

THE BETTER GENERATION

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1 INT. BOOKER'S ANTIQUE EMPORIUM - EVENING

1

It is a cloudy evening in Sebring, Florida. The rush of the shopping street has died down. Inside a local antique shop, Booker's Antique Emporium, a boy named KARAN, who has greasy black hair and is wearing a Gap hoodie, sits on a table in the middle of the store, looking through an old accounting book with weariness. He sighs in irritation and whips out his phone. He puts his shoes on the table and starts scrolling through TikTok. He picks up a call from his phone.

KARAN

(weary)

Hi, Mom, how's it going? -- Yeah, so -- Mr. Booker had to go for his monthly checkup so he left for the day and gave me his extra set of keys. -- I'm getting bored working though, can you come pick me up? Please?

Karan abruptly tenses up as an anxious expression forms on his face. His mom is not happy about his request.

KARAN

(frustrated)

Ok, ok, I'll stay. Chill. -- Look, I didn't mean to start all this volunteering work for the application so late into the year. And I told you I'll do some research on courses next week. Okay? -- When he comes back to close up, I'll head out. Alright? -- Okay, bye.

Karan hangs up the phone and continues scrolling through TikTok, now with dejection. Suddenly, Karan is alerted by a "TING!" of the hanging bell of the door. MR. GRAY walks in at a moderately slow pace. He is wearing a gray jacket that looks as old as him and carries a walking stick in his right hand that thuds against the floor with his every step. He pauses in front of the door.

KARAN

(mild-mannered)

Welcome to Booker's Antique Emporium. How can I help you, sir?

The old man looks at Karan. For a split second, he looks somewhat startled but an annoyed frown immediately forms on his grisly face.

MR. GRAY
(annoyed)
Where's Booker?

KARAN
(confused)
Um, he's not in right now. I've been
put in charge of the store while
he's gone. How can I help?

MR. GRAY
(unphased)
I'll look around myself then.

Mr. Gray begins to wander around the store. Karan freezes for a moment - his expression gradually morphs into a scowl of controlled rage. He marches over to Mr. Gray who's now gazing across the shelves.

KARAN
(angered)
Sir, what's the problem? I'm trying
to help. What do you need?

Mr. Gray turns to Karan and stares at him with a steely look.

MR. GRAY
(irritated)
Ugh, fine.

Mr. Gray looks around for a moment and points his walking stick to a vase on a shelf close to the entrance of the shop.

MR. GRAY
(stern)
What's that item over there?

KARAN
Um, a vase?

MR. GRAY
Where's it from? How old is it? How
much is it for?

Karan gets a shudder down his spine. He feels as if he's doing a test he hasn't studied for.

KARAN
(nervous)
Um--uh, I'm not sure.

MR. GRAY
Hmm, alright. How long have
you been working here?

KARAN
(hesitant)
A few weeks.

MR. GRAY
(mockingly surprised)
Huh? A few weeks, you say? That vase over there is probably one of the best antiques in stock considering it's on the window display. You've walked past it every week and you can't even try to sell it to me?

Karan looks down at the floor in shame.

KARAN
(embarrassed)
Apologies, sir.

MR. GRAY
(stern)
Well, you better be glad I don't want it, kid. I was just testing ya. I knew you wouldn't be able to sell that antique. In fact, I'm sure you can't sell me any of the store's best items.

Mr. Gray looks at the table and spots the accounting book.

MR. GRAY
You do clerical work for Booker, correct?

KARAN
Yeah. Inventory, accounting, sweeping.

MR. GRAY
(miffed)
Alright then. Why can't you do more, hah? Have you tried memorising this store's catalogue? Getting to know Booker's regulars? Have you thought about ways of getting more customers? No, right? I'll tell you why. You people never bother with doing more than the bare minimum. You just do what you're asked, nothing more. Instead of making the most of your time, you use a fraction of it well and waste the rest.

KARAN
(puzzled)
What do you mean, *you people*?

Mr. Gray pauses for a moment to process what he said and then snaps back to his cantankerous persona.

MR. GRAY
(displeased)
I mean, your generation, *kid*. Your elders, people like me, brought success onto themselves through self-motivation. They worked like their lives depended on it because they *did*. Nowadays, people are too comfortable to try harder. That's why I don't need your help. Even if I went to you, I *guarantee* that you wouldn't even *try* to find the best item for my needs!

Karan is taken aback. He feels seen through and slightly ashamed. He can see the truth in the man's words but doesn't want to accept it. His shame turns into anger as he clenches his fist. He's not backing down.

KARAN
(maddened)
First of all, I work hard where it's needed. I get great grades, I win competitions and -- I engage with my community. Second, I don't need to be a workaholic to be successful. I bet you guys never thought of a work-life balance or how burnout can affect your health. Third, I don't think that attitude makes your generation the better people.

Mr. Gray scowls and squints his searing eyes at Karan. He doesn't appreciate being retorted to.

MR. GRAY
(offended)
What do you mean by that?

KARAN
Your *people* had a flawed way of life and beliefs. As time passed, we saw those flaws, fixed them and changed for the better! Just look at --

Karan hesitates as he tries to conjure a counter-point out of thin air.

KARAN

(arrogant)

Aha! Technology! It's clearly improved our lives with how we use it but your generation can't accept that it's the future. While old people protest outside city hall for even trivial tech advancements like 5G or cashless payments, millennials are using it to work harder than you ever did!

Mr. Gray pauses and chuckles menacingly to himself.

MR. GRAY

(gleeful)

You say it's helping you work MORE? Tell me then, why were you on your phone instead of doing your job when I walked in?

KARAN

Um, my mum called me? She was wondering when I was coming home.

MR. GRAY

Don't try to *fool* me. My sight's not what it used to be but I could clearly see you scrolling on TicTac when I came in.

KARAN

(mocking)

It's called TikTok, sir.

MR. GRAY

(enraged)

Ugh, *TikTok*, Instagram, it's all the same to me! Kids these days can't give their 100% because they've become addicts without even knowing! *Everywhere* I go, the park, the mall, even the street, there's always teenagers mindlessly tapping or snapping or whatever! You can't tell me that device doesn't waste time. It's trained you to enjoy others' lives instead of what's right in front of you.

Karan starts to get visibly anxious. He doesn't have a comeback for that.

KARAN
(anxious)
Um, well...

MR. GRAY
(mocking)
Haha! You get me! First, just because I'm old doesn't mean I don't respect technology. I use my laptop and phone productively everyday. Second, my generation has lived through and seen more than you ever have which is the reason why we're the wisest of those living today and why your parents have told you to respect us. Third, respect these words; buzz off and think twice about speaking to me like that!

Mr. Gray walks away from Karan, muttering to himself. Karan starts to walk back but he feels his frustration turn into pure rage and take control of his mind. He turns around.

KARAN
(grave)
What about racism?

Mr. Gray stops. Karan's somehow struck a chord in him.

MR. GRAY
(shocked)
What do you mean *racism*?

KARAN
(grave)
If you *baby boomers* are so wise, explain why so many elders are still racist?

MR. GRAY
(confused)
Baby what?

KARAN
(infuriated)
Don't act like it isn't a thing. Do you know how much *shit* my family and I have taken from the older generation? People in the supermarket, at school, even our *neighbours* aren't sold on us being

here. They've called us names. Told us we don't belong. Ordered that we go back to our own country. Where's the wisdom in that?

Mr. Gray seems to look horrified for a moment but begins filling up with fury.

KARAN

(outraged)

In fact, maybe that's why you're being harsh. You don't care that I'm a teen, you're only getting at me because I'm brown!

Mr. Gray turns around and marches to Karan, his walking stick in hand.

MR. GRAY

(extremely angry)

QUIET! Don't come to me with such nonsense! I didn't live through wars and famine to take an earful from a boy like you!

As Mr. Gray speaks, he bangs his walking stick on the ground for emphasis. With every thud, a glass item high on the shelf next to him moves closer to the shelf's edge.

MR. GRAY

(extremely angry)

We persevered through struggle and built the foundations of everything your generation use today! And now, when we're at our lowest and weakest, we have to deal with being demeaned by our inferiors! Now, shut up and get out of my sight, you little -- CURRY EATER!

Mr. Gray bangs his walking stick on the floor. Karan looks upon Mr. Gray with horror. Mr. Gray's face rapidly switches to a similar look, but more remorseful. All of a sudden, the item above Mr. Gray falls.

KARAN

(horrified)

LOOK OUT!

CRACK! Karan steps back and looks away. When he slowly turns back, he sees an unconscious Mr. Gray bleeding on the floor. Karan's heart starts to accelerate. He grabs his phone and speed-dials 911. He then puts it on speaker while he takes off his jacket to wrap around Mr. Gray's head.

FADE TO BLACK.

2 INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

2

Karan walks through a hallway into a patient's room. In the room, he sees Mr. Gray lying comfortably in a hospital bed with a large bandage around his head. The old man smiles when he notices Karan.

MR. GRAY

(pleasantly surprised)

Good afternoon. I didn't think you'd want to see me again.

KARAN

(anxious)

Well, you took such a bad hit, I had to come check on you. Plus, the doctor told me your daughter wouldn't make it until tomorrow night so I -- Look, I just feel responsible for this, that's all.

MR. GRAY

(calm)

Oh, don't burden yourself like that, this was all me. -- I'm sorry, kid. I didn't have a reason to start going off at ya like that. Or at least, not a good one...

KARAN

What do you mean?

Mr. Gray sighs, sits up, clears his throat and looks to Karan.

MR. GRAY

Last year, my beautiful daughter finally got married. To one of your kind, a -- South Asian. Being Southern and all, our family didn't take it too well. Not just because of his race, this was his second marriage. He even had a kid. It was a messy situation but I defended her firmly. She was my daughter after all. If she's happy, I'm happy.

Mr. Gray looks down from Karan's gaze as his expression gradually shifts to one of shame.

MR. GRAY

(ashamed)

But one fine night, we were celebrating her husband's birthday and the whiskey got to me. One thing led to another and before you know it, I was spouting bigotry. It was a disaster. I never meant any of it but she must've thought I did. The next day, she packed my bags and sent me down to Sebring. She didn't want me around the kid until I changed or whatever.

Tears begin to roll down Mr. Gray's cheeks.

MR. GRAY

(upset)

I haven't felt so -- unhappy in my life. -- A cloud of shame hangs over me every day since that night. -- I know I have to change but I don't have the strength to. So I've just been left with all this pent-up -- anger directed at myself, bubbling inside me.

Karan perks up in curiosity. His words have struck a chord in him.

MR. GRAY

(sad)

That's why I got at ya the other day. Rather than fix my problems, I just get out my frustration on people I know can't talk back or-

KARAN

(in awe)

-try to win senseless arguments. Not because you care but out of desperation to feel better about yourself.

Karan and Mr. Gray look at each other in awe. For once, they don't try to see through each other.

MR. GRAY

(in awe)

Yeah, something like that...

They stare in silence for a moment before Karan speaks up.

KARAN

Well - surely the retirement home
could help you out?

MR. GRAY

(saddened)

They tried. But I denied them all. I
guess I'm just used to having to be
tough. Be a man, like my pappy used
to say. But -- I need closure.

Mr. Gray breathes in and curls back a little.

MR. GRAY

(upset)

I miss my grandson. He's such a
sweet kid. I feel like if I can do
right by him, I'll be redeemed to
myself. That's why I came to
Booker's. A few of my buddies said
he's the best shop in town for
gifts.

KARAN

(surprised)

That's why? Wait, how old's your
grandson?

MR. GRAY

Twelve.

KARAN

(amused)

Twelve? And you wanted to get him an
antique? There's a GameStop on the
next street, why didn't you think of
going there?

MR. GRAY

(defensive)

What do I know about video games?
Besides, I always used to get
antiques and stuff like that from my
pappy and mammy.

KARAN

Well, times have changed, sir.

MR. GRAY

Indeed they have.

There's another moment of awkward silence between them.

KARAN

You know, we could learn a lot from each other.

MR. GRAY

I guess so.

KARAN

So, how about I come to the retirement home next week? We can meet and help each other.

Mr. Gray looks back at Karan and smiles. It's the happiest Karan has ever seen him look.

MR. GRAY

(joyful)

That would be great, kid.

KARAN

Alright, I have to go. I'll see you soon! Have a safe recovery.

MR. GRAY

Thank you.

Karan leaves the room, immediately whips out his phone and calls someone as he walks to the hospital exit.

KARAN

Hello? -- Hi, Mom. Would I be able to volunteer at the retirement home? -- Why? Well- -- No, it's not for the application. But it's important.

Karan looks back at the door to Mr. Gray's room and smiles.

KARAN

This one's personal.

THE END.

