

Autumn Ages

Night comes quicker now that November is here. Seems like you just finish dinner and bang it's dark. Kinda makes ya feel all closed in and sad, thought Hazel. She opened the door to her closet and looked inside for her pink sweater to match the cranberry colored slacks she had on.

"Now where is that gall dern thing," she muttered. "Maybe it's in the dresser." She made her way to the small chest of drawers next to her bed and pulled open the top drawer and glanced inside.

"Well someone's gone and stolen it right out from under this poor old woman's nose. God, everyone takes advantage of you when you're old."

Bad enough she had to give up her home, furniture, knick-knacks and worst of all her cat to come to the nursing home. Happiness was as sparse these days as leaves on the barren gray November trees.

"Hey! Pick up the tempo old lady. We're gonna be late for bingo. Everyone's already down there."

"Well hello there Myrtle. I'm lookin for my pink sweater, but looks like someone's gone and stole it from me and I hope they burn in hell."

"Why here it is Hazel, right here in your closet."

"Oh, so it is. Well how'd you suppose I missed it?"

"I don't know," said Myrtle, "but get your walker and let's get go'in."

Myrtle was the one bright spot in an otherwise grim future. When Hazel first came to the nursing home last summer, it was Myrtle who told her what time to go to meals and Myrtle who took her to activities so she wouldn't feel shy. The nurses and activity director were nice enough, but they were always so busy. They would get you going in the right direction, but never seemed to be able to stick with you till you got there and settled in. That's what Myrtle did for her. Helped her get settled in. Well, as settled in as you could be in a place that wasn't your home. Hazel took her walker and she and Myrtle made their way to the dinning room where the nightly bingo game was.

"God, my joints are as stiff as a dead dog," groaned Hazel. She walked slowly, stooped over, hanging onto her walker. Myrtle slowed down to walk alongside her.

"It's nice to have someone to go to bingo with," said Myrtle. "Been kinda lonesome around here. The kids don't visit as often these days. Busy with their own lives ya know."

"Yes, with Frank gone ten years now and my daughter out there in Colorado, it's been lonely for me too. As much as I hate to admit it I guess I can't do for myself like I used to, so just couldn't live by myself anymore."

"Well I'm glad you're here Hazel."

As Myrtle and Hazel entered the dinning room, Myrtle noticed two other residents, Fern and

Clara, sitting in their seats.

“Hey, that’s where Hazel and me sit for Bingo. You’re in our seats!”

“Well I didn’t know we had assigned seats,” growled Clara. “I guess I can just sit anywhere I want to thank you very much.”

“Well figures,” grumbled Hazel. “First my pink sweater gets stolen, and now my seat gets stolen.”

“Hazel you’re wearing your pink sweater,” said Clara.

“Oh yeah, that’s right,” said Hazel “Myrtle found it for me.”

“Well I’m not playing Bingo if I can’t sit where I always do,” yelled Myrtle.

“Bye,” said Clara.

“OK ladies, what seems to be the problem?” asked Patty the activity director. Patty had been at the nursing home for ten years and was a wizard at keeping the peace and trying to make everyone happy—an impossible task.

“They stole our chairs,” said Myrtle, “and I’m not playing if I can’t have my rightful spot.”

“Now let’s calm down,” said Patty. “Clara, why don’t you and Fern sit on the other side of the table. That way Myrtle and Hazel can have their usual chairs but you will still be at the same table. We have some great bingo prizes and bingo money to win tonight and we will be having doughnuts and punch.” Distracted by thoughts of prize money and food, they moved into their places without further cackling. Only Fern sat throughout the entire altercation without speaking, the ever-present smile on her pleasant face never changing, oblivious to all that had been said.

Suddenly Fern called out to Patty: “Lunch! I thought we already had lunch.” “No Fern,” said Patty “I SAID WE WOULD HAVE PUNCH.”

“Oh, yes that’s nice.” With that settled, Myrtle, Hazel, Clara and Fern set up their bingo cards and the bottle caps that had been collected to mark their numbers, and were ready to play. With Patty’s assistance, one of the other residents named George, was turning the crank on the metal drum that held the bingo numbers.

“You’ve got too many bottle caps Clara,” said Myrtle.

“Oh for God’s sake Myrtle, go ahead then take all of them.”

“I don’t want all of them, just a few more is all I need.”

“Hey! Someone stole my handkerchief,” yelled Hazel. “The one with the little embroidered butterflies on it that my daughter sent me. Bunch of thieves.”

“Well there it is Hazel, right there tucked in your sleeve,” said Myrtle.

“Oh so it is. How do you suppose I missed it? Must of stuck it up there after I blew my nose.”

“Look, here comes Elmer,” said Myrtle.

“Oh, that old fool”, said Clara.

“Elmer’s not so bad, he’s just a little addled in his wits,” said Hazel.

“Well I don’t know,” said Myrtle. “I spent some time with him last summer. We’d be

walkin down the hall together and that poor old thing would be tottering along pushin his walker just a fartin with every step he took . Why it was like walkin with a choo choo train. He didn't seem to be bothered by it though, just kept grinnin like a toothless old fool.”

“Well, he probably couldn't help it you know. When you get old you just can't control things like you used to,” said Clara.

“Ain't that the truth,” said Hazel. “Why everytime I sneeze anymore, I pee so bad I gotta change my pants.”

“B-10” called out George.

“And I get so bound up,” said Hazel, “that I can't even bend over. I asked for some prune juice two days ago and still haven't gotten it. It's gonna take a stick of dynamite to loosen this load.”

“N-36, N-36.”

“I hope I win today,” said Clara. “I haven't won bingo money for weeks. Is this a coverall or just regular bingo?”

“Coverall” said Myrtle.

“Well ya know I think someone stole my bingo prize money from last week,” said Hazel. “Yep. Stole it right out of my purse. Only thing I got left in this whole world to carry in my purse is my bingo prize money, Tums and my dentu cream. Better not steal my dentu cream. Although it's about as worthless as toothpaste for holdin my teeth in.”

“You're tellin' me,” said Myrtle. “Back when me and Elmer were seeing each other, we went to smooch, bumped teeth and my dentures went flyin, his dentures went flyin, and there they lay on the floor, his tops mixed with my bottoms, my tops mixed with his bottoms, what a mess. By the time we got everything sorted out, the mood had passed. You know what they say, gotta strike while the iron is hot, and these days old Elmer's iron is only lukewarm and strikin' time is down to about one minute. Hee Hee.”

“I-22, I-22.”

“I think I've got a bingo,” cried Clara.

“This is a coverall and you ain't even close,” said Myrtle.

“Is that right?” replied Clara. “Guess I forgot.”

“I know what you mean,” said Hazel. “It's all I can do to keep my mind on the game. I wished to hell they would get me something for this gall darn rash between my legs. I went to church service last Sunday and sat there during the sermon diggin' at my crotch like an old cat with fleas. Now do you know what that young minister fella did?”

“What?” asked Clara and Myrtle.

“He winked at me,” said Hazel.

“No!” exclaimed Clara and Myrtle.

“Yeah, winked right at me he did. Now what do you suppose he meant by that?”

“Well I don’t know,” said Myrtle “But you know when that Madonna person grabs hercrotch the men go wild, Hee Hee.”

“Well, I sure ain’t no Madonna,” said Hazel. “Young folks today are all a bunch of fornicatin’ heathens.”

“But Hazel he’s supposed to be a minister,” said Clara.

“You never know nowadays. Why I heard on the news the other day where a doctor took this lady’s gallbladder out and come to find out, he wasn’t a doctor at all, he was an insurance salesman,” said Hazel.

“Oh my god,” said Clara.”

“What’s the world coming to,” said Myrtle.

“I don’t know, but they better get me something for my crotch pretty soon,” said Hazel.

“You know Christmas is coming and if you need a watch put it on the gift exchange list,” said Fern.

“Fern, what in the sam hell are you talking about,” said Myrtle.

“I just felt that if Hazel is so upset about her watch she could ask for one for Christmas.”
“I -19 I 19.”

“Hey look over there, Lucy just smacked Robert. What do you suppose that’s all about?” asked Myrtle.

Lucy and her husband Robert had been at the nursing home as long as Myrtle could remember. They always sat at the same table each week right next to George.

“You know they always sit right next to George so they can check the numbers he draws. Guess they don’t trust him,” said Myrtle.

“Quit putting bottle caps on numbers that ain’t been called,” yelled Lucy. “You’re cheatin’.”

“I’m not cheatin’, it was an accident,” said Robert.

“Oh Yeah, well seems to me you’re having an awful lot of accidents,” said Lucy. “I counted seven in the last five minutes.”

“Now, now folks. Let’s play fair,” intercepted Patty.

“That Lucy sure keeps a tight leash on him. He ain’t about to get away with anything with her around. Hee Hee,” said Hazel.

“Hey what was all the commotion at the end of the hall last night,” asked Clara.

“Oh, that was Wilford,” said Myrtle. “He had an itch in his eye so he put a big glob of Ben Gay in it.”

“Oh my God!” yelled Hazel. “Of course you can’t hardly blame him. It takes so long for them to get any medicine around here. If you have an itch or a pain first they have to call the doctor, then they have to order it in, then half the time they don’t bother to come and give it to you when they do get it.”

“So how’s Wilford today?” asked Clara.

“Oh, it turned his eye red,” said Myrtle.

“He’s dead!” exclaimed Fern.

“No. I said it turned his eye RED,” said Myrtle. “Fern why don’t you get yourself a hearing aide?”

“I don’t need a hearing aide,” said Fern. “I hear just fine.”

“Well at least get a Q tip and clean out your ears,” said Myrtle.

“A cube steak. What would I want with a cube steak?” asked Fern.

“O – 60, O - 60,” called out George.

“Have a doughnut ladies,” said Patty as she brought around the evenings’ refreshments. “I’m going to have this orange I brought,” said Clara.

“Speakin’ of oranges, did you see Glen last night runnin’ around without a stitch on?” asked Myrtle.

“Now, you can’t really blame old Glen, he’s a few bricks shy as the sayin’ goes,” said Clara.

“Well it was still a sight to see” laughed Myrtle. “I thought he was a carryin’ a sack with a couple of oranges in it then I realized it was his male parts hanging clear down to his knees. Wonder he didn’t trip over them and knock himself out.”

“B – 5, B - 5.”

“Hey, where’s that cute little Indian man centerpiece,” asked Clara. “

Glen ate it,” said Myrtle.

“Oh, you don’t say,” replied Clara.

“Wasn’t that made out of styrofoam?” asked Hazel.

“Yes, I think it was,” said Myrtle.

“Whoee! That’s gonna hurt commin’ out!” said Clara.

“Wasn’t that Indian holdin’ a tomahawk?” asked Hazel.

“N –28, N -28.”

“Bingo!” yelled Fern.

“Guess she hears just fine when she wants to,” said Myrtle.

“Well, I’m all done in, think I’ll head back to my room and go to bed,” said Hazel. She stood up and looked around then yelled out “for cryin out loud. Who stole my walker. Can you believe that? Stealin a poor old woman’s walker! Might as well just chop my legs off.”

“It’s over there by the wall,” said Myrtle.

“Oh, so it is. Well how do you suppose I missed it.”

“I don’t know,” said Myrtle, “but I’ll walk back with you. See the rest of you tomorrow.”

“The clap dancers are coming tomorrow,” said Fern.

“Not the clap dancers Fern, the tap dancers,” corrected Clara.

“Sure hope they don’t have the clap,” said Hazel. “Hee Hee.”

Hazel and Myrtle headed down the darkened hallway to their rooms. “Goodnight Myrtle.

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Thank you for ... you know, everything.”

“Yep, I know,” said Myrtle. “Time was a gift when I was young, now it seems like a burden,” said Hazel.

“I know what you mean,” said Myrtle. “When I was young there wasn’t enough time to do all I wanted to do. Now there isn’t enough to do with all this time. Hee Hee. See you in the morning.”

Myrtle headed to her room further down the hall. On the way she stopped off at Elmer’s room. Elmer had gone to bed long before bingo was over. “Poor old fool,” she muttered. Elmer had kicked his covers off, and fallen asleep with his glasses on. “Crazy old man,” she whispered as she gently removed his glasses and covered him up for the night.



photo submitted by Amber English