

The Moth

by

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As he was returning to the office after his grandmother's funeral, a moth flew into Craig's car.

He swatted at it with his phone while keeping one eye on the road. As usual, the Southern Motorway alternated between a parking lot and a funeral procession. He groped for the window buttons on his new Lexus, hoping the moth would fly out, but the roar of the air rushing by drowned out the sound of his voicemail messages. Swearing venomously to himself, he closed the windows.

He was in line for a promotion at work and was under a lot of pressure. And missing an important meeting this morning because of a funeral didn't help. His boss had told him to take as much time as he needed, but Craig told him it wasn't necessary.

Craig gave a slower driver the horn, passing the miscreant on the inside, the adrenalin surge of frustration mixing with the stress of the work that had piled up. The messages kept coming. Ian and Bill needed to see him on the Foxton proposal. They say it's urgent. Colin called from Neotech. He wants to meet ASAP. Jillian from Pilkington wants to talk. That's urgent too, of course.

He slowed down a little, wondering why he was in such a rush to get to the office. *Everyone wants a piece of me, and they want it now.* It used to make him feel important, but now it was irritating him. He waved his phone again as the moth fluttered in front of his face. "Get out of here. Leave me alone."

His grandmother hadn't been sick for long. He had seen her over the holidays when the family got together, but he hadn't found a chance to visit her since then. He'd gotten a call a few weeks back saying that she was in the

hospital. He planned to go see her, but between work and travel, he never made it, and he had felt badly when his mother called two days ago to say that her mother had passed away.

The funeral was on a warm November morning and Craig was somehow disturbed by that. Funerals should be on grim, grey July days, not when spring is so full of promise. During the church ceremony, he was surprised at the number of people. When the vicar described his grandmother and all the things she had done and the people she had touched, he realized that he hadn't really known her that well, even though she had been a major part of his childhood. A few people were crying, including his mother, but Craig found that didn't feel much emotion. But at the end of the ceremony when he walked past the coffin for the last time and put a flower on it, he felt a burning sensation in the back of his throat.

The family stood behind the open hearse and talked to the guests. His grandmother's sisters had come up from Taranaki for the funeral and were showing a lot of emotion. But that didn't stop them from telling him how proud they all were of him for having achieved so much at such a young age. That kind of talk always made Craig feel uncomfortable, even though deep down he found it gratifying. Plus it was true, especially if you compared him to his two brothers and sister.

And then his great aunt said, "You know, Craig, you were your grandmother's favorite. Ever since you were a baby, you were the apple of her eye. And she always talked about you when I called her. She was so proud of you."

Craig just smiled.

Now, alone in his car on the way to the office, those comments came back to him. He swore at the taxicab in front of him. And then at the moth that fluttered around his face again. He was angrier than usual. Why did his aunt

have to say that? She was probably just trying to be nice, but it had made him feel bad.

He hadn't stayed for the family lunch after the funeral. He told his mother he didn't have time. He needed to get back to the office. Everyone was disappointed, but understood how busy he was.

I should have gone, he thought to himself as he got off the motorway and entered downtown traffic. *I'll never find a car park at this hour.*

The moth was still with him, and now, off the motorway, he opened the window again, hoping it would fly away. But it refused to go anywhere near the open windows, preferring to float around in front of him. He blew at it, hoping to drive it out the window.

He swore out loud when he saw that the parking garage was full. He drove further from the office and found a spot in an open car park. He hurried to the office and on the way bought a sushi box for lunch.

He went to his office and started to return calls. Later that afternoon, David, his boss, stopped by. "Sorry to hear about your grandmother."

"Thanks."

"You OK?"

Craig looked up sharply. "Sure, no problem, why?"

"Just asking. I was really close to my grandparents. It hit me hard when they died. Take some time off if you need to."

"It's OK. I'm fine."

"Anyway, I'm glad you're here. I've got some news. We heard back on that proposal you put together for the Warner project."

"Oh? What happened?" said Craig, suddenly nervous. Thanks to his efforts, the firm had been invited to propose on a huge project for a major company. It had been a long shot and no one really expected them to be successful, but just being invited to propose had been a major coup for Craig. If they got the work, he'd be a hero.

“You’re not going to believe it, but we got the job! Expect a call from the managing director. He wants to congratulate you personally. The Warner people specifically mentioned you and your team as the reason they picked us.” David stood up and extended his hand, “Congratulations, Craig!”

Craig stood and returned the handshake, “Hey, thanks!”

David continued, “It’s going to be a lot of work and you’re going to have to devote a lot of time and resources to it. I had a talk with the managing director. We agreed that a project this size will need a principal to head it up.”

Craig’s euphoria vanished. *Typical. I do all the work and they bring in some guy above me. That’ll block my chances for sure. I should have been at the meeting.*

“And we figured that since you have the contacts and the knowledge, you should be that principal. Congratulations, again, Craig!”

It was the promotion he had been hoping for. Just like that. “Really? Thanks. This is great!”

“I’m happy for you. And proud. I think you would have gotten it anyway, but this Warner thing made up everyone’s mind. Now I’ll get out of your way and let you celebrate.”

“Thanks again.”

Craig sat down and looked around his office. Something was wrong. He should be happy. He had been anticipating this moment for years. Worked so hard for it. But he didn’t feel special, different, relieved or even glad. *It’ll probably just take time to sink in. Plus it could have come on a better day.*

He wanted to call someone to share the good news. But he couldn’t call his parents. It didn’t seem right to interrupt them. And he couldn’t think of any of his friends who would really care about his promotion. He ended up sharing the news with two of his staff. They congratulated him and then went back to work.

Feeling more lonely than jubilant, Craig decided that David was right. Maybe he should take the day off. He packed up and walked back to his car, barely noticing the warm spring sunshine. Opening the car door and sliding behind the wheel, he glanced at the dashboard. Curled up in the corner was the moth. Dead. Craig looked more closely. Still not starting the car, he stared at it, thinking. It looked so pathetic, lying on its side with its wings spread. He should have taken the time to let it out of the car.

Then he put both hands on the leather-covered steering wheel, laid his head between his hands and broke down sobbing.