

# a small appliance man

*by* Lance Manion

It was now or never for Tony.

His grandson sat at his bedside amidst all the machinery keeping him alive. Tony wasn't sure exactly how old he was now but it was old enough to hear what had to be said.

His confession.

There had been talk in the family about his past. A few of his associations raised some eyebrows in the neighborhood but nobody has ever been able to prove anything.

Tony's lifestyle had never been elaborate so any eyebrows that wanted to raise themselves could do so but nobody was going to pay too much attention.

He raised a hand to signal to the boy to come closer. For a moment he looked at it like some foreign object. It looked so old. Withered. Thin and covered in age spots and veins.

It had not always looked like it did now and Tony took a deep pained breath to remind himself that the old hand did indeed belong to him and that the hand was connected to an old arm which was connected to an old body that was about to expire.

It was time to talk.

"Your Grandpa was a bad guy" he started. His grandson leaned forward, barely able to make out the words.

"It doesn't matter. I love you Grandpa." The boy saw the old man's eyes get misty.

"I know. But you should know a few things about me before I go."

He stared at the ceiling. He didn't know where to start.

"You know the movie "Rounders"? The one with ..." he began.

"Matt Damon. Yeah. I love that movie Grandpa."

"Yeah, well ... you know the character Joey Knish?" The more he spoke the stronger his voice seemed to get.

"Yeah Grandpa, the guy played by John Turturro. He's one of my favorites."

"Yeah. But what did you think about Joey Knish?"

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The boy fidgeted for a few seconds, not sure what the correct answer was.

"Do you remember the scene where he said "Don't got the stones? You ignorant punk. I play for money. I owe rent. Child support. I play for money ...?" and with that his voice dissolved into a long cough.

"I remember."

His Grandpa collected himself and his gaze returned to the boy.

"Have you ever heard of the big bank heist of '79? The First Federal job?"

Slowly a smile began to creep across the face of his Grandson.

"Was that you Grandpa?"

"Yes. It wasn't me alone ... but I was the brains behind it."

"You were a bank robber?"

His Grandpa tried to sit up. Energized at his grandson's reaction.

"I was. Only I didn't steal money."

A puzzled look fell over the face of his grandson.

"Back then when you opened up a new account they use to give you a toaster."

The puzzled look remained.

"The First Federal had this big promotion that I got wind of. They were bringing in 300 toasters."

The puzzled look began to take on a hint of contempt.

"You stole toasters?"

"And made it seem like a failed robbery attempt. The headlines read the next day "Failed bank robbery attempt!" and then it went on to say that the thieves managed to get away with only toasters."

"You stole toasters?"

"That was the beauty of it, don't you see? Back then those toasters had a street value of \$5 a pop." Tony smiled a small smile. "Do the math. Split three ways that left each of us with \$500. Free and clear."

"Could you have taken the money?" the boy asked after mulling it over for a little while.

"I suppose we could have ... but then they'd have been looking for us" his Grandpa said with a growing urgency. His breathing was

growing more labored and a few of the machines started to ping and beep with a little more fervor.

"That was only the beginning mind you. We did jobs up and down the East Coast."

The boy sat back in his chair as he digested the information.

"Did you ever steal any money?" he finally asked.

"Never. It was mostly toasters. There was the odd coffee maker or electric can opener ... but mostly ... toasters."

He sunk back into his pillow, clearly drained from the confession.

"That's a great story Grandpa" and with that the boy took Tony's hand.

"It is ... isn't ... it." His breath became a wheeze and then a few gasps.

The little machine that tells you when a heart has called it a day began its monotone song.

Tony's hand gave a final squeeze and then went limp.

That's when the finality of it all began to dawn on the boy.

"Wow ... my Grandpa was an idiot."

