To: Grandma Janet, Love: Family

The collected and calm feelings that once occupied their house were suddenly disrupted by the sounds of hostile shouts. Stan thought his mother would take the news well. Janet had always been supportive of his future, no matter how outlandish it sounded, and she was the most understanding person that he knew. But, that unfortunately was not the case today. Perhaps his father would have understood better, but he wasn't there. Simply put, Stan had dropped out of college mid-semester to transfer, which wasn't necessarily a bad thing. However, the college he wanted to transfer to was halfway across the globe.

"Where are you gonna get all the money for that? Who are you staying with? Did you even work things out before dropping out? I mean, are you really going to leave everything behind?!"

"I told you, I have everything figured out, I just don't have the money." Stan says, reserved as he tries to explain himself.

"Fine. When you include the wasted tuition, and the price of your new tuition, and all of these other *stupid* costs,"

Stan flinches at her words.

"*Then*. How much money will you need to leave us all behind?" Janet asks, taking a deep breath as she tries to calm herself down. She was one bad response away from losing the temper she was barely grasping onto. It was the first time they've ever had such an intense argument, to where they were yelling at each other. None of them wanted to have to be in this situation, and they wouldn't have had to be if Stan hadn't told the truth, or if he had *just* made up his mind earlier. Hesitantly, and with a heavy heart, Stan lists the large number.

Janet had lost it, letting go. Her face grew hot.

"No… No! If you just told your father and I beforehand, we could've *all* worked something out. Instead, you're willing to let all of our time and dedication wash away to do…" Janet stammers, trying to find the words. "Whatever this is! Do you know how long your father and I worked? How many hours your father stayed at the office? How many people *I* had to talk to just for your application to look pretty on paper?" Janet was practically screaming in Stan's face, the pupils dilating in her frowning eyes. "And for what? For you to sit there with that *careless* look on your face, filled with not a single ounce of remorse or gratefulness!"

Stan stands up, almost towering over his shorter-framed mother.

"If you can't even listen to what *I* want, then nothing that you or Dad have done for me matters!" Stan's face began to match the expression on his mother's. Words were just pouring out of his mouth. Janet couldn't believe that her own son would just disregard their entire family, and Stan couldn't believe that he was really saying these things to his own mother. Janet stands there, breathing heavily, with tears and burden in her eyes. "I really want to believe you're coming from a place of love, and care, and understanding, and just *trusting* me!" Stan cries out to her.

Her voice breaks as she points an agitated finger towards Stan's incredibly guilty face.

“What am *I* to *you*?!”

Stan ignores the question, continuing his words.

“And I *hope*; I just *hope* with all my heart, that one day, that you won’t see the things that I want and my happiness as a burden! *I really do hope for that…*”

The television illuminated artificial blue light into the initially dark room. As the shutters open, the morning light floods into the living room. Janet walks over to the couch, holding a pile of papers, and slumps down in a way that is comfortable for the joints in her legs. The old woman let out a heavy sigh of relief as her body met the couch. Her TV played the morning news, which she paid minimal attention to. It was nice to just have noise in the background. Spreading the papers out on the table, Janet begins to sort through her mail which amassed over the past week. The old woman neatly created a few piles– including trash, sales she would save onto yet ultimately never use, promotions for stores she could never go to but wanted to keep, and every other category that could be applied to 2 weeks worth of mail. After mindlessly sorting the papers on her living room table for a few minutes, she eventually reaches the bottom to find something that piques her interest.

A simple, white envelope rested at the bottom of everything, buried beneath the burdens of life. One that, on the back with red crayon scribbles simply read;

To: Grandma Janet

Love: Family

A small, flat-lipped smile appears on her face as her eyes glide across the messy words. It wasn’t a rare occurrence to receive mail from her son’s family. While he did live halfway across the globe, Stan made sure to keep her updated through paper postcards and remittances. Though, digital means would have been much easier if Janet knew how to use them. Slowly picking it up, she released a heavy, solemn sigh upon closer inspection. A bittersweet feeling, really– it was nice to know that her son still cared for her, but all of the cards and gifts just made her reminisce about the feelings they both held before he left. Her hands flip the envelope over, and she gently peels the flap open. Janet slides out the folded piece of paper, then unfolds it. She lets out a boisterous laugh of joy, her body slightly rocking as she did so.

The paper had a juvenile drawing of a person, which she assumed to be her, drawn with a smiley face, while 4 other people were drawn further away with frowning faces. Some of the drawings looked more detailed than others that were on the paper, but it was still clearly drawn by children. Janet squints her eyes as she tries to read the writing. On the left side of the paper, it read:

HI GRANDMA JANET
WE REALY MISS U HERE
WE WISH WE CULD COME VISIT
OR U COME VISIT
WE LOVE U AND HAVE A
GOOD DAY
LOVE, SAM AND KENNETH

She lets out a happy sigh as she looks to the right side of the paper. The writing was much more legible, written in a black pen.

Hi Mom,

The family hopes that you're doing well, just as we are. I haven't seen you since before I had my kids. When Dad was around. I hope that we can come visit you soon. They're both really eager to meet you. The remittance should be coming shortly. I love and miss you. Hopefully, once you figure out how to set it up, you can FaceTime the kids so they can see what you look like.

Love, Stan.

Janet's positive mood quickly falls flat as she finishes reading the card. Dismissively tossing the paper back onto the table, she slumps back further into the leather couch, and her focus goes back to the television screen. She sits there for a little while, sulking to herself, before starting to drift back to sleep, not caring for the morning light which occupied the room. And so, she had fully fallen asleep, laying back idly as quiet snores escaped her. The TV continued to blabber away at things she cared little for.

The sleeping continued, until she started to hear her name being called. A masculine, exuberant, voice.

"*Janet… Janet…"*

The voice said in a singsong, quiet type of way. Her eyes slowly fluttered open, her head and thoughts fuzzy.

"JANET! WAKE UP!"

The voice yelled out, jolting her to being fully awake. She looked at her TV, eyes widening. On the center of the blank TV screen was a blue figure, resembling that of a genie. In fact, it was practically identical to the famous genie from *Aladdin*. From the voice, to the appearance, and all the way down to the mannerisms.

"How' you doing? I'm a genie. Well, not really, but your son really liked *Aladdin*, so this appearance suits it best. In fact, you and him used to watch it all the time!"

As he continued to talk, an annoyed Janet reached for the remote, pressing every button possible as she tried to make him go away. She grumbles as he stays on the screen.

"Now, Janet. I'm going to give you three wishes, with a few, uh, provisos, of course. Rule #1: I can't kill anybody. So don't ask. Rule #2, I can't make anybody fall in love with anybody else. Rule #3, I can't bring anybody back from the dead. It's not a pretty picture. I don't like doing it! So, sorry about your *husband*."

Janet's annoyed expression quickly formed into one of sadness, tears quickly forming in her eyes. However, it quickly morphed into feelings of rage. The old woman stands up, pointing a finger at him.

"*You* don't get to talk about him like that, you *blue*-"

"Hey, remember the last time you got mad at someone? Didn't turn out so well, did it?"

The "genie" interrupted, with a smug look appearing on his face. Janet continued to huff.

"And every day, you feel guilty about the way that you talked to him. The way that you talked, and yelled at him. The way that you shunned him. But I can *change* that, I can *fix* that."

Janet sits back down, staring blankly at the TV. He was right. She caused her own son to feel like he was worthless. But no amount of wishes could change that. The genie from the movie was a lot nicer. She thinks for a brief moment, recovering from her anger. The old woman puts her hand to her back, massaging it. Janet then has her idea.

"Fine then, *genie*. I wish I was healthy again. No more joint pain and everything." Janet says, reluctantly submitting to him and not fully believing him.

The genie grins through the screen. "Well, call me *Advil* and get a glass of water! While you won't be *immortal*, don't feel filthy, for you are now… Healthy!"

A whimsical, cartoonish appearing pink smoke comes out of the genie's finger through the TV, surrounding Janet and raising her to stand up. As the pink smoke encapsulated her, she could already feel her body changing. She didn't get any younger, but all of her aches and pains began to fade away. The old woman felt her back straighten, and even felt herself gaining some muscle mass. Her bones seemed to strengthen, no longer quivering under her weight. Overall, once the smoke faded away, Janet felt like a completely new person. She quickly *sprints* to the mirror; something she hadn't done in so long.

"If you ever need me again, just rub the side of the remote. Closest thing to the lamp!"

The genie exclaims, but Janet couldn't find herself to care. She was fit! No longer the frail old woman who could barely walk to check the mail. With her newfound energy, Janet made sure to seize the opportunity. Running to her cleaning supplies, she quickly got to work. She could finally dust the tops of the kitchen drawers without trouble. Janet was able to move around cabinets and tables, getting to the hidden dust underneath them. While she was at it, she moved furniture around and sorted her trash. By the time her cleaning and refurbishing rampage was over, the entire house looked brand new. Any clutter that the house had was quickly reduced. Carrying heavy trash bags with ease, she brought them outside. She laughs, overjoyed, feeling the sun beating down on her

Janet felt the most hopeful she's ever been in so long– just like when her son and her husband were around. Before her husband passed, before the argument about her son's future, and before her life changed for the worse.

This thought invaded her mind, quickly ruining her hopeful mood. She sighs, returning back into the house. Walking into the door, the tidiness didn't make her as happy as a few moments ago. Sure, it felt nicer to live in there, but what was the point of it if she was the only one who could enjoy it? She wanted her son back, and she wanted him back *now*.

Storming towards the remote, she rapidly rubs the side of it, creating warm friction between her and the plastic. The image of the eccentric blue genie immediately popped up.

"Hello again, Janet… What can I d-"

"I wish my son was here!"

Janet interrupts the genie, wasting no time to pursue her happiness again. She believed that it was still possible. The genie didn't waste any time either, quickly waving his hands around to do his magic. At first, the genie pauses, and it appears nothing happens, to the dismay of Janet. That was, until the genie finally said something.

"Well, he'll be here in 15 minutes. *Start getting ready!*"

With that, Janet began to sprint around the house, getting things ready for her son's return. She had no time to cook anything, so she began to change clothes. Janet didn't even know what he looked like now, and wasn't sure how to impress him anymore. So, she quickly got herself ready. In the midst of everything, the doorbell rang, the sound lingering across the entire house. Janet took a few deep breaths, mentally preparing herself as she rushed to the door. With anticipation bubbling in her, she opens the door.

As she does so, a towering man she can barely recognize reaches out to hug her.

"*MOM!*"

She's taken by surprise at first, but hugs him back. Janet wraps her arms around her clearly tearing up son, feeling him for the first time in a while. They just stand there for a bit, tightly embracing each other silently. Stan was obviously overjoyed. After years of postcards, it all just seemed meaningless to him as he was there right now. Janet however, didn't know how to feel. She was supposed to feel happy and overjoyed, but she could barely recognize him. She wasn't exactly *disappointed*– she was glad to have seen her son, but it just *surprised* her. Stan had grown a beard, dressed completely differently, gained weight, and overall just did not look like the son who she had shunned all those years ago. The gloomy son she wanted to apologize to. Janet had left her son behind, and couldn't bring herself to accept him back. Perhaps that was why she wasn't immediately overjoyed, and it pained her deeply to admit that. Janet felt guilty and horrible, but couldn't ruin the moment.

After a few moments of silent embrace, Janet is the first one to take a step back.

"Where is your family?" She asks.

"The flights were very limited… only one seat was available. They really wanted me to take it. It's like *Home Alone*." Stan jokes, wiping the tears from his face. "You look really healthy now." He adds.

Janet wasn't sure what to say once again. It's what she wanted, but didn't know how to react. The woman couldn't believe she felt this way. She was his mother, and felt like a terrible one at that. She struggled to accept him then, and struggled to accept him now. But why? She couldn't believe what she was about to say.

"You've… *gained* weight…"

"Thank you!"

Stan smiles like a child. Then Janet starts to cry. Not out of joy, but out of guilt and repressed feelings from all the years after the argument. She wasn't mad at him; she was mad at herself. Why did she say all of those things before? Now, all Janet could see was the pudgy little baby boy that loved watching movies, who didn't care about the future and didn't even think about college.

Had she really said those words to her baby boy?

Questions of guilt plagued her mind, and she broke down, sobbing into her son's arms. Janet couldn't bear to be seen so vulnerable like this, but Stan did not care as his big arms returned again to wrap around his mother's.

“I’m sorry for leaving you like that…” Stan says as she cries.

Stan understood what Janet wanted to say. How she was sorry, how she felt guilty, and how she couldn’t find herself to fully accept his path all those years ago. Yet, despite all of her negative feelings and thoughts, Stan didn’t care. To even just see his mother after so long made him happy.

The awkward and confused emotions that once occupied their house faded away, replaced by compassion and love. Stan knew how his mother would take the news of his arrival. Janet had always been supportive of his future, no matter how outlandish it sounded, and she was the most understanding person that he knew. And that quality in her continued today. Perhaps his father would have loved to see his son again, but he wasn’t there. Stan had dropped out of college mid-semester to transfer, and Janet had accepted him. The college he had transferred to was halfway across the globe, but Janet knew that he had made the right decision, and believed in him.

Stan guides his elderly mother to the couch. As she sits down, Stan looks to the table. The back of a DVD disc shimmers against the afternoon light that spilled into the room. Stan picks it up, flips it over, and exclaims at the colorful printed design of a movie that was beloved to him.

“Oh, nice. *Aladdin*!”

He walks over to the TV, opens the DVD player, and sticks the disc inside. Turning on the TV, he presses a few buttons, and it switches over to the menu for the movie. Stan sits down next to his mother, and presses the *Play* option on the screen. Janet leans on her son as she recollected her emotions. With a clearer state of mind, Janet comes to a realization.

She hadn’t used her third wish.

Her hands reach for the remote, and she rubs her hand against the side of it slightly. Quietly, she whispers to herself, making the final wish.

“*I wish for my son, Stan, to always feel loved and appreciated by me, and that he knows I believe in him even when I’m gone.”*

Stan doesn’t hear this, as he blissfully watches the movie with his mother. Janet couldn’t hear nor see the genie, expecting him to pop up from the screen again. After a couple of minutes, nothing changes with her son. Janet felt hope, knowing that in the short time that she had left alive, that Stan would always love her and see her as a mother. She felt hope that Stan would continue growing to become what both of them wanted and live a life that he loved.

The wish she made had already been fulfilled a long time ago.