

Wake Me Up Before You Go...

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Spangler woke up thirsty.

The night crickets still chirped and sang, so he knew it wasn't past midnight. His feet ached from being in the fields all day. Rolling out of bed, he trudged his way downstairs, stubbing his toe on the banister. Cursing, he hobbled the rest of the way down and slipped on the carpet at the bottom. A loud belch ripped from his stomach, the product of the indigestion he had before he went to bed.

A light was on in the kitchen. Damn that woman! Always wasting electricity! Did she think money grew on trees? He chuckled at that one, since as a farmer, yes, money did grow on trees. And on the ground and in it as well.

He used the light of the kitchen to guide him down the hall, his knees aching as much as his feet did. Getting too old to be working in the field all day. Maybe he should retire. At sixty-four years old, he had put in enough days and nights on the farm. Anna had never provided him with any little rug rats, thank god! He had never wanted any. Waste of time and money to procreate.

Hearing a clink of glass on glass, he surmised that Anna was also up, likely scarfing down the rest of that chocolate cake she made. As he rounded the corner, he saw that the refrigerator door was open and Anna was bent over and rummaging around within it. Her upper body was hidden by the door and the sound of tinkling glass was beginning to get on his nerves.

“Make up your mind, woman! I’m thirsty!”

Anna jumped up, startled. Only it wasn’t Anna.

A youngish man, likely in his thirties, with long brown hair and a horrified expression on his face stood in the open door. “Who the hell are you and what the hell are you doing in my house?” the man shouted.

“Your house?” Spangler roared as righteous anger boiled up from within his sleepy consciousness. “This is my house!”

The man didn’t back down. “What? You’ve got to be kidding!”

Spangler reached for the broom that Anna always kept in the corner. She could never remember to put it away. But it was gone, for once in her life she done what she was supposed to do. Damn that woman! He searched around, grasping for whatever he could, to match the bottle of ketchup the intruder held in his. Weapon for weapon. His eyes fell on a long wooden pepper grinder. When did Anna buy this piece of Taiwanese crap? Disgusted, he dropped into a boxer’s stance, raising his clenched fists to either side of his head.

As they stared each other down, Spangler noticed that the man was barefoot and wore a terrycloth robe. His hair was disheveled and looked as if he just woke up. A sleepwalker? Or a conniving burglar from one of those new developments over on Shady Road?

“Who are you?” Spangler growled. He shifted his feet, getting ready to strike. Damn punk kids, think they can just walk into someone’s home and steal his milk and cake...

“I asked you first!” the man shouted back.

“Aren’t you a mouthy little punk?” Spangler moved forward, deftly shuffling his feet while making preparatory mock punches.

“Screw you,” the punk replied, brandishing the ketchup bottle in a more threatening manner. “You better just walk out of here old man before I take you down.”

“This is MY house!”

“No it isn’t! I’ve lived here for five years!”

“I’ve lived here for twenty-seven!” Spangler howled in rage. The kitchen table caught his eye. It wasn’t the one he had spent two weeks building back in ’75. The rest of the kitchen didn’t look the same as this morning either. It now had yellow trim with off-white walls. The fridge looked like a different model too. But the cabinets were the same. He had crafted them back when he built the place in ‘56. Solid oak. Damn right, he did. With his own bare hands.

“That’s impossible,” the man replied, though he did lower his bottle of ketchup. “I bought this house from an old lady named Anna. Anna Somethingorother.”

“Anna? That’s my wife’s name...” Confused, Spangler lowered his fists. “What the hell is going on?” He turned around, finding that the hallway behind him looked the same as when he went to bed, though the wallpaper was gone, replaced by white paint.

His feet hurt. Maybe he was lost. Maybe he was the one sleepwalking...

“Mister, are you alright? Are you lost?”

“Lost? This is my house. I live here. 539 Maplehoft Lane. What the hell is going on?”

“What’s your name, old man?”

He looked up, beyond confused. His head felt fuzzy. “Elmer. Elmer Spangler.”

The man snapped his fingers. “That was her name!”

Spangler tried to focus but it was hard to ignore the pain in his feet. “This is my home. But it doesn’t look right... I just woke up...” His legs ached so badly.

“Are you sure you’re alright? You seem a little bit out of it. Have a seat. Listen, I’ll make you some coffee.” The man pulled out a chair from the kitchen table. “We’ll work this out. I think you might be lost.” The man calmly turned on the coffee pot, and within seconds, the black gold began pouring out.

“I’m not lost! I’m home!”

“You might be home, Mr. Spangler, but I bought this house from Anna five years ago.”

“You’re lying! She’d never sell the farm!”

This was his home, dammit! He had built it with his own two hands! Just like the farm outside. The smell of the coffee was heavenly. He was dying for a sip.

“Calm down! I only bought the farm house. A land developer had bought the rest.”

“Land developer?” The thought was inconceivable! Sell the farm to a developer? She sold the farm to a developer!? He cursed his wife under his breath.

“My name is Harry DeSoto,” the man said as he pulled out two coffee cups. “Have you ever heard of Alzheimer’s, Mr. Spangler? It’s a memory loss condition. You forget you most your recent memories. I think you may have wandered off from your retirement home. You seem confused which I’ve heard is a symptom of the disease.”

Thoroughly confused, Spangler despaired. “Where’s my wife? Where’s Anna?”

“If I remember, after she sold the farm, she moved across town to the Willowshire Retirement Home.”

New rage billowed up, spilling out. “Willowshire? I hate that place! They wasted perfectly good farmland building it!”

Harry continued to ignore Spangler as he prepared the coffee. “Have a seat, Mr. Spangler.”

“Like hell, I will!” Spangler remained standing and watched as Harry poured coffee into the two cups.

“How do you like it?”

Through clenched teeth, Spangler muttered, “Black.”

“As any hard working man would.” Harry sat the coffee down in front of Spangler. “I’m going to call the police. They’ll be able to find out where you belong.”

“This is my house! I belong here!”

“You may belong here but I can’t have you living in my house. My wife and kids wouldn’t go for that. I rightfully purchased this home and could have you arrested for trespassing. I’m not going to, mostly because you seem really confused. Likely you have Alzheimer’s and you’ve forgotten where you’re supposed to be.” Harry reached for the phone on the wall.

“I tell you, I went to bed last night next to my wife! Upstairs!”

“Not here you didn’t.” The coffee steamed silently on the table as Harry dialed the phone, putting it up to his ear. “You should drink your coffee, Mr. Spangler.”

Spangler eyed him suspiciously and then reached out to grasp the cup, keeping his eyes firmly on this Harry fellow. He kept reaching for it, but he just couldn’t quite grab it. Harry’s eyes went from questioning to surprise, then downright shock. The man backed up as far as he could and dropped the phone, which clattered loudly onto the counter. Spangler looked down at the cup of coffee and reached for it again. His hand went right through it as if it was air.

“What the hell?” he muttered and looked up at Harry, who had a terrified look on his face. Spangler touched the top of the crappy, mass produced table, but his hand fell through it as he applied pressure.

“What was the yesterday’s date?” Harry stammered out.

Confused at his inability to pick up the coffee cup, Spangler looked up in annoyance. “September 21st, I think.” Damn, he was thirsty!

“What year?” Harry asked quickly.

What a dumb question! Any fool knew what year it was. “1983,” he said flatly. Harry turned white as a sheet. This punk was weird, asking stupid questions that related to absolutely nothing!

“Mr. Spangler, it is September 23rd, 2005.”

“Well, that can’t be right. Are you sure you haven’t been smoking that weed the kids grow out in my back woods?” He looked down at his hands, and the table showed through them like they were rice paper. Looking around, he saw that everything had a white glow to it. “I can’t believe she sold the farm to a... to a...” He spat out the last word with a vehemence that transcended time. “Developer!”

The light around him became too bright for him to see anything. Harry became a white shadow and slowly disappeared into the whiter background. He could no longer smell the coffee, which he knew was still steaming inches away from where his now invisible hand had been.

As his consciousness dissipated into the white ether of oblivion, Elmer Spangler’s last thought that would last him throughout eternity was how his bitch of a wife had sold the farm to the enemy...

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