

The Last

By Jason Sellers

Jimmy fucking Pryor was dead. I pull my tie tightly around my neck. It's only been fifteen years since we graduated high school but I can still hear him ridiculing me in the halls at high school. And now he's dead. I begin to comb my hair. Everybody always liked Jimmy so much, the comedian, the jock, the homecoming and prom king. I was on the other side of his pranks. I still have a scar on my lip from where he pushed me into a locker when we were growing up. I walk over to my bed and pick up my suit jacket. His funeral is today and I'm not missing the chance to see that prick laying their dead in a coffin. Looks like I get the last laugh Jimmy. I head outside and get in my car. I never moved out of our hometown and the funeral is being held at the church just down the street from me. Before I start the engine, I reach in my pocket and feel the neatly folded pages of the eulogy I'm going to give at his funeral.

He did so many mean things to me but I'm going to come out on top this time. They're allowing anybody who knew him to come up and speak. I'm going to get up there and lay into him. I'm going to tell everyone all about the real Jimmy. He was no hero, he was just big prick. As I drive to the church I pass a local park, the place I first met Jimmy. I was playing with some army men in a sand box. He came up to me and told me to go home and leave behind the toys. I told him no and explained that they were mine. He punched me in the face and kicked me in the gut. Then he grabbed my toys and walked back to his friends while I crawled to my feet and sulked home. I told my family I fell and that was how I hurt my face. I think they knew but my step dad didn't care enough to do anything about it. He always viewed me as a waste.

On the first day of middle school we got paired up for a group assignment. We had to learn the other person's name, where they were from, and something interesting about them. I hoped that this would be the start of a new relationship for us. When we talked, he was nice to me, which is to say he wasn't mean. I introduced him first. I stood up and said "This is Jimmy Pryor. He's from Forest Lake Minnesota and he got to go to Disney World last summer." Then I sat down and Jimmy stood up. "This is Rob. He's from around here and he pisses himself every day at school. His backpack is full of clothes for him to change into." The teacher scolded him but the damage was already done. Everyone laughed at me for the next several years and made jokes about me wetting myself. I told my Mom but she was too stressed trying to pay our bills to be able to get involved.

I pull up outside the church and head inside. I never thought I'd still be living here at this age but I could never get up the courage to leave town. Despite my poor upbringing, I actually did pretty ok in school. Then Jimmy started a rumor that I was cheating on all my papers and tests. Eventually people started to believe it and everyone came forward saying that they had proof I cheated in all my classes. Because of all the people coming forward the school had to take it seriously so my teachers started giving me failing grades which ruined my chances of even going to a community college. I never did get my high school diploma and had to go to work right after high school. I've been working the same type of dead end jobs ever since while Jimmy was off living the life that I wanted. A year after high school Jimmy came into the Mexican restaurant I was working at and demanded to be seated in my section. Afterward he complained that I stole his wallet and I got fired.

I look around the church as it fills up with people dressed in black. Up at the front is his casket. It's open and I start to make my way up but before I get up there someone stops me. It's Sara, one of the only people in school that was nice to me.

“Hey Rob!”

“Hi Sara.” She’s dressed in a black dress and her eyes look stained from crying. Her bright red hair still just as curly as when we were in school.

“I’m surprised to see you here. I know you and Jimmy were never really close.”

“Yeah, well when I heard he’d died I knew I had to see it for myself.”

“What do you mean?” I shrug.

“I just wanted to see that fucking bastard dead in the casket. I wanted to have the last laugh.” Sara’s eyes get wide.

“Rob what are you talking about? What did Jimmy ever do to you?”

“He ruined my whole life!”

“How?!”

“He- reported me for cheating!”

“Rob, you were cheating.” My face turns red.

“So? It wasn’t affecting him! Why’d he have to go and tell anyone about it? And-and he did this!” I point at the scar on my lip. Sara rolls her eyes.

“Jimmy tripped when he knocked you into that locker. Everybody saw it, even a teacher.” I look at the ground. “Rob is this about the job? Do you still blame him for you getting fired? Cause everyone knows you were-”

“It’s not just that Sara. Jimmy did something horrible to me.”

“What? What did he do to you?” I glare at her.

“He took Lisa away from me.”

“What? What do you mean he took Lisa away from you?”

“I loved her Sara. I loved her so much. She meant the world to me and- and Jimmy took her away from me.”

“Lisa Anderson?! Come on Rob! You never went on a date with her! You didn’t even talk to her!” I look at her silently.

“Yeah, but I really liked her. She might’ve gone out with me.” Sara rolls her eyes and breathes heavily through her gritted teeth.

“Yeah Rob, she might have but you never asked. And on the last day of high school Jimmy asked her out.” She steps forward and puts her hand on my shoulder. “I’m sorry that you’ve been holding on to all of this hate Rob. I really am but you need to let it go. Jimmy didn’t do anything to you. You need to let it go and realize that none of this was his fault.” She pauses and looks at me. A voice interrupts her silence.

“Everyone, if you could find a seat we will be starting shortly.” I walk with Sarah up to the front and sit down. Ok so maybe I did cheat in high school. Maybe I didn’t ever talk to Lisa. Maybe I did all those things to myself. But no one ever would’ve found out about it had it not been for Jimmy. Still though, maybe it was my fault. Maybe if I had tried harder. Maybe I could’ve done more. Maybe I should accept that I did this. If I hadn’t chosen to blame Jimmy would my life be different? Would things have been better? A priest stands up and talks.

“We are gathered here today to remember the life of Jimmy Pryor. First to speak will be Jimmy’s mother, Dorothy.” He steps down and a very short, skinny

woman steps up to the stand. Her hair is a mess and she is so skinny she looks like a skeleton.

“Thank you so much everyone for coming. Those of you who knew us knew that Jimmy didn’t have it easy growing up. Between his abusive stepdad and my constant struggle with addiction, it’s a miracle he turned out the way he did. We didn’t have much but Jimmy made the best out of what we had. He cleaned up the house when I was too... too stoned to do it.” She buries her face in her wrinkled hands. The tears flow slowly down her ragged face. I can hear her softly crying. So Jimmy really was just like me? The poverty, the abusive stepfather, the addicted mother? All of it? If I’d just had his attitude I could’ve been just like him? Dorothy finally lifts her head out of her hands and resumes speaking. “For those of you that fell out of contact with him, Jimmy moved to the city and established a nonprofit drug rehab center that helped get kids and adults clean. It offers the less fortunate housing and education so long as they stay clean. Every year since Jimmy established that place drug use has been plummeting. Jimmy was a great boy and didn’t deserve the life he got. He got married and helped his wife start a defense league for women who have been abused and assaulted. Every year more and more women are able to get out of abusive situations and put their attackers behind bars. Jimmy and Carol’s project is continuing to help women who don’t feel like they have a place to turn to. He and Carol also brought three beautiful children into this world who will remember him fondly.” On a bench in the front row sit two young boys and a little girl. All of them have an agonizing look on their faces. Jimmy may have been my bully but he was their everything. He raised them and now he’s gone.

“Finally, he left this world helping others. Last week a man with a knife was trying to take a woman’s purse. Jimmy tried to stop him and the- the- the man killed him.” She blows her nose. “However, I remember a time when Jimmy was a boy.

He went to the park and saw that another boy had taken some toys from a mentally handicapped boy.” I squirm in my seat. “Jimmy got his toys back and then spent the rest of the afternoon playing with him. He was an amazing example for all of us to look up to. I love you son.” Dorothy nearly collapses saying this final sentence. She is gushing tears and inhaling so hard I think she may pass out. The priest helps her back to her seat and stands back up to the microphone.

“At this time we would like to open the floor to anyone who would like to speak in memory of Jimmy. Thank you.” He steps back down and a woman walks up. It’s Jimmy’s wife, Carol. She begins speaking about their life together and their children. I reach into my pocket and take out my speech. I unfold it and look over my poorly scribbled words. Shit, was he just trying to help me? Was he just trying to the same standard he held himself to? My head starts to hurt and my heart feels heavy. Carol finishes talking and starts to step down.

“I know what I need to say.” I whisper in Sara’s ear. I rip up my paper as I stand up and walk up to the microphone. Standing at the podium I look out at my peers. I look over at Sara. She smiles at me. I smile back. I turn to the casket and see Jimmy’s lifeless body. I step back from the mic and walk over to his body. I stand directly in front of it.

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I’m sitting in the back of police car being driven to the station. The officers up front are both asking me how I could do such a horrible thing. My clothes are torn from my being pushed off the stage. It all happened so fast. At first I was standing over his corpse and the next thing I knew I was pissing on it. I was screaming and hollering at him for being the piece of shit that he is. I can’t believe I let him bother me that way. I can’t believe I let him get to me like that. What the fuck Jimmy? Why

the fuck did you have to put me through all of that embarrassment? Goddamn it. I guess he gets the last one then. I lean back in the seat and laugh.