**LIVE MUSIC**

Strong sunlight filtered through the large picture window overlooking an immaculately maintained golf course, nourished the African violets sitting on the window shelf and illuminated a brightly colored calendar, one of several which were hanging on the wall of the neat, clean room. There was a bed and bedside table, a closet and an adjoining bathroom.

A frail white-haired woman sat in a wheelchair staring blankly at the picture on the calendar. It looked like an old Saturday Evening Post cover by Norman Rockwell and showed a frantic father beside a fireplace scrambling into his Santa Claus outfit. It was near Christmas of the 4th year since she had come to this place, but she didn’t know that. She thought she had just come to some sort of hotel and would be leaving today to stay with her son. She was awaiting his arrival and was getting more than a little impatient.

At that moment she heard an old man’s deep voice behind her saying, “I thought I mentioned to you that Richard was sick today. He’s got a bad case of the flu.”

“For goodness sake, you startled me,” she said. “When did you get here? How did you know how to find me?”

“Just followed the directions. Simple for anyone with any sense. You were always independent minded but you never could find your way around, could you? I always had to tell you where to go. Now that you’re on your own, how do you like it?”

“You know I hate it, Frank. Why won’t you take me out of this place?”

“That’s not up to me, honey, you know the rules. You got to put in you dime, and serve your time.”

“I’ve been here at least an hour and a half and I’m tired of waiting. If Richard isn’t coming today and you’re unwilling to help me, what should I do? Someone comes in to see me sometimes but I don’t remember her name and she’s black one time and white another. She’s so sweet and she always bathes me and massages my back but hen a little later I can’t get her to take me to the bathroom till after I pee in my britches. And my bowls are locked up good.”

“ ‘Take the juice of two lemons in the AM.’ It’s not much better where I’m staying. Heck, it was so heavily advertised and supposed to be worth waiting for! But it wasn’t what it was cracked up to be. Then again, the help is atrocious these days everywhere you go, you might as well be in hell.”

“It’s so confusing. I’m going crazy with boredom. I don’t have anyone to talk to most of the time. And when I do have some visitors, I can’t remember who they are or what we talked about right after they just told me.”

“Didn’t you used to be a staunch Republican? They say you have to fall back on your own resources.”

“What are my own resources? Have I got any that I don’t know about?”

“For the love of God, Bessie! I left you well fixed for investments and cash. I provided for you.”

“Did you? I guess so, that sounds familiar. But why did you have to go and die, Frank? Why, when I needed you so to help me, and no one is even half as good? Richard tries, but he’s never here when I expect him. Why didn’t he come today?”

“I just told you why. Pay attention.”

“Did you have to leave so soon after they diagnosed you with bad kidneys? Didn’t I take good care of you? Wasn’t I nice to you, even when you were sarcastic and mean? Why didn’t you let them diaperize you?”

“You mean dialyse me? We talked about that, remember? You can’t teach an old fart in winter to smell like a summer rose, in spite of all the new gadgets these young squirts have up their sleeves. Leave well enough alone, you know. ‘For every mannnnn there is a season, for every thinnnnnnnnng there is a reason.’”

“You still have your sweet baritone, Frank. Sing some more to me, Frankie. Sing, please.”

“I have to say you could stand some live music, here. All I see are TV sets and Laurence Welk reruns on Saturday nights.”

“Remember how we used to enjoy those? We’d have a couple of nightcaps, and sometimes you’d take off your slippers and we’d dance on the carpet in our bare feet ---and then later ---”

“Later, I wasn’t worth a damn. Not the man I used to be.”

“You were great, Frankie, as far as I was concerned. Oh, you were a devil!”

“Now I have to act like I’m a friggin’ angel!”

“Just you wait! I’ll be there any day now and we’ll have a fine time! There’s really nothing keeping me here any more.”

“You sure are a slowpoke, Bess. I’ve been waiting on you going on five years now.”

“We’ve all been waiting. But now I need to go pee and no use hollerin’. Want to see me crawl to the toilet?”

“I’d rather you fly, if you can.”

“I might just try that. Let’s see. Stretch my wings first, then ever so slowly over the edge.”

“Uh-oh. Don’t get yourslef in trouble with the authorities. You know the rules.”

“Here I come, ready or not!”

“You better call for the nurse!”

“Ohhhh! That didn’t hurt too much…I think I’ll just wait and see if anyone heard that. I’m sleepy and I think I’m going to take a nap now…See you in a little while, Frank.”

“So long, Bessie. I love you.”

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Nurse Ethel Bryan and her aide Catherine Walker came charging out of the room down the hall where they had been changing Mrs. Elliot’s linens when they heard the crash. They made a beeline for Bessie’s room. Ethel saw Bessie, alone in her room and still strapped into her overturned wheelchair, and sized up the situation quickly. She and Catherine loosened the safety binder and straightened Bessie’s crumpled body. She saw that there were no obvious broken bones, and just the beginning of some bruises on her chest and on the right side of her face.

“Don’t that beat all! She’s done it again! I guess we have to get X-rays of her chest to check for any cracked ribs. Catherine, get hold of the supervisor, tell her what happened and ask her to call Bessie’s son. Looks like we might have to get the ambulance too. I’ll stay here with her. Bessie, can you hear me? Where does it hurt? Were you trying to reach something or get out of your chair? You poor thing.”

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