

The Journey Home

by

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A widowed grandfather cures his family's addiction to  
cellular devices with a baseball bat.

FADE IN:

INT. GABBY'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Pictures on the wall of a very young girl. There are some books on a shelf. GABBY MILLER, 11, is sitting on her bed. The iPad she holds illuminates her face. Two cell phones sit beside her. A flatscreen hanging from the wall is streaming something dramatic.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

When I was ten, my mom opened the door at eight-thirty every night and hollered for us to come home.

Gabby goes from the iPad to one of the cell phones.

GABBY

*(to herself)*

He did not!

She grabs the other phone, texting at 90 words per minute.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

Now they sit in their room all night talking to their phone. To their phone. Not on it.

INT. BOBBY'S ROOM. NIGHT.

BOBBY MILLER, 9, is talking to his phone.

BOBBY

Siri, tell me a joke.

SIRI (O.S.)

Knock, knock.

BOBBY

*(rolling his eyes)*

You already told me that one.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT.

GINA MILLER, 41, breathlessly enters. She is busy removing dress shoes and earrings.

GINA

Alexa, set an alarm. Bobby's birthday is March 3rd. I'm not saying that it's your fault, but he was really mad last year when you didn't remind me.

INT. KITCHEN. MORNING.

STUART MILLER, 45, is devouring a bagel. He is sharply dressed. All creases, no wrinkles.

STUART  
 Hey Google, what should I get Gina for  
 Valentines day.  
*(takes a bite, mouth full)*  
 And what day is Valentines day?

INT. GABBY'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Stuart enters the room. FREEZE FRAME - STUART'S SMUG  
 LOOK.

SAMUEL (V.O.)  
 My son is a lawyer. He sues plastic  
 surgeons with unhappy clients. He makes a  
 ton of money. When he was 18-years-old I  
 promised that I'd be proud of him even if  
 he was a garbageman. He called my bluff.

BACK TO SCENE:

STUART  
 Time for bed kiddo.

GABBY  
 Just a minute dad.  
*(to herself)*  
 Susie is going to die!

STUART  
 Why do you sound happy about that?  
*(spots the second phone)*  
 Where'd you get the other phone?

GABBY  
 It's Susie's.

STUART  
*(beat)*  
 She's not actually dying, right?

GABBY  
 Nah. She's all goggly over Johnny.  
*(eyes Stuart mischievously)*  
 He's fourteen.

STUART  
 How old is Susie?

GABBY  
 Ten. But she's really mature. She wears  
 makeup and a bra.

STUART

I ... um ... first, TMI on Susie's wardrobe. Second, she is too young.

GABBY

That's what Johnny said. Too immature. Right to her face. Or to her phone. If you're being technical it was to me, but he thought it was to her. So rude!

STUART

So you've been using Susie's phone to talk to a 14-year-old boy!?

GABBY

Relax dad. Susie was too embarrassed to break the ice. I was just helping out.

Gabby glances at Susie's phone. A look of concern materializes on her face.

GABBY

Do you think that she'll blame me when she finds out that Johnny rejected her?

FREEZE FRAME - GABBY FREAKING OUT

SAMUEL (V.O.)

When I was a kid we passed notes. It was always face to face. If you got rejected you blushed. Now you tweet. Or instagram. Or tick tock. I'm not sure what any of that is.

INT. CHAPEL. DAY.

YOUNG SAMUEL and HELEN MILLER happily exchanging vows, circa 1961.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

I passed one note in all of my life. She said no. Ten years later she changed her mind.

Young Samuel and Helen exchange their first marital kiss. All smiles.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

When I was forty I dreamed that medical science would make a discovery that would allow us to live forever. Helen made me so happy. I didn't want it to end.

EXT. GRAVEYARD. DAY - RAIN.

SAMUEL MILLER, 77, with log-soaked flowers staring at a headstone.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

I'm ready to go home. To see Helen. To see my sister and parents. To stand before Jesus.

INT. GABBY'S ROOM. NIGHT.

FREEZE FRAME - GABBY FREAKING OUT.

BACK TO SCENE:

GABBY

*(young and melodramatic)*

No. No. No, no, no, no. I'll just die if she blames me! Can you imagine anything so horrible!?

SMASH CUT:

INT. CHAPEL. DAY.

Samuel is kneeling in a pew. He is crying.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

It was cancer. Started in one place, then spread to other places. The chemo only made her feel worse. The doctor suggested we try an experimental therapy. It cost half-a-million bucks. It wasn't covered by insurance because it was a scam cooked up by the doctor's crooked cousin.

INT. FRONT DOOR. DAY.

Stuart opens the door to Samuel. He is carrying a suitcase.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

You'd think that Stuart would've sued them, but putting a roof over my head was literally the least that he could do.

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Samuel is lounging on a recliner with a small tablet.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

For sixty years I ended every day talking to Helen. Now I spend it playing fake poker with a bunch of strangers. I'm up to one-point-two million chips. I'm trying to figure out how to exchange them for the real money that I lost to that fake doctor.

FADE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Bobby is sitting upside-down on the couch. He is playing a game on his phone.

Gabby is furiously texting.

Stuart is doing pushups while multitasking with emails on a tablet laying on the floor. The screen goes dim. He taps it with his nose during a pushup and it brightens up.

Gina is chomping at thin air while looking at her phone.

GINA'S POV:

On the phone we see Gina's face: digital donuts are flying into her mouth with each chomp, her cheeks growing fat via Instagram's latest filter.

Samuel sits on a chair looking bored.

SAMUEL

Anyone interested in a little Monopoly?

OVERLAPPING:

GABBY

I'm in the middle of something.

BOBBY

After I clear this level.

STUART

I've really got to read this.

Gina is still mindlessly chomping at thin air. She giggles.

GINA

I have to post this.

INT. KITCHEN. EVENING.

Samuel is picking idly at a plate of food, still bored.

Stuart is eating a sandwich over the sink while reading from his tablet.

Gina is making beauty poses in front of her phone.

Gabby's head is down, beams of iPhone light spilling through a curtain of hair.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Samuel enters. The kitchen is ruffraff with leftovers from a hurried breakfast. Stuart's tablet lies by the sink. Samuel eyes it.

SAMUEL

Uh oh. How will he ever survive without it?

Gina's phone is on the kitchen table. Samuel spots it.

SAMUEL

Two for one.

Samuel starts to tidy up. He puts dishes in the sink. He moves the tablet next to the phone.

INT. LIVING ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Samuel enters the living room. Bobby's BASEBALL BAT is sitting on the couch. Samuel grabs it and starts for Bobby's room before pausing.

SAMUEL

(to the bat)

I have just the job for you my friend.

INT. KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS.

Samuel carries the bat towards the electronics.

Samuel looms large. Suddenly looks strong. The world his oyster. A geriatric superhero.

He raises the bat and swings powerfully down. The tablet and phone are off-screen. Glass particulates shoot up. Samuel laughs. He raises the bat again.

SMASH CUT:

EXT. KITCHEN - WINDOW. CONTINUOUS.

A NEIGHBOR watches Samuel through the window. She is holding a cell phone.

Samuel lifts the bat over his head. He feebly swings at the table ... and misses the electronics. He raises the bat again like it weighs a thousand pounds. The bat is dropped more than swung. It bounces harmlessly off the devices. Samuel raises a third time. He pauses, unsteadily, before grabbing his back in pain. He falls out of view.

911 OPERATOR (V.O.)

911. Do you need police or rescue?

NEIGHBOR

I'm honestly not sure.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Samuel is sitting on the couch. An AMBULANCE EMT has a BLOOD PRESSURE CUFF on his arm. Stuart lingers in the background.

EMT

You're fine. Just no more excitement, ok?

The EMT stands and heads for the door.

STUART

(to EMT)

Thanks.

Samuel stares at the floor.

STUART

What were you thinking pop?

SAMUEL

You remember when you were young? When we ate dinner? No one left until everyone was finished.

STUART

I remember that mom ate like a snail. Thirty minutes, beginning to end.

SAMUEL

Remember all the stuff that we'd talk about.

STUART

Sure. You can't go 30-minutes staring at each other without saying something.



SAMUEL

Your mom always considered dinnertime to be like a mini-communion.

STUART

Communion? Like wine and bread at church?

SAMUEL

A pastor told her once that communion was just a group of people who shared a meal. All you had to do was remember Jesus and be together. She liked the idea of that.

Stuart looks down reflectively.

STUART

I miss her.

SAMUEL

Really?

STUART

What's that mean?

SAMUEL

I lost her. And then they took everything.

STUART

Pop ... the people I represent. You know how many of them end up happy? Endless dispositions, testimonies, court dates, just for the opportunity to be judged by a jury who doesn't know the first thing about medicine. They relive the worst day of their lives for years. I didn't want to do it to you. I didn't want to do it to me.

SAMUEL

Just tell me that it meant something.

STUART

The money? Oh, you betcha. Mom died knowing that she was loved. And you get to hang with us now.

SAMUEL.

I'm proud of you kid.

(pause)

I just wish that I'd had enough stamina to finish the job with those danged gadgets.

STUART

You're on a tablet every night!

SAMUEL

On this railcar hurling towards death,  
you either sit and watch the world go by  
or you stop and smell the flowers.

STUART

Who's that, Keats?

SAMUEL

Just ... don't forget what's important.

Stuart pats Samuel on the back.

INT. GABBY'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Gabby lies in bed on her phone. Stuart walks in.

STUART

Time for bed kiddo.

GABBY

Five more minutes. Susie is having a  
meltdown.

STUART

Over 14-year-old Johnny? They haven't put  
him in prison yet?

GABBY

Daaad.

STUART

Come on. She'll still be a mess tomorrow.  
Say goodnight.

GABBY

Fine.

Gabby fires off a quick text and puts the phone down.

STUART

Ok, best thing worst thing.

GABBY

Really? We haven't done that in like,  
forever.

STUART

Best thing?

GABBY

*(giggling)*  
Grandpa trying to break your phone.

STUART

I'm not sure that counts, but I'll allow it. Worst thing?

GABBY

If grandpa had broken your phone!

STUART

Uh uh. Not this time. Really, worst thing?

GABBY

Um, well, I guess Susie. I mean, I think she kind of blames me ... but her little Johnny crush was weird.

STUART

Why'd you agree to help her?

GABBY

I don't know. Boredom? It was sooo Kim and Kanye.

STUART

Should I know who that is?

GABBY

*(ignores him)*

It was so dramatic. Johnny was never going to go for it, but he was all that she would ever talk about.

STUART

And now?

GABBY

He's all that she ever talks about. She's so sad. Like, weirdly sad. I don't know what to do.

STUART

Be her friend. Hug her. Tell her to stop thinking about Johnny.

GABBY

Hmm. Maybe.

STUART

Let me know how it goes.

GABBY

Thanks dad.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM. DAY.

Gina enters the room with two full shopping bags. She dumps it on the bed: STREAMERS, BALLOONS, a BASEBALL MITT and a HAPPY BIRTHDAY BANNER.

GINA

Hey Alexa, don't worry about Bobby's birthday. A change in our relationship has been long overdue. It's called a mothers love baby. They don't make an app for that.

EXT. BACKYARD. DAY.

Bobby with his brand new baseball mitt. He and Stuart are playing catch on the grass. On the porch is the rest of the family. The Happy Birthday banner and balloons surround them. Discarded wrapping paper lies at their feet.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

ANGLE ON A GRAVEYARD OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES.

Not broken, just ignored.

Several feet behind it the family sits at the dinner table. Every plate is empty save for Stuart's.

GABBY

Oh my gosh dad, how long are you going to take? Newton invented calculus in less time than you've spent on that potato.

STUART

No complaining. That's the rule. Nobody leaves until the last person finishes.

Samuel beams with pride.

EXT. PORCH. EVENING.

Gabby sits on the porch with SUSIE, 10. Susie is crying into her hands. Gabby gives her a hug, then a playful slug on the shoulder. Susie looks up with a tearful smile.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

Kim eventually got over Johnny. Or ... wait ... wasn't her name Susie? And wasn't there a Kanye in there somewhere? Whatever. You can't digitize a hug. They're better than a thousand texts...

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Samuel is sitting on the couch playing poker on a small tablet.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

I only play once a week now. I'm up to two million. Someone messaged asking if I'd hawk some of my winnings. I don't think they understand the true value of PlayFun Poker chips. I honestly believe they're the next Bitcoin. I'm mining them so that I can afford a bamboo shack in Tahiti. They offered me twenty bucks for a million chips. I'd like to think that it's the fake doctor and his crooked cousin, but it's probably a nine-year-old from Topeka. I'm going to demand fifty.

EXT. GRAVEYARD. DAY.

Samuel lays neat LILIES at the foot of the headstone.

SAMUEL (V.O.)

Lilies were her favorite, lilies she gets. I still miss her, but now sometimes when I think about her I smile. Before long I'll see her again. Face to face.

FADE TO BLACK