knocked us out cold.

Arthur hangs the medal back on the wall. Stares at it fondly for a moment, folding his arms.

ARTHUR
When I woke up, I was in a MASH unit. They had some top notch doctors there. Patched me up, then sent me back to the front.

ERIC
What happened to Charlie?

ARTHUR
He was there too. They thought they'd have to take his leg, but they were able to save it.

ERIC
Why did you want to join the army in the first place?

Arthur can't help but smile, pleased that Eric is interested in his story.

ARTHUR
I didn't. I was barely out of high school when I was drafted.
(beat)
Thankfully you don't have to worry about that these days.

ERIC
Weren't your parents worried?

ARTHUR
Oh lord, yes.
(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

My mother cried from the time I
got the draft notice until the day
I got on the plane.

ERIC

What about your dad?

Arthur looks over at one of the photos on the shelf -- a
picture from his youth of him with his parents.

ARTHUR

My father was happy I was serving.
He fought in World War 2. He said
it was a man's duty to defend his
country.

ERIC

He didn't cry when you left or
anything?

ARTHUR

Things were different back then.
Men didn't cry or show much
emotion, especially in public. He
knew he loved me, he didn't feel
the need to say it all the time.

ERIC

Man... things were different back
then. Makes me glad for dad and
mom.

ARTHUR

You should. You've got some good
parents, Eric. They really love
you.

Eric looks at the floor, not comfortable with being the subject
of the conversation now.

ERIC

I know they do. Sometimes I just
feel like they're never around.

ARTHUR

They have good careers.
Unfortunately, that takes a lot of
time. But you should be grateful.
You have it better than a lot of
people do.

ERIC

I just...
(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)
I don't know... miss them, I
guess.

ARTHUR
Have you told them that?

Eric shakes his head.

Arthur playfully pats Eric on the shoulder. Laughing.

ARTHUR
They can't read your mind. You
have to talk to them.

Eric starts laughing too.

ERIC
I know. I know.

ARTHUR
I'll never forget the day your dad
found out your mom was pregnant.
He called me at two in the
morning. He couldn't sleep, he
said he was gonna make sure he was
the best father in the world.

ERIC
Really?

Arthur nods.

Eric stands. Hugs Arthur.

Arthur looks surprised, but hugs the kid just the same.

ERIC
Thanks, grandpa.

ARTHUR
Don't mention it. I was your age
once, a long, long time ago. It's
rough. You feel like your brain
and your body are against you.
Just remember you've always got
your family.

They separate.

Arthur reaches up on the shelf and pulls down a small porcelain
figure of a SOLDIER. It's old, paint faded and chipped. Hands
it to Eric.

ARTHUR

Here. Merry Christmas. I picked this up in Vietnam.

ERIC

Are you sure?

ARTHUR

Yeah. Keep it. Anytime you're feeling down, look at this figure and be thankful you're not crawling around a dirty trench getting shot in the ass with shrapnel.

Eric snorts laughter. He's never heard grandpa swear.

Arthur starts for the door, gesturing for Eric to follow him.

ARTHUR

Let's go. Your grandmother should have dinner ready by now. If we don't eat it all, I'll never hear the end of it.

Arthur leaves.

Eric pockets the figurine, follows in Arthur's wake. Gives on last look at the room, then shuts the door.

INT. ARTHUR & GAIL'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Arthur and Eric enter from upstairs.

Alan sits alone on the couch, watching TV. He looks up as they enter. Gets up.

ALAN

Look who decided to show up. Thought you two got kidnapped by aliens. Your mother and grandmother are in the kitchen. If we don't eat soon, they're convinced all the food will ruin.

ARTHUR

(to Eric)

Told you.

They all start for the kitchen.

Eric stops Alan. Gives him a hug.

Alan looks surprised. Shares a glance with Arthur, who casually shrugs the whole thing off.

ERIC
Love you dad.

Alan embraces his son.

ALAN
Love you too, bud.

Eric lets go of his father and heads for the kitchen without another word.

Alan turns to Arthur.

ALAN
What in the world got into him?

ARTHUR
I don't know, son. You raised him.
Now lets eat. Your son can't
afford to lose any weight.

Arthur follows Eric into the kitchen.

Alan looks around the empty living room. Wondering what the hell just happened.

INT. ARTHUR & GAIL'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Everyone is seated at the table, well into dinner. They laugh, talk, smile.

It's a Norman Rockwell painting come to life. A happy family.

Eric catches Arthur's gaze. Gives him a small nod that goes unnoticed by the others.

Arthur returns it.

EXT. ARTHUR & GAIL'S HOUSE - EVENING

Alan, Kate and Eric start for the car, arms weighed down with containers of leftovers.

Arthur and Gail watch them go from the porch.

GAIL
Are you sure you got enough food?
Did you guys get enough rolls?

ALAN
We got plenty, mom. If I eat
another bite, I'm going to
explode.

GAIL
What about tomorrow? You'll be
hungry tomorrow. Your son needs
some meat on his bones.

Arthur puts his arm around his wife, trying to calm her down.

ARTHUR
They're fine, Gail.

GAIL
But...?

ARTHUR
They're fine.

GAIL
(to Alan)
Make sure you call me when you get
home.

ALAN
I will.

Alan and Kate get into the car.

Eric stops, turns back to his grandparents. Waves.

ERIC
It was nice to see you guys. Love
you.

GAIL
Love you too, honey. Take care.

ARTHUR
(to Eric)
Be good, beanpole.

ERIC
I will.

Eric climbs into the backseat.

As the car backs out of the driveway, Eric watches through the
window as Gail goes back inside.

Arthur gives a small wave to Eric, who returns it. He heads
inside.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Alan's car drives along with the traffic. The roads are much calmer now.

INT. ALAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Alan drives as Kate struggles against her food coma.

Eric looks out the window, a much happier expression on his face this time.

KATE

See, that wasn't so bad, was it?

Eric reaches into his pocket, pulls out the soldier figurine. Looks it over.

ERIC

No. It wasn't bad at all...

Eric looks back out the window and smiles. He can't help it.

Off his smiling face --

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END.