

The Man From The Theater

The film had just started. The lights dimmed as the projection appeared on the big screen. There were very few people in the theater. But this is how it was every weekend at the Sunny Hooves Cinema, on the corner of Main Street. However, this time, it was different. Carl, the old man who owned the theater, would always sit in the very back to watch the film. No one ever paid any attention to him. This is how it had been for weeks. Except this time, Carl was nowhere to be seen. This was the finale! Everything had built up to this moment! Every Saturday afternoon spent in this theater to watch the next part of the film and finally it would be over. How could Carl miss it? Now, as I said before, no one ever noticed Carl. No one, except for a little boy named James. James was nine years old. He was known for being very observant and curious. Which could be very annoying at times. But it wasn't any surprise that when Carl was missing, James was the first to notice.

"Lucy," James whispered to the blond haired girl beside him. "Lucy!" He said again, poking her arm.

"What could you possibly want from me?" Lucy whipped around.

"Where is he?"

"This better not be one of your stupid games." Lucy was already angry with her little brother since he had begged to come with her and her boyfriend, Dallas. And although she had offered him 5 cents to get a candy bar from the corner store, James, being his stubborn self, had insisted on tagging along. Not wanting to argue with a mini lawyer, Lucy had given in.

"Where is who?" she said.

"The old man who always sits in the back. No one ever sits with him or even bothers to say hello" Lucy sighed.

"What old man?"

"I said hello to him once but he never replied." James ignored his sister's comment and continued his story.

"Why does it matter to you where he is?" Lucy was starting to lose her patience.

"I just find it quite odd that he isn't here, especially since he's been here for the other parts of the film."

"Well maybe he was busy." She tried to end the conversation.

"But this is the last part! How could he miss it?"

"Just be quiet already! I'm trying to watch the film!"

"Fine I will never talk again!" James folded his arms and curled up in his chair. He was silent for the rest of the film.

After the film, Dallas drove them home in his 1951 red convertible. To Lucy's delight, James stayed quiet for the whole drive. He sat silent and still, the late June breeze blowing through his hair. Stars and street lights lit the road in front of them. Dallas and Lucy gossiped about school drama over the car radio. James didn't care for other people's drama so he tried to focus on the radio instead. The more he tried to focus, the more the image of the man kept creeping into his mind. *Who was he? Why wasn't he at the theater today?* His mind felt like it was going 1000 miles a minute trying to come up with answers. It almost gave him a headache. But that could have also been the black leather seats, flowery perfume, and a freshly lit cigarette mixing together to make an intoxicating smell.

When they finally arrived home, James ran up to his room. He shut his door and flopped down onto his bed. Although he knew it was silly, he couldn't help but keep wondering about the man. Something about his absence seemed strange. To try and keep his mind off the day's events, James reached over to his night stand and grabbed his small, wooden, toy boat. He traced the smooth wood grains over and over again, imagining what life would be like at sea. He could be a pirate, searching for treasure all across the seven seas, Or a sailor, just trying to help his country. Eventually, he grew weary. He laid his head down on his pillow and drifted off to sleep.

The next day at school, James told his best friend, Harry, about the man.

"I think you think too much," Harry said, stuffing half a peanut butter and jelly sandwich into his mouth. "You care too much too." After a long silence, James had an idea.

"Harry," James took a sip of his juice box.

"What?"

"I have an idea."

"What is your idea?"

"What if I called the theater and asked them if they knew who he is?"

"Who who is?" James sighed.

"The man."

"What man?" James couldn't tell if Harry was just playing stupid, or if he actually was.

"You know, the man from the theater."

"Oh that man!"

"I have to know who he is! And I'm certain that someone at the theater will have seen him before."

"That's a bad idea. What if you get in trouble?"

"I think it will be fine. There's no way they could tell it's me."

"Ok then, but I'm telling ya, grown ups know everything. Be careful." James rolled his eyes.

That night when he arrived home, he pulled out the daily newspaper. He flipped through the pages until he found the one that listed almost every business in the city. He quickly skimmed through it and when he finally found the number, he ran over to the rotary phone and dialed the number.

"Hello," a tired teenage boy's voice came through the receiver. "Thank you for calling the Sunny Hooves Theater. What do you need?"

"Robert! You're doing it wrong!" Another voice could be heard. James was getting a bit impatient.

"Hello, thank you for calling the Sunny Hooves theater. Please don't mind my friend Robert, he's a bit foolish. How may we help you?" A perky teenage girl's voice took over. James cleared his throat and tried to make his voice sound deeper so that they wouldn't be able to tell it was a kid on the other line.

"Good evening, ma'm," he stuttered. "This may be an odd question, but would you know of an old man who was at the theater a few weekends ago?"

"Maybe, do you have a name?" James started to panic. He didn't know his name.

"N-no I guess I don't," he stammered. "Sorry to bother you, have a nice evening." He slammed the phone down. If he was going to solve this mystery, he needed important details. And there was only one way to get them.

"Lucy! Please! I need to go back to the theater!" James begged his sister.

"James, for the last time, I'm not taking you with me." Lucy was rushing to put her hair up and pick out a dress for her date with Dallas.

"Please! I need answers!" James followed Lucy around her room. "I'll tell mom that you won't let me go with!"

"What's she gonna do? Ground me?" Just then, their mother walked past.

"What's all this screaming about?" she stepped into the room and set the basket she was carrying down on the ground.

"James won't leave me alone!"

"Lucy won't let me go with!" Their mother sighed.

"Lucy, I understand your frustration, but James is your brother. I think he would really like it if you took him with. Just this once." Lucy stared at her reflection in her vanity mirror in silence.

"Fine," she sighed. "I guess you can come." James started jumping up and down.

"Yay! Thank you! Thank you! Lucy, I love you soooo much!" she rolled her blue eyes.

"This is the last time I'm taking you though."

At the theater, James could hardly focus on the film. His eyes kept darting around the room, searching for the man. The theater was almost full, which was pretty unusual. James started to worry that he would never see the man again. Then, half way through the film, James saw the man walk in and sit down in the very back row. He decided he was going to go say hello.

"Lucy,"

"What now?"

"I have to go to the bathroom," he lied.

"Then just go, I'm not gonna stop you." James had already started ducking through the rows of seats. He had tripped over a rowdy gang of greaser's feet as he hurried past. He wondered why they were there and not out wreaking havoc out on the streets like they normally did.

"Where do you think you're going?" A thin, leather jacket wearing, hair slicked back, intimidating boy grabbed onto the collar on James' shirt.

"Well, well, well. What do we have here?" The rest of the gang gathered around.

"Look at this boys, we've caught a prep." James tried to wiggle free from the boy's grip.

"What's a little prep doing here?" said a blond boy with a thick New York accent.

"I was gonna ask you the same thing," James gulped.

"Oh look, he can talk!" James had finally managed to escape.

"Of course I can talk!" he stammered. The boy in the leather jacket turned to face his friends.

“Oh listen to his voice tremble! Are you gonna cry? Poor little baby. Go cry to your mama, why don’t you. Leave us to watch the movie in peace.” Jame’s face started burning up. He clenched his fists.

“Excuse me, but you’re the one who started the fight.” The boy murmured to his friends and then turned to look back at James.

“Aw look who’s acting all tough now!” For a second, James swore his eyes flashed red. The boy continued with his taunting. “Kid, you’re the one who stepped on my foot. It seems like you’re the one who’s looking for a fight.” Suddenly, the old man appeared behind the mean boy. He tugged at his hair, and then, as suddenly as he appeared, he was gone again.

“Hey! Which one of you did that?” The boy whipped his head around and started arguing with his friends. James decided to make a run for it. He reached the heavy doors and quickly opened them. The bright lights of the lobby nearly blinded him. When his eyes finally adjusted to the light, he made his way to the men’s bathroom and pushed open the door. He almost ran into a man in a dapper suit and top hat. The man just scoffed and walked out of James’ way. James locked himself into a stall and sat on the toilet, thinking about what had just happened. *How did the man just appear out of nowhere? Where did he go after?* It was almost too much for James’ little mind to comprehend.

Finally, he finished up and stepped out of the bathroom. As he made his way back to the theater, he passed the concession stand. He examined everything, trying to figure out what to beg Lucy to get for him after the film. He glanced at the red popcorn machine and noticed that hanging above it was a picture frame. He studied it for a bit. The frame was golden and had a little tiny plaque on the bottom. The picture inside the frame was of an older man in a nice hat. The plaque underneath read “*In Loving Memory of Carl Winston, 1900-1950*” . There was another picture right beside it. This picture had a silver frame surrounding it. It had two men standing in front of the theater, cutting a ribbon. The plaque underneath this one read “*Est. 1933*” . Upon closer inspection, James had noticed that the one man looked strikingly similar to the one in the other picture. James had concluded that they were both pictures of Carl Winston. He also concluded that Carl must have been the one who owned the theater, since there were awards hung around the pictures that all said his name. *Neat*. James thought and then he went back into the theater. Lucy hadn’t even noticed he was back, since she was too busy kissing Dallas.

James sat still for the rest of the film. He let his mind wander off into a fantasy world where he could meet the old man. Suddenly, it hit him. The pictures, the man, everything all came together at once.

“Lucy! Dallas! I’ve figured it out!” James said as the credits began to roll and they started walking out.

“What now,” Lucy scowled.

“I know who the man is! His name is Carl Winston. He was the owner of this theater!”

Dallas interrupted, “But didn’t he die four years ago?”

“Yes,” James was so proud of his discovery and he didn’t want anyone to ruin his moment. “But the resemblance is too uncanny” James was also proud he remembered the big words his teacher taught him.

“Woah there little buddy,” Dallas put his hand on James' shoulder and knelt down to his level. “That’s a good story, but there is no way that it’s even possible, unless he’s a ghost. And ghosts don’t exist.” Lucy laughed.

“A spooky scary ghost story,” she grabbed Dallas’ arm. “Don’t scare him, darling. Why don’t we go say hi to Robert and not have to listen to another one of James’ silly stories.” Dallas stood back up and Lucy led him over to the concession stand to talk to their friend. James stood there, feeling all sorts of emotions. Why would no one listen to him? Suddenly, he saw someone standing in the corner by the bathroom. He ran over to Lucy.

“Ok, fine. Don’t believe me,” he pointed to the corner where the man was standing. Lucy turned around and her jaw dropped.

“Oh my god,” Dallas turned around too. “Well I’ll be”. He whispered in disbelief.

“See, I told you I wasn’t lying,” James smiled. The man in the corner tipped his hat. Then turned around and disappeared through the wall, never to be seen again.