

Apsolution

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Jack was the new manager in the office. He had made sure everyone knew he was there to make his mark, within the first month he had: fired two long standing employees, promoted one to a job they didn't really want, created three posts of middle management to do 90% of his work between them and kept the last 10 percent for himself just to make himself look busy. His workforce detested him, but the few who dared to complain found their complaints to his boss fell on deaf ears, this was mostly due to the fact, that Jack was the boss' son.

Jack loved his life; he would get out of his expensive feather bed to a perfectly heated house, looking out on his garden manicured by his gardener, he would sip his extra strong Java coffee that was timed to be ready as soon as he stretched and put his feet on the plush bedroom carpet, his laundry was delivered, ironed, weekly. His breakfast was sat waiting for him at his favourite coffee house down the road, yes life just didn't get any better.

On reaching the business his father had spent so many years building up, he felt like a king. When he got into his office, he would spend time putting his feet up on the desk and pretending it was all his, but then reality came back, his emails were always waiting for him, but he spent a few minutes delegating them to his middle management, then it was down to business the next level to reach.

One morning, while working hard to get to the next level on his favourite game he realised the time, he buzzed through to his secretary.

"Jessica, you might have forgotten the time but my eleven o'clock coffee seems to be five minutes late again!"

Wearily Jessica answered.

"I'm so sorry Mr Phelps, I was on the phone, pay roll were querying your expenses for your last business trip."

"Never mind that," Jack snapped, "just tell them to talk to dad about it, and then bring me my coffee!"

The door slowly opened a few minutes later, a downtrodden Jessica walked in with his coffee slamming it hard on the desk, she ignored his protestations of it being spilt and left the office.

"Clean it up yourself," she mumbled as she left, slamming the door behind her.

Lunch he had delivered to the office from the artisan bistro the other side of town, and then brought up to the office by this week's intern. He then phoned through his evening meal request to Jessica who diligently rang it through to the restaurant.

"Why he can't just ring them himself," she muttered, stabbing at the phone, as though it was Jack's face.

The other thing Jack loved was gadgets: he had heating he could set with his mobile phone, his coffee machine was on a timer, and even his exercise routine was set by a very expensive personal trainer at the gym, his haircut was chosen by the latest Trevor Sorbie app; his wardrobe was chosen online by a virtual tailor, in short Jack hadn't set foot in a shop for at least 2 years. His whole life was a mix of apps and people to do things for him, but true to form he was getting bored with having to deal with more than one person.

Then one day it happened, the app of his dreams:

“Download this app and you will never have to want for anything again!”

“Wow this is the app for me,” Jack exclaimed with glee.

He didn't stop for a second to read any small print, in went his bank, work and home details. Most apps didn't ask for quite this much information, but if they were going to run his life for him it would be worth it. No more moaning secretary complaining that running his life wasn't in her job description, no more having to talk to the dopey waitress to order his breakfast. No this was just what he deserved, after all he worked so hard.

He grinned eagerly as he input more and more information, handing his whole life over to the small black object in his hand.

“Good morning Jack, good to have you with us” the voice of the app sounded so soothing, almost hypnotic, he knew he would never have to worry again. He would spend more time doing what he wanted wining, dining and his beloved computer games. The next 2 months were amazing, just the life he wanted he felt so good, his meals were booked and paid for, his exercise routine sorted, even his heating was changed depending on the weather conditions, the app seemed to think of everything, including things he hadn't even thought of himself, the soothing melodic voice constantly reassuring him, even praising him.

One sunny morning he got up and dressed, looking at the weather he thought it should be a nice day today, however, he didn't have that relaxed devil may care attitude, in fact, was feeling very tired but couldn't work out why, had he been up that late playing computer games.

Suddenly, as he sat drinking his perfect morning coffee watching the world go by from the coffee house window, he remembered the dream. He had been asleep in the dream when a ghostly figure of a woman veiled in a soft silk fabric appeared though the wall, although he couldn't see her face he knew she was the most beautiful woman in the world, she shook him gently on the shoulder to wake him. Opening his eyes, he felt in a trance.

“Don't worry Jack we will care for you,” the figure had softly said to him and then vanished. The same dream happened twice more that week, each time the figure was accompanied by more figures, all the same shadowy shape, the faces veiled in the same silken cloth. It had to be a dream, didn't it? Ghosts didn't exist. He carried on his week, but couldn't shake the ominous feeling that something wasn't quite right. Back at the office, the lack of sleep made him snap more and more at his staff, the workers kept their distance but soon things were about to get much worse.

The following week, his father arrived unannounced at the office, this was quite unusual, he had handed over most of the running of the office to Jack, the staff rarely saw him these days.

“Good morning sir, your father wants to talk to you” Jessica called through on the phone.

“Just tell him I'll see him at the weekend, I'm going over there anyway” Jack grumbled back, his head was starting to pound, he really didn't want to have to talk to his father.

“But he is here, outside your office” begged Jessica.

“Very well send him in” Jessica didn't have time to relay the message, the door opened with such tremendous force that it fired the waste paper basket across the room hitting the wall, the door then bounced shut behind his furious father.

“What the hell do you think you are doing sending you mother such a rude and thoughtless text?”

Puzzled, Jack had to ask his father what he meant.

“When she asked you what meal you would like when you come over on Sunday, you answered. “anything as long as you don’t cook it.” What do you mean by that? She works so hard to cook the Sunday meal and now she is heartbroken, explain yourself” Jack didn’t remember sending the text, his mother wasn’t the best cook in the world, even as self-centred as he was, he would never upset her like this.

“It wasn’t me, I would never send a text like that” he pleaded fruitlessly, his father had never been so angry with him, but he checked his phone and sure enough there was the text sent to his mother at two am round about the time he had been woken by the dream. Putting the incident behind him he sent his mother some flowers with feeble excuse that he had been drinking.

The next Saturday the doorbell went at 8.00 in the morning.

“Who is about at the time on a Saturday morning,” Jack grumbled as he set off down stairs, swinging the door open he was greeted by a cheery delivery man, who beaming asked his name and then handed him a set of car keys, confused Jack began to argue.

“I haven’t ordered a car,” he started then looking over the delivery man’s shoulder, there was the car of his dreams, he had even put this as his favourite car on the app’s survey, shocked he stuttered “I can’t afford a Ferrari” his voice raised a little more “this must be a mistake, a joke on me. No, I didn’t order this!” the delivery man looked shocked.

“But sir is this your signature?” Jack looked at the form and yes it had been electronically signed with his own personal electronic signature, reluctantly he took the keys. He went back into the house and started up his lap top checking his bank account, the money had gone from his account and the recipient was the local garage. He also had a further £100,000 transferred from his father’s company, shocked he quickly transferred the money back minus the money for the car, this he would have to pay this back when he sent back the car.

Over the next week Jack avoided his father, assuming this was due to the indiscretion over the meal his father gave him some space. Jack becoming exhausted from the now nightly visits/dreams, tried to retreat into his computer games but the app wouldn’t let him.

“You are due at the gym Jack, ready to work that body?” the ever more persuasive voice asked him “then I have booked your favourite restaurant and I have ordered your favourite meal.” Jack found himself thanking her, thank goodness, he had the app, how did he ever cope without it?

When he returned home from the gym he found a small parcel on the door step, it was just a little too large to fit through the letterbox, opening it he found it was the latest computer game, he couldn’t remember ordering it, but he had wanted so he probably had, in the early hours of the morning he would often online shop.

Then the phone calls started.

“Thank you for your interest in our product” just a sales call he thought, he wasn’t interested and put the phone down. The phone calls continued again and again wine clubs, gyms, magazines, why did they ring? He hadn’t showed interest in any of these things, had he? He tentatively opened his lap top, there in his outbox was an email to each of the companies that had rang him. What was happening to him? His mind whirled then suddenly it hit him, he had been hacked! He picked up the phone to speak to his father.

“Oh, I see, you need my help do you?” his father barked, Jack explaining the situation, begged for forgiveness sobbing down the phone.

“Please help me, I’m so tired they won’t leave me alone” he felt sorry for his son, although he could be a fool, he still loved him. He told him to bring anything he had that was connected to the internet to work the following day, he would get the tech team to have a look at it for him. Relieved he headed off to bed but again he was woken in the night, by the voice telling him once again. “That it would all be ok he would never want for anything again.”

He took all the gadgets he had to the tech team.

“We’ll let you know how we get on Jack, probably some kid sat in his room, who over it is we’ll find him; should be done in a couple of days” the tech guy waved him out the door.

“Ok see you later” replied Jack.

“Goodbye Jack see you later” the phone called out to him, the tech guy looked a little disturbed and Jack normally soothed by the silken voice shivered, something just wasn’t right but weary, he had handed things over to his father’s team sure that they would sort it out.

Back in his office the place felt strange, he continued his work feeling anxious, soon he realised that he didn’t know what to do with himself. He didn’t have the phone telling him what to do and when to do it. He had to go out and get his lunch as his phone hadn’t ordered it, that night he left work, late, as his phone hadn’t told him to leave, wondering the streets he couldn’t eat at a restaurant as his phone booked and paid for everything online. He had £10 in his wallet, he used this to buy a ready meal at the local garage, drained of all energy he took it home cooked it and went straight to bed, when he woke the next morning he found he had slept all night with no strange dreams waking him.

The next couple of days were a revelation for Jack, he found himself relaxed and refreshed making his own choices he breezed in and out of the office, then the tech guy brought it back, the box of gadgets, including his phone.

“We couldn’t find anything wrong, but I’m sorry Jack we had to tell your father” confused he took back his belongings his phone of the top with the words “HELLO JACK” on the screen, as the tech guy left his father walked in.

“They found the money you took,” his voice was quiet and shallow like he had all the breath taken from him “why did you do it? And the car where is it? Why? Jack why? You only had to ask for the money” he was almost in tears. There was nothing Jack could do, he tried to protest but his father slammed his fist down on the desk “don’t you lie to me, they found nothing wrong, get out of here, you are sacked” broken he slowly rose and left the room without looking back. Jack solemnly packed his belongings and left, his head in complete turmoil.

Over the next few weeks Jack’s life changed in ways he couldn’t imagine: as the business paid the mortgage payments on his house, he had to move out. The flat he was forced to take was high in a tower block, foul smelling steps took him up to a small damp flat, he had few belongings and the nights were long and desolate, the only visitors he got were the nightly visions. He took a job at the local garage, the people who used to work for him now smiled (some sympathetically, some mockingly) at him as they handed him small change or paid with the flash of a card. He no longer ate at the high-class restaurants he used to, but was now forced to buy the cheapest own brand products, still his phone would tell him what to do.

“It’s ok Jack we can make this work just trust me, remember, you will never have to worry again”

“Then why does it feel like this?” he snapped back at his phone.

“Just trust me, we will get you through”

Each day he would get up when the phone told him to, go and work come home, eat what the phone told him to, day after day serving the people he used to employ, moving deeper and deeper into a state of despair, only talking to his phone, she was now his only friend.

Then one day he snapped.

He was working at the garage, and had just served his father who had not known what had happened to his son. Jack now looked so different from the son he knew he didn't recognise him, when his father showed no recognition to him, Jack sank down behind the counter.

When no one was serving Jack's boss was called in, they found him still sat behind the counter staring into space, for over an hour no words passed his lips, nor did he move, finally his boss called the police, the police officers gently led him to the police car, wordlessly, he walked over to the car and sat still staring at the void of nothing ahead of him.

At the station the silence continued, worried the police called for the duty doctor. As the doctor examined him he found there was no interaction with any of the outside world.

“It is as though his mind has locked itself, it must be trying to protect him, I will see if there are any beds at the local unit.” As he left Jack spoke.

“I will want for nothing” he said and then chuckled to himself.

When they arrived at the unit Jack looked around at the clinically white walls, the stark emptiness of the corridors gave the feeling of a heavenly place, a place where you could find peace, if you knew where to look. The attendants led him down to a small room for assessment here they tried to take his phone away from him, Jack held his phone close to him, protecting it like a child protects its' most beloved toy.

“No, no, give her back to me,” he wailed “I have no one else, please don't take her away, her friends will come they care, she will bring them.”

Cradling the phone, he sobbed and shook, two people in white uniforms came slowly towards him as they took the phone from him he read her final message.

“Goodbye Jack, they will look after you here, you will never have to want for anything again.”