

Jim's head jerked to attention alerting him to a tiny pointer finger tapping his shoulder, and the owner of that finger shout whispering, "Mister. Hey Mister..."

Jim turned to face his awakener.

"Oh I am glad you are awake mister. Your head was so far back that your chin was shooting straight for the ceiling. My dad is a chiropractor, and he is always saying that people sleeping funky is the reason we got such a big old house on the lake. And mister just looking at your clothes I don't think you could afford my daddy and then you would just have a crooked neck in pain and well I just couldn't let you live the rest of your short life that way."

The onslaught of the boy's pointed view of Jim's appearance and life span caused his eyes to brighten a bit to almost suggest a smile.

"Is that so?" Jim simply replied. Linda often complained of his limited conversation skills: "*Lord, Jim you could be forced to say a paragraph of words to win a million dollars and you would still flummox*"

"So mister, did I save you from a life of neck pain?"

"I do believe you did." The briefest silence elapsed as he took in the boy of likely seven with deep black hair mussed up like he had been sleeping. He immediately realized the boy was likely sleeping recently as he was in blue shark pajamas claiming "He Looked Shark Like Dad." Jim glanced at the clock beside the TV and saw it indeed it was 2:00 am, which is likely why the room was so cleared out.

The boy followed his gaze, "I've already asked the nurse to change it to *Wild Kratz* but she said that 'the TV was for everyone and *Wild Kratz* is just for kids' which is not true because my mom snuggles me close every time it is on and says, 'Isn't this the best?'" The boy cut off quietly and slumped completely down.

Jim wagered his mom was the reason this boy was in shark pajamas at 2:00 am next to him.

"I didn't have time to grab anything. There was just so much screaming and being pulled into the car with dad," the boy finished quietly.

Jim once again longing to switch places with Linda as she would know exactly what to say to this boy. Jim settled for the only type of communication that always felt safe. He shifted slightly to pull out his worn deck of cards. "Would you like to see a magic trick?"

The boys deep brown eyes met Jim's with curiosity. Taking that as a yes, Jim continued, "Pick any card and memorize it."

"Oh I can do that really well. Probably too well according to my dad because I repeat a whole conversation back to him. Like when I reminded him that on Christmas he promised to show me how to use my new ice skates and even though I have repeated that conversation back to him multiple times he hasn't taught me. I'd ask my mom but she is petrified of the water even if it is frozen, which is hard since we live right on a lake. So she is constantly reminded of all she fears, which I think is why she is in her room a lot with the curtains closed."

Jim was at a lost of how this magic trick took such a twist. He surprised himself next with where he took the conversation, "Linda, my wife, feared lakes too likely from never learning how to swim, but we still ended up here in the land of 10,000 lakes. Here I'll take your card now."

The boy slid the card back in the pile as Jim started laying out three rows of five cards and asked, "Is that why you're here tonight? For your wife?"

Nearing the truth of the night, Jim's stomach clenched as he nodded. "Cancer for about a year. Is your card in row 1, 2 or 3?"

"Row 3. Three kids in my class right now have grandparents dying of cancer. I told my dad that and he said it is probably because they aren't eating enough natural food. He hates candy. But mom and me have a secret stash of sweet and sour licorice that we eat when we cuddle together in her bed."

"Linda's weakness was anything containing peanut butter. I have some of her favorites here if you would like one."

The boy gleefully started unwrapping the gold tinfoil as Jim reshuffled and laid the cards in groups of four but this time face down. The boy was finally silent from both candy and intrigue from where this trick was going. "Pick to two piles." As Jim removed the two the boy had touched, he said, "Now pick one." Four cards remained as the final moments of the trick were taking place until finally only one card was left. Jim picked up the card, which was a jack of hearts. "Is this your card?"

The boy's eyes brightened wide with awe and the first huge simile of the night. "Yes! That is it and that's me. I'm Jack.

"Nice to meet you Jack. I'm Jim."

"How in the world did you do it?"

Jim slyly grinned declaring, "A magician never shares his secrets, but I will do it again for you."

Jim proceeded to perform the trick until soon the light was changing in the windows and a nurse finally came to collect Jack to see his mom.

Jack looked hopefully at Jim and asked, "Will you be here still Jim when I get back?"

Jim's eyes brighten for a second time that night with Jack and nodded, "Yes I do believe so."

Jim just resettled when his and Linda's favorite nurse walked into the waiting room. "Oh Jim. I am so sorry. I just heard the news from girls."

Jim stiffly nodded as the magic of the last few hours vanished and the reality of last night settled back in. "Thank you Lou."

Lou looked at him quizzically, "What on earth are you still doing here Jim in the waiting room? The girls said it happened early evening yesterday."

Jim couldn't fully explain his actions of not leaving the hospital. He settled on as close to the truth as possible, "My friend Jack was in a need of a little magic."