

Too Little, Too Late

by F.R. Southerland

“What the fuck are you doing here?” Succinct. To the point. Aaron didn’t waste in time in getting to the heart of it. Charlie’s presence in shop was unusual. Charlie being around in general was unusual. He figured it had something to do with his father’s lack of involvement in his youth. Associations never really faded.

Fucking too little too late, old man, Aaron thought. He tossed a greasy rag aside, finally looking up at him.

Every time Aaron looked at him, it was always with a touch of anger. Sometimes, that anger was simple annoyance. Other times, it was stronger, like a freshly opened wound that stung. Right now, it was somewhere in between. Charlie studied his son before giving his answer.

“I’m moving things from your grandmother’s estate this afternoon, possibly to storage forever. If there’s anything you want, you should come by. Pick it up.”

Aaron immediately gave a scoff of disbelief. “Ain’t that something you call a person about? Didn’t need to show your fucking face here.” Translation: he would rather he didn’t show up at all.

He had expected as much from Aaron. All he had to do was open his mouth—didn’t matter what he had to say—and Aaron was ready to protest it completely. “I know, but I was nearby. It was easier.”

For who? He shook his head at Charlie and grabbed his cigarettes off the table. He made a flame—large, extra hot—and lit up. Through the haze of thick smoke, Aaron stared at him. “Alright, so are you selling Gran’s shit?”

“No. Just moving it.”

“Should just sell it. Ain’t gonna do any good gathering a shit-ton of dust in some storage unit.”

Charlie sighed. “I’m not ready to sell anything yet.”

“Uh huh.” Aaron took a long drag on his cigarette, then hefted one shoulder in a shrug. “Well, I don’t give a shit what you do with it. Go find Jamie. He might want something, but I don’t.”

Despite his desire to push the issue, Charlie didn’t risk it. After all, mending the rift between himself and Aaron was an ongoing project. He wasn’t too keen on the idea of tearing apart what little they’d fixed already, so he relented to Aaron’s words with a nod. “Okay. But if you change your mind—”

“I ain’t.” Aaron’s chuckle was devoid of humor, the annoyance and anger growing. To anyone else, his father’s reason for visiting was only an excuse. There was always something else, some kind of agenda. It was too late for them to ever have the perfect father-son relationship that Charlie probably wanted, and he hated that Charlie tried.

He hated even more how much he resisted the idea, but that was a whole other thing.

Aaron might catch on, Charlie thought as he nodded again, stuck his hands into his pockets, and turned to leave. Little by little, I’m working my way into his life. It’s not much, but it’s better than before. Better than nothing.

He was determined not to give up, even if Aaron fought it—as he assumed he would—every step of the way.

