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Crazy Sunday

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Abstract

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Crazy Sunday

A FAINT breeze rustled through the curtains and carried all the freshness of the spring morning into the room of T. J. Comstock Jr., known to his family as Junior and to his friends as T. J. He wasn't aware of the beauty of the day as he stretched his long lanky body in his sleep. He moaned a little, turned over and covered his head with a pillow to shut out the light and the sounds of the new day.

From the kitchen came the sounds of breakfast and on its heels came the aroma of French toast and bacon. T. J. sighed, thinking that it was probably time for breakfast. "The hell with it," he said aloud. "The old lady can fix me some more when I get up. For Chrissake, you'd think that's all I had to do was to chase around getting up and eating breakfast and going to church and all the rest of that kind of crap." He looked up at the ceiling and studied the pattern of the wall paper for a moment or two and then doubled himself into a tight ball under the thin coverlet, closing his eyes tightly to shut out the sun.

A fly buzzed in his ear. T. J. slapped fiercely at it without opening his eyes. The fly came buzzing back and crawled along his bared neck. "Damn fly," T. J. said rather loudly, then checked himself remembering that it was Sunday and that his mother didn't approve of swearing. "Guess I can swear if I want to," he said bitterly under his breath. He rolled flat on his back and again tried to sleep. The fly started to crawl on his nose. He ignored it. It started to crawl up his left nostril. T. J. grabbed futilely at his nose as the fly buzzed off.

Guess I'd better get up, T. J. thought. Got to get the car cleaned up if I'm going to take Jeannie swimming today. He threw the light coverlet back and stretched his gangling arms way above his head. Wonder if he could get the old

man's car. The thirty-seven's all right for dragging around, but Christ, it's not fit to take a woman out in. You'd think the old man would come through with a rag-top one of these days. T. J. swung his long lean legs over the side of the bed and sat staring at the floor. I do most of the work around this place. If it wasn't for me, the old man would starve to death. He's getting so damn slow it's pathetic.

"Mom---Mom?"

"Yes."

"Any breakfast left?"

"No!"

"Well, why isn't there? I'm hungry. I'd get up if I thought there was something to eat."

"I was just kidding, Junior," his mother said. "I've got something fixed for you."

"That's more like it," T. J. mumbled just loud enough so she could hear.

"What's that I heard you say?"

"I said that's fine, I'll be in in a minute." He started to pull on some dusty looking levis. His toe caught in a tear on the knee and he ripped a slightly larger hole. Damn wore-out clothes." He picked the levis up and threw them into a disorderly pile of similar clothes in one corner of the littered room. "Mom," he yelled, "have I got my clean levis?"

"No," she called back, "but there's some clean khakis in the top dresser drawer."

"Hell's bells, I'm not going to a Sunday School picnic, I'm going to wash my car," he said somewhat under his breath in fear that his mother might hear.

He began rummaging through the pile of dirty clothes again and found a dirty sweat sock with the lipsticked initials T. J. on it. "Wondered where that sock was," he said to himself as he pulled out a very greasy pair of khakis from the bottom of the pile. He sniffed at them and held his nose in disgust. "Getting pretty rancid, but I guess I'll wear 'em anyway," he said rather loudly in the hopes that his mother would hear. He put them on, beltless, and without bothering to put on a shirt, he started for the kitchen.

His father and mother were sitting around the breakfast table drinking coffee. He seated himself noisily in his usual

place and groped aimlessly in the pile of mused up paper that had once been the Sunday paper.

"Why can't you keep these papers straight?" T. J. moaned. "It never fails. A man's in a hurry to read the sports page and he can't find it for all this other crap on top of it." He finally found the missing page and settled back, apparently satisfied, into his chair. "Say, give me some grub, I'm about starved." Getting little or no response from either of his parents, he went to the stove to get some food himself.

He brought a plateful back to the table and started to eat. "Cold," he muttered, "never get a bite to eat around here that's warm."

"Your food cold, Junior?" his mother asked. "Here, let me warm it up for you."

"Don't bother, I'm not as hungry as I thought I was."

His mother warmed the food anyway and placed it before him. He started to eat it from behind the shield of the sports page. "Say, Dad?"

"Yeah."

"I'm going to use the ninety-eight today. Has it got any gas in it?"

"You're going to do what?" his father sputtered, coming awake from his position deep in the comic page for the first time that morning.

"Going to use the car, that's what. I've got a date with Jeannie to go swimming and I don't want to use my old car."

"But son, have you forgotten? Your Uncle Ben and Aunt Grace are bringing over Dad and Mom for dinner today. They haven't seen you for five years."

Oh God, he said to himself, I'd forgotten all about it. Can't let Jeannie down.

"Gosh, I'd forgotten all about it, Dad. That's too bad. I've made other plans." He trailed his fork through the greasy remains of his eggs and made strange patterns of orange and white on his plate. Trying his best to look unconcerned and cocky, he casually flicked a crumb from his bare chest to the floor.

T. J. notice his father looking at his shirtless back. I suppose he'll chew me out for it. He'd no sooner thought this, when his father spoke. "Junior, where's your shirt?"

Don't you know it's Sunday? What if someone came in and saw you?"

"Who gives a damn?" T. J. said half aloud. He glanced over at his mother who was busy stirring a tall pot of some foul-smelling concoction on the stove. He knew she was trying her best to avoid the argument that was to come between the husband and the son.

"Thomas John Junior," his father shouted angrily completely forgetting the comic section he was reading. "What did I hear you say?" He came to his feet and towered over his son who was squirming deeper into the security of his chair. "You know good and well that I let you do nearly anything you want to, and here I ask you to make this one little sacrifice and you say you've made other plans. If it was anybody else but my folks, I'd say all right, go ahead. I don't like to sit around and gas with these old fogies any better than the next person."

"Tom," T. J.'s mother said as gently as possible, trying her best to change the subject, "Tom, don't you think you'd better get the lawn mowed before your parents get here?"

"No, I don't think I'd get the lawn mowed, at least not until I get this settled with this young whippersnapper. After all, Junior," he said in a softer more pleading voice, "these are your grandparents and they've come all the way from California just to see my brother and me and our kids. And you've made other plans. Good God, son, what do you use for brains? I told you a week ago that my folks were coming this Sunday."

"But Dad, I forgot all about it. Honest I did. Besides they don't want to see me anyway." T. J. scuffled his feet aimlessly on the floor searching for words to bolster his confidence. He didn't want to talk to those old duffers. Maybe he could just walk out and get in the car and drive off. "Say Dad, are you sure I can't have the ninety-eight? Cripes, I've had this date with Jeannie for a week."

"No if's and but's about it son, you're going to stay home. I've got the keys to the Olds and you're not going to take it. And furthermore you're not going to go in your car either. I took the keys out of it this morning just in

case something like this came up. You've been acting like a baby lately, and if that's the way you're going to act, that's the way I'll treat you." By this time T. J.'s father's face had turned a fiery red and the veins in his neck were protruding and swollen with anger. "If you can't act like a man, I'm not going to treat you like one."

T. J. threw his paper to the floor and went out storming. "Be damned if I'm going to take this any longer. You're treating me like a dog." He slammed the door violently behind him.

From his room, T. J. could hear his mother speaking to his father. "Good old Mom," he said softly. "She'll come to bat for me."

"Tom, you shouldn't be so harsh with the boy. After all he's so young."

"Good old Mom," T. J. said from his sanctuary in the bedroom, "she'll stick up for me anyway."

"He's so full of life and he won't be with us too much longer. He'll grow up one of these days and leave me." T. J. could tell she was nearly in tears by the tone of her voice. "I don't know what I'll do without him."

T. J. felt a lump creeping into his throat. He didn't realize that he did mean so much to his mother. "It'd been different if it had been your parents," T. J.'s father shot back. "You'd probably promised him a new car and he'd stayed to see them."

"What a way to treat my mother," T. J. said angrily.

"In fact, if it had been your parents, I wouldn't have blamed him for sneaking off." By this time T. J. could tell that his father was really getting angry and that his mother was catching the brunt of it. He heard the door slam as his father went storming out of the house.

He lay on the bed thinking of some way that he could get out of the house and yet still smooth over the quarrel. He couldn't stand to sit around all day listening to those old fogies shooting the breeze. Still he hated to leave and have his parents mad at him and each other.

There was a knock on his door. "T. J." His mother whispered again, "Junior, can I come in a minute? I want to talk to you."

"All right, come on in."

"Junior."

"Yeah."

"You know how much this means to your father, don't you?"

Silence.

"Junior, are you listening to me?"

T. J. rolled over on the bed and faced his mother. "Yeah, I'm listening." He noticed that her cheeks were tear-stained and her eyes were swollen. He thought silently to himself that he was three kinds of a heel. Still he couldn't back down now.

"Junior. You know how much this means to your dad. This is the first time that your grandparents have been here in five years and he's so proud of you. He just wants to show you off to them. You've hurt him deeply; son and you've hurt me too." He looked at her sad face and a little lump came into his throat. "I know that you're really not that kind of a boy," she said.

T. J. began to feel almost ashamed of himself. "Got to live up to my standards," he said under his breath. "Shouldn't have poured it on quite so hard, but still I can't lose face." His mother left the room and shut the door behind her.

He mused to himself a moment or two and made a decision. "Oh hell, I'll stay home if it means so much to them. Got to stay on the good side of the old man . . . besides it might be good to see Grandma again." Then as he thought a little longer it dawned on him that maybe he could work it to his advantage after all. "If I stay home, maybe I can borrow the car next Sunday to go to Des Moines." He couldn't afford to shake up the old man too much; besides he might even get the car tonight if he played his cards right. He'd call up Jeannie and tell her what the deal was as soon as he broke the good news to Mom.

"Uh, Mom?"

"Yes, son."

"I guess I'll make the supreme sacrifice and stay . . . uh, do you suppose Dad'll let me use the car tonight?"

—John Taylor, *Ag. Jl., Jr.*