

Ben and Lila pulled into the driveway of their demented grandma's house. They were sent there to take care of her since her caretaker was leaving and couldn't be replaced for a couple of weeks.

The house looked like all the others in the neighborhood. It wasn't what Ben pictured when he thought of New Mexican architecture which, granted, wasn't often. It was red brick with a slanted shingled roof. It had plenty of windows and looked pretty new.

Ben was nervous about their stay because he didn't know the first thing about home health, or healthcare in general. He ran his fingers through his shaggy dirty blonde hair and brushed his bangs out of his blue eyes. Next to him, Lila's hazel eyes were wide with what Ben assumed was anxiety.

They didn't know what they were getting themselves into. They didn't even know their grandma that well. Their visits were few and far between. She had moved to New Mexico a couple years ago with their grandpa, shortly before he died.

Ben and Lila hadn't been to visit her in the new house yet. They got out of the car and approached the door. Lila twirled her long blonde hair nervously around her finger.

"What if she doesn't remember us?" Ben asked.

Lila sighed. "Try not to worry about that," she said. "Let's stay positive."

She reached out to ring the bell, but didn't get a chance to before the door opened. The woman on the other side was not their grandma.

*She's hot!*

The lady looked to be in her thirties, maybe twice Ben's 17. She was also preoccupied with more important things.

Her pregnant belly stretched the fabric of her white scrubs. Her blond hair was pulled

back in a way that highlighted her face. Ben finally understood the pregnant glow he had heard of. He tried not to ogle her while she talked.

“You must be Lila and Ben. I’m Carolyn. It’s so nice of you to come watch your grandmother. I have an appointment in an hour, but please come in so I can catch you up.”

Ben wasn’t sure how much she could possibly teach them in such a short time, but he didn’t mind following her around and hanging on her words. For once, he might have actually been paying more attention than his sister.

“It’s best to keep your grandma on the ground floor,” Carolyn said. “The stairs can be dangerous.”

Ben wondered if there was a story behind that.

“What’s upstairs?” Lila asked.

“There are two spare bedrooms and a bathroom,” Carolyn said. “That’s where you’ll be staying.”

“Shouldn’t we stay close to Grandma Rose?” Ben asked. “What if she needs us in the middle of the night but can’t go up the stairs?”

Carolyn smiled at him.

*Score!*

“That’s so sweet of you, Ben,” Carolyn said. “She actually does sleepwalk sometimes. Perhaps you two can take turns sleeping on the sofa bed. It’s only for two weeks, after all.”

“I’ll take the first shift,” Ben volunteered in an attempt to impress Carolyn.

The way she looked at him made him think it worked.

Lila nudged him and whispered, “Suck up.”

He grinned.

They went over Grandma Rose's diet, medications, and schedule. She seemed pretty high maintenance. Ben wondered if they'd ever be able to leave the house. The town they were in was small but had some historical significance.

Roswell, New Mexico was relatively well-known as the alleged crash site of a UFO way back in 1947. A farmer claimed to have found some mysterious, otherworldly materials on his property.

The government immediately covered it up by saying they came from a fallen weather balloon. They amended their statement years later when they admitted they had been using what was advanced technology at the time to try to spy on Soviet Russia's military tactics.

To Ben, that sounded as farfetched as a UFO crash, so it was just as hard to believe one as the other. Weather balloon was a nice and simple explanation, but Ben was no fool.

He wanted to take advantage of his time in Roswell to find a truth he could accept. The city boasted a mere two museums with exhibits related to the crash, but Ben had access to the Internet and, if he was stealth and careful enough, the crash site. It wasn't open to the public, but Ben was not easily dissuaded.

"Do you have any questions?" Carolyn asked, reminding him that they were at the end of their informational tour.

*Yeah. Will I see you again?*

"Can we have your number in case we think of any?" Lila asked.

They stood in the living room and waited while Carolyn took a notepad and pen out of her purse and jotted down her number. Ben looked around at the old furniture. There was a well-loved red armchair that he would bet his grandma spent most of her time in. It was next to a saggy flowery sofa that he knew converted into a bed. They both faced an old-fashioned TV.

Carolyn held out her number and Ben snatched it before Lila could flinch.

“Where is Grandma?” Lila asked.

“She’s sleeping,” Ben said. “It was on the schedule. Remember?”

“It’s on the fridge,” Lila said. “I’ll get to know it.”

On her way out the door, Carolyn turned to Ben. “Don’t call me in the middle of the night. Okay?”

Ben’s face flushed and Lila laughed as the door shut.

“Should we wake her?” Ben asked a moment later.

“Probably not,” Lila said. “We’re here to help her stick to her schedule, not to disrupt it.”

Ben sighed. “In that case, we’ve got some time to kill. I heard there’s a McDonald’s shaped like a flying saucer.”

Lila rolled her eyes. “That’s ridiculous. And we’re not going out. We need to be here when Grandma Rose wakes up.”

“We’ll be back before she does,” Ben said.

“Not if she doesn’t stick to the schedule. We can’t risk her waking up all alone.”

“Why not?” Ben asked. “I do it every day.”

Lila groaned. “Oh, shut up. This is serious. We have to make sure Grandma Rose stays healthy and relatively sane. I thought you cared. Or was that just a show for Carolyn?”

“I do care!” Ben said. “I just slightly exaggerated for her sake.”

“I hope you were serious about taking the sofa bed because I’m going to go unpack upstairs.”

“Okay, fine,” Ben conceded. “But only because I’m a man of my word.”

Lila scoffed. “Likely story.”

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Ben had fallen asleep on the sofa and woke up to the sound of dragging footsteps. He opened his eyes and saw his grandma standing in front of him. He quickly sat up. If, for some reason, she didn't recognize him, it wouldn't look good for him to be lying down on the couch.

Her appearance was unsettling. Her thin gray hair looked like a rat's nest. She was incredibly thin so her nightgown hung on her like a sheet on a Halloween ghost. She wore slippers, which explained the shuffling sound.

Her droopy, wrinkly face was livened only by her bright blue eyes. Her expression was somewhat frightening because Ben couldn't tell if she wanted to hug him or kick him out.

"Grandma Rose!" Lila called.

Ben's eye darted over to where she stood at the foot of the stairs.

"You're awake," Lila said as she walked over to greet their grandma.

Ben watched with anticipation as Lila came face-to-face with her. If she didn't recognize either one of them, they'd both be in trouble. Ben admired Lila's confidence, though. It was as if she wouldn't even accept the possibility of looking like a stranger.

"Lila, dear!" Grandma Rose said, pulling her into a hug.

Ben heaved a sigh of relief and stood up.

A moment later she said, "Ben, darling. Come give your grandma a hug."

She squeezed him surprisingly tight for someone who appeared so frail.

"We're so excited to see you, Grandma Rose," Lila said.

"I'm happy to see you both, as well," she replied. "Come with me to the kitchen. I made some cookies."

Ben didn't know when she had the chance to do that. He had assumed she'd just gotten

up. He looked to Lila but she just shrugged.

The oven was off. Ben suspected that meant it was also empty, but he felt the need to indulge his grandma. He pulled open the door and saw that there was nothing inside. In fact, it looked like it hadn't been used in a while.

He didn't know much about dementia, but the fact that his grandma was imagining nonexistent cookies was hard for him to swallow. Just like the cookies. Unsure what to say, he grabbed Lila's arm and pulled her into the living room.

"What the heck?" he whispered, checking over his shoulder to make sure they weren't followed.

"I have no idea what's going on," Lila said.

"Carolyn did not mention this."

"Are you sure? Maybe you were too busy leering at her to listen."

"Now is not the time to joke around! What are we going to do?"

"I don't know. When someone is sleepwalking, you're not supposed to wake them. Maybe that means we shouldn't tell her that she's—"

"Crazy?"

"I was going to say confused."

"I think crazy fits better. Besides, we can't let her believe there are actually cookies. Does she expect us to eat air and pretend like everything is normal?"

"I sure hope not because everything is most certainly not normal. When I was unpacking, I saw some stuff upstairs in the closet. It was—"

"Is everything okay in here kids?" Grandma Rose asked, sticking her head around the corner.

“Yeah, fine!” Lila said. “We’ll be right back.”

“Good! We don’t want the cookies to get cold.”

“I say we run,” Ben said.

“Don’t be ridiculous. We’re staying. Let’s just go take care of this.”

“Wait! What were you going to tell me about the upstairs closet?”

Lila glanced over at the place where their grandma had appeared moments before. “I’ll tell you later.”

They walked back into the kitchen, where their grandma stood holding an empty plate. They exchanged worried looks.

“Have a cookie,” she said.

Ben tried to think of how to respond.

After a moment, he said, “They’re too hot to eat right now. They just came out of the oven. Why don’t we have something to drink first?”

He was afraid she would get upset or insist they take one. Instead, she smiled and set the plate down. “You’re probably right, dear.”

“Lila, take Grandma Rose into the living room and I’ll get us drinks.”

Once they were gone, Ben walked over to the fridge and opened it. There were tons of plastic containers filled with food and marked with dates. Carolyn had told them she had prepared some meals for their grandma. Ben searched for drinks but only found soy milk. He scrunched his face in disgust. Water would have to do.

He joined them in the living room with three glasses of ice water. Grandma Rose was in the armchair. She fit in it like it was an extension of her, just like Ben had guessed. He handed her a glass and she smiled. Lila sat up straight on the sofa with her legs crossed. He sat down

next to her and gave her a water.

“Relax, would you?” he murmured. “You look like you could be snapped in half.”

“I’m just a little nervous, okay?”

“So, tell me,” Grandma Rose said. “How was your flight?”

“Oh, we drove,” Ben said.

She tilted her head in confusion.

“It was good,” Lila amended.

“Wonderful! Did you meet Cassandra earlier?”

*Does she have two hot caretakers who had to quit?*

Lila shot Ben a look that told him their grandma was probably talking about Carolyn. It made him nervous that she could forget the name of someone who practically lived with her. Did that mean she’d forget her own grandchildren while they were there?

“We met her,” Lila said. “She was nice. Ben especially liked her.”

He elbowed her in the side.

“She’s a nice girl. It’s a shame about her baby.”

“What about her baby?” Ben asked, unable to suppress his curiosity.

“She was pregnant, you see, but she lost the baby a little while back. She needed to take time off to grieve. I can’t blame her. She must feel horrible.”

Ben stared wide-eyed at Lila.

“How?” he mouthed.

Carolyn was so pregnant you could probably see the bump from space. Yet Grandma Rose thought she’d lost the baby? Was she crazy and blind, or crazy enough to seem blind? Cookies were one thing, but how could she not know Carolyn was still pregnant?



Maybe she didn't want to face the fact that Carolyn was leaving to take care of her baby. Grandma Rose could've felt abandoned and made up a story that would explain Carolyn's absence without making it seem like she had chosen someone else.

Grandma Rose stood up. "I'm going to go get the cookies."