

Life has been hard for Jim in recent years, and with what he has, things will only get more challenging. That's not what the doctor says, but it's what everyone knows. You see, Jim hurt himself in the Autumn a few years ago and spent the following Winter (and the years afterwards) in bed, just taking things slow. The problem when you stop moving, though, is that you don't want to start again.

"Can I not take it slow?" Jim would ask. "I done nothing but run and work for 50 years. Can I not lay and enjoy the slow life?"

Most times, this came off as aggravated and annoyed. But in truth, Jim was *scared*. He knew his body hurt. But something else was wrong. He didn't know where the time had gone. He didn't know why he didn't get out of bed even though he wanted to.

*"It hurts now, but it's going to be worse if you don't move,"* they told him. And he knew they were right. "Enjoy the slow life," he thought to himself... "It ain't much of a life I'm living." But then, the sun would go down, and the room would get dark, and Jim would all but forget who he was.

When Jim woke up, his room was bright and pleasant. It was Summer now, and someone had opened the curtains, and he could hear talking from the den. Barbra was one voice; the other one he couldn't make out.

Intrigued, he called, "Hey, Barb."

"Oh, you're awake," she said, popping her head in the door. "Jens here!"

"No shit!?" he said, coming up on an elbow. "How the hell you been, Jenson?" he called loud enough for his friend to hear from the dining room.

"Better'n you, I reckon," Jenson said, coming through the door with a smile and a coffee in each hand. "What's up, how *you* been?"

"Oh, not as bad as everyone makes me out to be," he answered. And for once, it sounded true. "Hell, this is a nice surprise. I didn't know you were coming down."

When Jen hugged him, his old friend felt strong. "Hell yeah, I figured I'd come and surprise you. It's been a while. Too long."

"For sure," Jim said, sitting up to grab the coffee. "Thanks."

Maybe it was the afternoon sun coming in, or perhaps it was Jen, but Jim was kicking off his quilts. And without a hand from Barb or the rail on his bed, Jim was soon up and at the table in the den for the first time in a long time.

For hours and hours, they talked. And not quietly. They laughed and yelled, and the mugs rattled as quite a few fists were banged on the table.

"Hell, getting a little late for coffee. You want some of this?" Jen held a pint of Evan Williams across the table.

Jim cut his eyes toward the kitchen where Barbra was. "Yeah, I'll have some." The burn was glorious. "Let's turn on some songs," he said, wiping his mouth. "What you wanna hear?"

"Mmmm... Roll Gypsy Roll."

"Hell yeah." The bottle made another pass between them. As soon as the song started, Jim was talking.

"It's crazy, too.. did I tell you I talked to Bill? He called and was telling me about a family event at the dirt track where he's at where anybody could race. It's in two months. Could you imagine actually finally doing a race? That'd be crazy."

"Yeah, it would," Jen agreed. Our younger selves would be so damn proud! How you think you'd do?"

"Man, I'm just so glad to be feeling myself again," he said, setting the bottle down. "I really don't know what was wrong with me there for a while. I guess I was depressed or something. You know me; I can handle physical pain. But the sun would go down and just take the life out of me."

A tear rolled down his cheek; he paused and looked at Jen, "I guess it just took a while for me to remember who the hell I really am."

"Damn, you drunk already," Jen said, trying to lighten the mood. He smiled. "I'm messing with you. I'm glad you're feeling yourself again. I was worried about ya. That's one reason I wanted to come see you, aside from it having been forever."

"Yeah, I'm glad you did, man."

He wiped the tear and rubbed it between his thumb and forefinger. The tears were because he was happy. Talking to Bill and talking about getting to race and seeing Jenson, Jim was finally getting back in the high life again. The parts where you'd *actually* want to take it slow, so the good times lasted a little longer.

He'd felt so lost these last few years. But as Jim thought of his friends, he felt hope. Like every door he'd ever closed was opening again, and all the eyes that'd once watched him smiled upon him again.

It was a spring evening, just before supper, when Jenson's phone rang.

"Hello," he answered. It was Barbra.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but Daddy passed about two hours ago," she said with her voice tight.

"Really? Goddamn it. I'm so sorry, hun."

"Me too," her voice cracked. "I'm just glad he don't have to suffer anymore, you know?"

"Yeah," he sighed. "I know it's been hell. I'm sorry I never did make it down to see him."

She blurted out a painful laugh. "Ya know what's funny? There toward the end, when he wasn't remembering faces or anything, he thought his new nurse was you... Kept calling the guy Jen."

She was crying now but laughed again.

"Did he really? That is funny. Might not have even recognized me if I had made it down." It was supposed to have been a joke, but the thought hit Jenson like a ton of bricks.

"You never know. With the sundowning, he may not have unless you caught him early."

"I'm so sorry, hun," he repeated.

"It's ok. He actually seemed happy when he passed. Not just at peace, but *happy*," she chuckled. I was with him about 45 minutes before he passed, and he was smiling and singing a little."

Jenson sniffled. "That's awesome. I'm glad to hear it. He deserves to be outta that bed. When's the service?"