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Pickle Jarred

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Pickle Jarred

by

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INT. NEIL'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

NEIL PESKIND, 15, pudgy, plays Beethoven's *Eroica* on an electric keyboard with his eyes closed behind thick-framed glasses. Huge headphones prevent us from hearing anything.

INT. LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

IRVING, an old man, with dirty stubble around his chin, appears exhausted as he sits in a beat-up recliner watching a baseball game on TV. He struggles in between heavy wheezing, coughing.

INT. NEIL'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Neil, now seated at his desk, rummages through his backpack for a notebook and chemistry textbook. He flips to chapter 8 and begins reading the first question aloud.

NEIL

(almost inaudible)

How many grams of barium phosphate will form when 120 grams of potassium phosphate reacts with 75 grams of barium chloride? (Beat)
Uhhhh...who cares?

Neil begins to scribble in his notebook, and then flips backwards in the textbook, looking for the solution. After a few seconds, he slams the book shut, and tosses his notebook to the floor. He plops onto his bed.

Neil points a remote control toward the TV, and flips to a baseball game.

NEIL

First inning and they already have the bases loaded. Just great.

A crack of the bat and "ooooohs" are heard from the TV. A grand slam!

INT. LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

"...and just like that, the Orioles jump out to a four run lead."

Irving now stands directly in front of the TV, balancing himself on a wall.

(CONTINUED)

IRVING
And so it goes.

Irving reaches down to turn off the TV, but he stumbles, causing the piles of old magazines and empty beer cans on the coffee table to scatter everywhere.

INT. NEIL'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

The clattering of aluminum cans can be faintly heard. Neil lethargically rolls out of bed.

NEIL
Grandpa?

No response. Neil's pace quickens as he heads downstairs. He is nervous.

INT. LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Irving struggles to bring himself to his feet as Neil enters. He rushes to his grandfather's aide, assisting him back to the recliner.

NEIL
Grandpa what happened?

IRVING
That pitch was right down the
fucking middle.

NEIL
Are you OK?

IRVING
I just need some water.

Irving tries to get up.

NEIL
Stay here. I'll bring you a glass.

Neil exits. Irving slowly rests back in the chair. He clutches at his heart as he closes his eyes, barely breathing.

Neil enters with a glass of water.

NEIL
(with mild trepidation)
Grandpa?

(CONTINUED)

No response. Neil moves timidly toward the chair.

NEIL
Grandpa?

Irving's eyes slowly open, he reaches for the glass.

IRVING
I'm not gone yet.

NEIL
But are you ok? Should I call Mom
and Dad?

IRVING
Heaven's no. Let them be. Just sit
with me a minute.

Neil takes a seat on the couch. His leg twitches.

IRVING
What are you doing that for?

NEIL
Doing what?

IRVING
With the leg. You're shaking.

Neil looks at his knee shaking.

NEIL
I didn't even realize. I'll stop.
Sorry.

IRVING
Sorry? Sorry for what?

NEIL
I don't know. For shaking I guess.

IRVING
Don't be so sorry. It's natural.
Just a part of you, that's all. If
you apologize too much...

NEIL
...everyone will think I'm weak.
We've been over this a million
times now.

Irving takes a large gulp of the water.

IRVING
Delicious.

NEIL
It's just water grandpa.

Irving finishes the glass with his next sip. Neil stands and begins collecting the scattered cans. Holding several empties with one hand, he snatches the empty water glass and heads toward the kitchen.

IRVING
It's nice that you clean up. Your mother will be happy.

NEIL
Whatever.

Neil exits.

Irving manages to get up from the chair and slowly shuffles toward an old-fashioned turntable. He places the pin on the Harry Belafonte record already in place. He smiles, as the track, *Hold 'em Joe*, can be heard. He strolls to the kitchen with a surprising kick in his step.

INT. KITCHEN- NIGHT.

Neil searches in the pantry, and then beneath the sink. He finally finds a plastic grocery bag, and packs the empty cans in.

Irving enters. He hums the melody, but begins to cough and finds a seat at the small table in the corner. Neil fills the glass with water and places it in front of Irving.

IRVING
Do you have any pickles?

Neil takes a jar of half-sour pickles from the fridge, sets it on the table and twists off the lid.

NEIL
Half-sours. Enjoy all you want, I don't like them.

IRVING
How could anyone not like pickles?

Irving's hand shakes as he dips his fingers into the jar. He extends a pickle toward Neil.

(CONTINUED)

IRVING
Here. You eat one.

NEIL
(refusing the offer)
I only like the full sour kind.

IRVING
Of course you do.

Irving coughs aggressively. He hawks up some phlegm, grabs a napkin and spits into it. He wheezes to try and catch his breath. Neil looks on with a pale stare, drenched in anxiety.

IRVING
Don't you worry.

NEIL
Grandpa, I really think we should call...

IRVING
I don't need anyone here but you.

NEIL
But Mom said to call if...

IRVING
(maintaining his poised
demeanor)
Just listen. You sit there, and I talk.

NEIL
(somewhat reassured, but still
nervous)
Fine. What is it?

IRVING
I need you to promise...(he begins
to cough heavily)

NEIL
I got you some more water.

Neil pushes the glass toward Irving, but he wants none of it. Irving collects himself, taking an extra deep breath.

IRVING
I want you to promise me you'll do something.

(CONTINUED)

NEIL

What is it?

IRVING

I want you to go to the Parkway Hospital tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. Go to the sixth floor, and find a nurse named Myra.

NEIL

But it's a Sunday. I won't be up that early.

IRVING

Promise me you'll get up and go there. For me. Parkway hospital.

NEIL

Parkway's the one down 112th street right?

Irving nods.

NEIL

But why am I going to the hospital?

IRVING

So you promise me? One day.

NEIL

Yes. But why?

IRVING

Just go. Nine A.M.

NEIL

Alright, alright. Are you done with these pickles?

Irving nods. Neil twists the cap back on and places the jar back in the fridge. He picks up the plastic bag full of cans.

NEIL

I'm just going to toss these in the recycling bin. Be right back.

IRVING

Parkway. Nine o'clock. Nurse Myra.

Neil rolls his eyes and smirks as he heads toward the front door.

(CONTINUED)

NEIL
What a nut job.

Neil exits. Irving carries the empty glass with him into the living room. He steps gingerly with incredible pain as he moves toward the recliner. He plops himself down, and closes his eyes. He releases the empty glass to roll across the floor, as his head drops, and he drifts into an eternal sleep.

Neil enters, and calls out toward the kitchen. Once he notice Irving is no longer there, he heads toward the living room.

NEIL
Did you say her name was Mary or
Myra or Mirna or-

Upon seeing the empty glass on the floor, Neil comes to an emphatic halt. Irving's arm dangles from the chair.

NEIL
(his voice trembles as he
holds back the tears)
Grandpa? Grandpa please just...

Neil falls to his knees, weeping softly.

NEIL
Shit.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM CLUB LEVEL SEATS- NIGHT

VINCENT, mid 40s, white-collar, holding a half-full beer, wearing a Yankees cap and MARSHA, mid 40s, short and round, also wearing a cap, stand and passionately boo amongst a sea of fans.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM HOME PLATE- NIGHT

The YANKEES manager storms out of the dugout and goes toe to toe with the home plate umpire to dispute a call.

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM CLUB LEVEL SEATS- NIGHT

Marsha heckling is interrupted by a vibrating phone clipped to her waist. She answers the phone and plugs her ear with her other hand. She yells in an attempt to speak over rambunctious crowd.

(CONTINUED)

MARSHA
Hello?? Neil?? I can barely hear
you.

Marsha's face is quickly filled with sorrow.

MARSHA
We'll be right there.

Marsha's eyes begin to tear up, as she takes a seat. She tugs at Vincent's arm.

MARSHA
Vince. He's gone.

VINCENT
(screaming down to her, but
still keeping his eyes on the
field)
No, no. The ump's not gonna toss
him. Probably just a warning,
relax.

MARSHA
That was Neil. It's your father.
He's gone.

Vincent is stunned. He takes the seat next to her, buries his face in his hands.

MARSHA
We'd better go.

Marsha pushes their way through the crowded aisle toward the exit.

EXT. PESKIND HOUSE- NIGHT

An ambulance is double parked along a street packed with parked cars. Vincent puts his luxury SUV into park, and races toward the front door. The door is already opening, as two EMTs guide a stretcher with Irving's covered body toward the ambulance. Marsha slowly exits the car, tears stream from her eyes.

INT. LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Belafonte's *Day-O* is softly playing. Neil sits in the recliner with a blank stare toward the black TV screen. Vincent and Marsha enter holding each other. Marsha runs to comfort her son.

(CONTINUED)

MARSHA

I'm so sorry we weren't here
sweetie.

Neil sits with no emotion.

MARSHA

Neil?

VINCENT

Neil, grandpa was very sick, it was
just his time.

NEIL

And you were at the Yankee game. I
found him right here, but he was
already dead.

Marsha rubs his shoulders, but he pushes her away. Neil
moves slowly upstairs.

VINCENT

We still need to talk about...

MARSHA

Just let him be for now.

Marsha picks up the empty glass from the floor and places it
on the coffee table.

MARSHA

Well...are you Ok?

VINCENT

We should've been here.

INT. NEIL'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Neil looks at a framed picture from a recent birthday. In
the photo, he appears melancholy, seated at the kitchen
table, a birthday cake before him. Irving and his parents
are all smiles behind him.

Vincent creaks the door open and walks toward Neil, despite
him ignoring his presence.

VINCENT

Good memories, huh?

NEIL

Do you ever knock?

(CONTINUED)

Neil stands, tosses the frame with anger and turns toward the door, avoiding eye contact like the plague. Vincent stops him.

VINCENT

Hey....hey. I'm here for you.

NEIL

I know.

VINCENT

I came up to tell you about the funeral. We're going to be leaving early tomorrow, so make sure you're awake and dressed by 8:30.

Neil shoots him an angry glare.

NEIL

I'm not going.

VINCENT

Alright look. I know how you resent family outings and all, but this is different. You need to be there.

NEIL

There's something else I need to do.

VINCENT

(loosing his patience)

I'm not interested in whatever it is. Cancel your plans and be ready by 8:30. Got it?

Neil stares at the wall, unresponsive.

VINCENT

This isn't optional.

Neil moves into his bed, pulls the covers over his face.

VINCENT

Do you want something to eat?

No response.

VINCENT

You don't need to make this more difficult.

(CONTINUED)

NEIL

Just go.

Vincent accepts his failure in consoling his son. He moves toward the door, holding back the tears mounting in his eyes.

VINCENT

Your mother and I will be
downstairs if you need anything.

Vincent moves toward the bed, pulls down the cover and gently kisses Neil's forehead. He closes the door as he leaves and begins to cry to himself in the hallway.

INT. NEIL'S BEDROOM- 8 A.M.

An obnoxious alarm wakes Neil. He puts on the first shirt and pair of jeans he finds on his floor. He dons a Yankees cap to control his wild bed hair. He opens the laptop on his desk.

Neil searches a bus map for directions to Parkway Hospital and lets out a giant yawn.

INT. PESKIND'S BEDROOM

Marsha puts the finishing touches on her make-up and hair., She is wearing black pants, and a purple cashmere shall. Water is running from inside their bathroom. She yells without necessity toward the closed door.

MARSHA

Do you want coffee Vincent?

INT. PESKIND'S BATHROOM

Marsha's voice startles Vincent as he cuts into his neck while shaving.

VINCENT

Great.

He stumbles to grab a tissue to prevent the blood from dripping onto his undershirt.

MARSHA

(off-screen, even louder)
Did you hear me?

INT. HALLWAY

Neil quietly shuts the door behind him as he exits his room. He peers around the corner and sees Marsha assisting Vincent with the cut on his neck. He makes an easy escape downstairs and out the front door.

EXT. BUS STOP

Neil stands by himself listening to music, as a bus pulls up. The doors open.

NEIL
(removing one ear bud)
Parkway Hospital?

BUS DRIVER
Get you close enough.

Neil gets on, the bus pulls out.

INT. HALLWAY

Marsha sips a coffee mug as she knocks on Neil's door.

MARSHA
Neil? (beat) Almost ready?

She is puzzled, and decides to open the door, but there's no Neil.

INT. BUS

Neil sits in the back row looking at the birthday picture, minus the frame. The only other passenger is an old lady with a shopping cart in the front. He meets eyes with her, and she smiles, but he appears apathetic. His cell phone begins to ring, and he checks to see who's calling.

HOME CALLING

He hits the ignore button and places the phone back in his pocket.

INT. PESKIND'S BEDROOM

Vincent hangs up the phone on the nightstand.

VINCENT
He's screening our calls.

MARSHA
It's 8:40.

VINCENT
What do you want to do?

MARSHA
We should get going. What did he say to you last night?

VINCENT
That he didn't want to go to the funeral.

MARSHA
And...

VINCENT
And that he had some other plans. But I told him to cancel them. He said he'd be ready by 8:30.

MARSHA
I don't understand where he could be.

Marsha picks up the phone and pushes the redial button.

EXT. 110TH STREET

Neil walks toward the front of the bus.

BUS DRIVER
It's just two blocks up.

The driver nods to Neil as he exits the bus. Neil takes out a vibrating phone from his pocket. HOME CALLING. He pushes the ignore button, powers his phone off and heads down the block.

EXT. PESKIND HOUSE- DAY

Marsha and Vincent move briskly out of the house. Vincent locks the door of their townhouse, and the couple turn and walk down the street which is lined with cars.

EXT. PARKWAY HOSPITAL

Two glass doors slide open as Neil enters with some hesitation. He walks toward a directory, and spots:

6th Floor: Children's Ward

Neil calls for the elevator and waits.

INT. PESKIND'S CAR

Vincent tries to reach Neil on his cell phone from the passenger seat. Marsha turns the car into the synagogue parking lot. It is already packed.

MARSHA

Any luck?

VINCENT

Where on earth could he be?

INT. ELEVATOR

Neil stands pressed against the back of the elevator. Three females, two doctors, one nurse, surround a stretcher. A young boy without hair, is laying on his back, with IVs dangling from both his arms. A breathing tube rests beneath his nostrils. Neil looks down at him with fear. The boy just smiles.

The doors slide open to reveal a sign that reads, PARKWAY HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S WARD. Neil follows the trio of women as they push the stretcher out of the elevator. He heads to the desks and tries to get the attention of VICTOR, an elderly male nurse who is shuffling through files.

INT. PARKWAY HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S WARD

NEIL

I'm looking for Myra.

Victor doesn't even look up. Neil realizes he's going to talk a lot louder than that.

(CONTINUED)

NEIL

Myra!

Victor finally looks up.

VICTOR

Who?

NEIL

(saying each word slow and
deep)

I'm looking for a nurse named Myra.

VICTOR

A Sasha?

Neil rolls his eyes with frustration, as one of the doctors from the elevator walks behind the desk.

MYRA

Can I help you?

NEIL

My grandpa sent me here and told me to ask for a nurse named Myra. 6th floor. Parkway Hospital.

MYRA

(beginning to smile)

You must be the infamous grandson- Neil. Irving always calls me nurse Myra. Thinks he's cute and all. I always told him you'd show up one of these days.

NEIL

Well. He used to call you nurse Myra. Last night, he uh...

MYRA

Oh dear.

Neil closes his eyes and bows his head.

MYRA

As in he...

NEIL

In our living room. Just fell asleep.

(CONTINUED)

Neil takes a long look at his surroundings. He sees a girl in a wheel chair, another laying deathly still in bed attached to a breathing machine. A young boy with one arm stacks blocks on a carpeted play area. He wonders why he is there.

MYRA

(displaying more sadness than Neil)

I'm so sorry. We were just getting used to him around here.

NEIL

What do you mean we?

Myra walks from behind the desk, putting her arm around Neil to tour him around the floor as she speaks.

MYRA

All of us.

Any child who got to spend time with him, all the nurses, myself, we all loved your grandfather. He was a very generous man.

NEIL

You must be thinking of a different old dude. My grandpa was cheap, real cheap.

MYRA

Not with money. He was generous with his time and heart.

NEIL

So he would what, like come here and talk to you guys and play with the kids?

MYRA

In the simplest of terms, yes.

INT. PESKIND'S CAR

Marsha's driving, Vincent is scribbling in his checkbook.

MYRA

Irving just showed up one day and told me he wanted to help sick kids.

EXT. BUSY STREET

A funeral procession interrupts traffic.

MYRA

He started coming 3 or 4 mornings a week. For some kids, he'd bring coloring books. Others got to play cards.

EXT. GRAVESIDE

Mourners line the side of the grave as an oak casket is lowered in. A rabbi's praying can be heard behind Myra's VO.

MYRA

He made quite the impression. I couldn't tell you how many times I've been asked, "When is Irv coming today?" Some of these kids don't have families who support them. As doctors and nurses, we can only do so much.

Mourners are shoveling dirt into the grave. Marsha tosses a handful in, as Vincent shovels.

INT. PARKWAY HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S WARD

Neil and Myra are now sitting on small-chairs around a miniature table, on which sits a box of crayons. A small girl, wearing leg braces, uses a walking device to approach them.

GIRL

Can I color too?

MYRA

Well hello Miss. Emily. This is my friend, Neil. Can you say hi?

NEIL

Hey Emily.

Emily is too shy to say hi, but Neil finds a piece of paper, puts in on the table. He moves the box of crayons toward her.

NEIL

Maybe you just want to draw me something instead?

(CONTINUED)

Neil extends a red crayon from the box toward Emily. He gives her an exaggerated, puppy-dog look. She grabs the crayon.

EMILY

I'm gonna draw a rainbow!

NEIL

Well then you're gonna need some more colors.

Neil haphazardly dumps the box of crayons onto the table, many of them spill onto the floor.

NEIL

Shit. I mean uh---shut. Sorry.

Myra and Neil begin collecting the crayons from the floor.

NEIL

Maybe I'm just not cut out for this.

MYRA

Why don't you hang out for a bit and see how things go? I'll come back in a bit to check up on you.

NEIL

I never was good at coloring. Always tried too hard to stay in the lines.

MYRA

Emily can probably help you out. Isn't that right Miss. Emily? You think you can help Neil color?

Emily nods her head and smiles.

MYRA

Just give it a shot.

Neil picks up one of the crayons and begins coloring with Emily.

FADE TO:

INT. PARKWAY HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S WARD HALLWAY

Neil pushes a child in a wheel chair across the floor as if he is driving a race car.

INT. PARKWAY HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S WARD BEDS

Neil reads a children's book in between two hospital beds.

INT. PARKWAY HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S WARD

Neil plays Monopoly at the table with a group of 3 children.

MYRA

Hope you kids aren't taking all of Neil's money.

The group laughs.

MYRA

Almost been here a whole day now, Neil. How's it feel?

NEIL

Well I don't feel bad or angry doing this kind of stuff. I'm not really sure.

MYRA

So maybe you'll be back in a few days to help our some more.

NEIL

What do you guys think? Should I come back again?

The gang nods excitedly.

MYRA

Got yourself a whole fan club already.

NEIL

Yeah, I think I'll be back. But for now, I really need to get going.

Neil looks at the clock, it's half past 3.

NEIL

Funeral must be over by now.

(CONTINUED)

MYRA
Irving's funeral was today?

NEIL
Yeh.

MYRA
And your parents let you miss it to come here?

NEIL
I just left. Had to come here. Made a promise.

MYRA
Well they are probably worried sick. I'm calling you a cab.

NEIL
Don't bother, the bus was just---

MYRA
(picking up the phone at reception)
What's the address?

EXT. PESKIND HOUSE- AFTERNOON- CONTINUOUS

A taxi cab pulls out. Marsha comes racing out of the house as Neil exits from the backseat. Vincent can be seen waiting in the doorway. Marsha runs to Neil, gives him an emotional hug, and begins walking him toward the door.

VINCENT
You have some explaining to do, but I'm glad you're alright.

MARSHA
We were worried sick, Neil. How could you just take off like that?

NEIL
I just did and now I'm back. What's there to eat?

INT. LIVING ROOM- AFTERNOON

The room is full of family and friends. Large deli platters, beverages, and heated food trays are scattered on tables everywhere.

(CONTINUED)

Ignoring his parents, Neil grabs a plate and begins to scoop out some potato salad, but he stops, noticing a plate of pickles. Neil walks over to the pickles and takes a sour one. He puts a few on his plate and finds a seat amidst the crowded room. Marsha approaches him.

MARSHA

Is that all you're going to eat?

NEIL

I'm fine for now.

MARSHA

You still didn't tell us where you needed to go. It's terrible, missing your own grandfather's funeral.

NEIL

There was nothing terrible about it, believe me Mom. Grandpa knows.

END.