

LITTLE PEOPLE

John Boston

Jim Keersaw was a little man with big problems. He stood 4 feet, 4 inches. A victim of Achondroplasia, he would never grow any bigger than this. His parents were normal size individuals who reacted with astonishment at the news that their only son would be a dwarf for his entire life. Hormone and steroid treatments did nothing, except damage his health. His parents loved him, but they were also clearly disappointed by the hand that life had dealt them. His father wanted a baseball player and his mother a ballerina. In the end, they got a dwarf, but a smart dwarf. Jim realized long ago that he would never be able to battle people with his fists or skills on the baseball field, rather he would have to outthink them, he would mentally spar with the best of them, and more often than not come out on top.

He got his first break at age 15. One of his high school friends had gotten a job as a stand-in for a major network sitcom and asked him to tag along with him one day. He was immediately noticed by a casting director who asked him if he would like to be in a short children's film he was producing. He accepted and has been working in Hollywood ever since. The problem with being an actor and trying to raise a family is feast and famine paychecks. Some months are great, with steady work and great pay, but when the cameras stop rolling, so does the money. It was not uncommon for him to be out of work for months on end. He would go from earning over 50,000 dollars a month to nothing. He figured the rolls and the money would improve once he became more well-known in the business. For a while, that was true. The competition between dwarves however was intense, with bitter feuds and rivalries being born with each movie. He never had to worry about money until he met her.

Her name was Cassandra. She too was a dwarf, born with the same type of dwarfism. He thought she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. She was also the friendliest person he had ever met. They worked together on a puppet show and immediately hit it off. A few months later, she moved in with him. The two quickly became inseparable. They were married one year later and have never looked back.

Jim was always just one big break away from stardom, at least that's what he thought. He had completed his bachelor's degree in Economics and had even done an internship for a major west coast bank that wanted to hire him, but he knew no one in the banking world was going to take a dwarf seriously. He would be hired, but never really go anywhere in the business. He was very good at making money, but not very good at making first impressions. He decided to leave the world of finance and concentrate on his acting career, which at the time made sense. Hollywood was much more accepting of people like him than would Wall Street.

The recession hit Hollywood just as hard as the rest of the country. Projects were put on hold or canceled indefinitely. He went from working eighty hours a week to zero hours a week within a few months. Nobody was filming. For the next two years, he only did one voice-over and had a

guest appearance on an internet TV show. He earned a total of 12,000 dollars for the year. To make matters worse, Cassandra was now pregnant.

Jim never thought of having kids of his own, not wanting to give them the curse he was born with. Doctors told them that his dwarfism and hers were caused by recessive genes, since both their parents were of normal height. They only had a twenty-five percent chance of having a dwarf child. Science and technology had improved considerably since they were both children and the condition could certainly be improved with new treatments. He had never thought of himself as a father. The more he thought about it, the more excited he became. He just had to find a way to pay for her hospital bills.

His SAG Insurance had run out. She had no insurance of her own. They made too much money in the last year to qualify for Medicaid. Having a dwarf give birth was more expensive than he ever thought possible. He could have just rung up a massive hospital bill, then declared bankruptcy and discharged it, but it was still going to be very expensive. With no insurance, many hospitals demanded upfront payment for screenings and services. He had over a hundred thousand dollars in his savings account at the start of the pregnancy. By the time his wife had given birth, it was gone and he had taken on over twenty thousand dollars in new debt. He could have left Los Angeles and moved to a less expensive area, but that would mean flying out to LA for casting calls and auditions. He was broke. His wife had given birth to a healthy, normal-sized boy and had survived the pregnancy, but it had come at a terrible cost. The debt collectors were calling now sometimes half a dozen times a day. Jim was at his wit's end.

He got the casting call on Friday, auditioned on Saturday, and was working on Monday morning. It was an internet TV show with a big budget and well-known actors and actresses. He was to play the best friend/neighbor of the two main stars. For Jim, it was a dream come true. Netflix had picked up the pilot and ordered a dozen more episodes. He was finally making good money again.

He decided to build his house on some property he had bought years ago near Topanga Canyon. It would be a house for little people. It would be a "little people mansion". He hired a well-known architect to design it and make sure it would pass an inspection, which was sure to happen in this area. It was built in only three months. It made news around the world. An LA News Station did a story on it, as well as two LA magazines. There were several YOUTUBE episodes about the house and the Keersaw family as well. Things were going great for Jim and his family, right up until no one wanted another season of his show. He shot the last episode on Friday and was out of work the next day. He collected unemployment for a few months until it too ran out. His agent tried to find him something, anything, but there just wasn't anything at the moment. The medical bills were devastating to Jim and his family. Other than a few odd jobs and teaching an acting class at a local community college, Jim hadn't done any real acting work in over two years. He auditioned for two roles that called for a little person and lost out on both of them to someone with no acting experience. Most of his lost roles were to much younger, inexperienced dwarves that would take pocket change for their efforts. Jim had just priced himself out of the acting business.

Things got so bad that one day in October, he went down to his agent's office and had to ask him for a loan. The property taxes were due on his house and he simply didn't have the money. He

had known his agent for over ten years. He had been at Jim and Cassandra's wedding and was there in the hospital after the baby was born. All he could do was to give Jim a few thousand dollars. It wasn't even enough to get him through the month.

"Look. I feel for you, I really do Jim. I know work is getting harder and harder to come by these days. I know a guy. He owns a casino. I've had dealings with him in the past. He bailed me out of a hell of a mess I got into with a studio. I could make a call for you. He might be able to work something out.

"You mean he's a loan shark?" asked Jim

"More like a really ghetto banker. Look, all this stuff is off the books. There's absolutely no way to trace it."

"I don't know. I'm desperate, but I don't want to be in the hole to a loan shark."

"As long as you pay him back, here's no problem.....you will be able to pay him back, right?"

"Yes, I've got several projects lined up. One of them has got to pan out. I just need a little something until my royalty checks start coming in. Just something to hold me over for a few months, that's all."

"Do you want me to call him?"

"I don't think I have any choice. I'm behind on my mortgage. If I don't come up with five thousand by the end of the month, we could get evicted. Make the call."

James drove to Las Vegas the next day and met two guys on the strip who took him in a limo to meet their boss, Mr. Calvin Joss, owner, and proprietor of the Whirlwind Casino Group. They had casinos and Vegas and all over the state of Nevada. Jim had never met these types of people before. They were polite but didn't screw around. He figured Joss was up to his eyeballs in crime but was rich enough to be able to buy the right people off. The two men took him up a private elevator to Mr. Joss's apartment above one of his Las Vegas Casinos. He was different than what Jim had pictured. A wiry old man with glasses and a cheap suit. He brought Jim into his office and poured him a drink.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Keersaw?" he asked

"I would like to ask you for a loan. To be paid back in full," said Jim nervously.

The old man just took a drink of bourbon and sat back in his chair.

"Well normally, I wouldn't even consider it, but your agent friend did a huge favor for me once and I guess you could say we've been doing business with each other ever since. He asked me to do this favor for you."

Jim didn't say anything, he just let the old man continue talking.

"The terms of the agreement are as follows: You will borrow fifty thousand dollars from me today. You have exactly one year to pay me back 75,000 cash. Are we clear on this Mr. Keersaw?"

Jim knew he was screwed. He didn't even have five dollars to his name right now, how on earth was he going to pay back 75,000 dollars? He knew he had no choice. It was either this, or he and his family were out on the street. As bad a decision as it was, he figured it was better than the alternative, besides, he had a whole year to pay it back. Things had to pick up and get better. They couldn't possibly get much worse.

"Fine. Where do I sign?" he asked

The old man just chuckled.

"Sign? You don't sign anything. My associate will give you fifty thousand dollars in untraceable bills. It's yours to keep. Do whatever the hell you want with it. Just as long as we are both clear on one thing, Mr. Keersaw: Do not fuck with me or my money. You better have the 75,000 dollars one year from today. Are we clear?" said the old man

"Yes. We are clear," said Jim

"Remember, you came to me. I didn't twist your arm and make you take this loan. I hope you don't let me down. Things are going to be very unpleasant for you and your family if you pay on time.....are we clear?"

"Yes sir. Understood," said Jim

Joss motioned for one of his associates to come over. He was holding a briefcase. The old man opened it up and gave it to him. Jim had never seen so much money in his whole life.

"You may go now," said Joss

Jim quickly closed the briefcase and was escorted out of the room by the same two men. They rode with him down to the elevator and walked him out to a cab that was waiting for him.

"Don't fuck this up Jimmy." said one of them as they opened the cab door. Jim climbed on the seat and sat down, holding the briefcase of money. His heart was beating so fast, he closed his eyes and tried to calm down. He couldn't believe what he had just done. He couldn't believe he had put his family at so much risk. Cassandra never really inquired about their finances, just trusting him to take care of everything. She didn't know how broke they really were. She spent most of her time caring for their infant son and playing housewife. It was probably for the best. He didn't want to worry her.

Jim was able to recover somewhat financially. He was able to pay off the bank and his taxes. He sank the remainder of his money into his house. It now looked like something out of a movie set. He wanted it to look like something out of a fairy tale and indeed it did. He was getting visitors now to the house. What started as a trickle of gawkers was now turning into a steady stream of tourists. At first, it had just been locals, curious to see what was going on in their backyard. Now

he was getting hipsters from LA as well as foreign tourists, eager to see the little family and their magic house. It had gotten to the point where he decided it would be necessary to install a fence and security cameras on the property. He had picked up the property in foreclosure in 2009 at the depths of the housing market crash for a fraction of what it had sold for just two years earlier. It was only on the market for a few days before Jim bought it. Usually, property in this area is bought by locals not wanting undesirable neighbors. Jim got to it first after working with the property owner on a production set. He would rather see it go to Jim than be taken back by the bank. It was literally the deal of a lifetime. Nowadays, no one like Jim would be able to go anywhere near this property. Malibu was home to some very rich and powerful people who were none too eager about having Jim's make-believe house in their backyard. There wasn't much they could do. He had only one neighbor down the road and the rest of the property was surrounded by a state park.

The house was now beginning to draw quite a bit of attention, as Jim hoped it would. It was as much a business investment as it was a place to live. The house would sell the family's ability. Other little people had their own reality TV shows, so why not him? It didn't take long before two producers called him and asked him if he would allow a film crew to follow his family around for a month to shoot a new TV series based upon his family. This is exactly what Jim had been waiting for. He signed the paperwork and for nearly a month, the film crew followed him and his wife around their little house. It was very cramped and difficult for the crew to maneuver, but they did it. They had nearly three hundred hours of film footage to go through. Jim sat back and waited for the final contract negotiations to be settled.

Problem was, the network decided the little people reality TV market was already saturated. They had other, more marketable projects to pursue. They hadn't officially canceled it, but it was put on hold indefinitely. Jim was devastated.

"Stupid sells, smart doesn't. Just a fact of life I guess," he told his wife one night after dinner. He didn't have much time left to pay back Mr. Joss. It was like this dark cloud hanging over him all the time. He knew Joss was not somebody you wanted to piss off. He also knew he didn't have the 75,000 dollars he needed to pay him off. It was not going to be pretty. He thought about telling Cassandra and very well should have, she had a right to know what was coming. He just couldn't bring himself to do it. She was happy. They were happy. They just needed 75,000 dollars to continue being happy.

Just when Jim was about to give up hope, his agent called him one morning with some wonderful news.

"Buddy, your last sitcom was a huge hit in China. A Chinese network has bought out the rights to the show and everyone's contract. They want to start filming as soon as possible. They aren't screwing around, everyone's getting a huge raise. It's a two-year deal."

Jim almost broke down in tears he was so happy. There was just one catch. They wouldn't start filming until after Thanksgiving. He owed Joss the money come October. He would have to get an extension. He told his agent about what he had done and if it was possible to get an extension from Joss.

"Jesus Jimmy, he gave you a whole year to pay it back. I don't think he's going to give you an extension."

"I can pay off the loan with the money from just two episodes. Two weeks of shooting and the loan is paid in full. He'll have to understand that. He knows how much money movie stars make."

"Good luck," he said

Jim was going to need all the luck he could get.

Jim got the phone call one night from the Bakersfield PD. His mother had called 911 to say she was having difficulty breathing. By the time the ambulance got to her, she was dead.

Jim never was very close to his mother. They would speak over the phone, but it was almost as if he wasn't her son, at least not the son she wanted. No matter what he did, she just never seemed to support him. The last time he had seen her in person was over a year ago when his son was born. Still, she was his mother and it would be up to him to take care of her affairs. She had enough money put aside for her funeral and related expenses. She lived in a modest neighborhood in Bakersfield. Selling the house shouldn't be too difficult. He first had to empty it. He hired a moving crew to help him and they figured it would only take a few days to completely empty the house.

It was on the second day while he was cleaning out her closet that he found the letter from the adoption agency and a copy of the adoption records from the court. He was shocked to discover that his parents had given up their baby to an adoption agency five years before he was born. He had a brother and never even knew it. He waited until the house was empty and the moving crew was gone before he made any calls.

He called the Vital Statistics Office. The adoption records were not sealed, meaning his brother could contact his parents at any time he wanted to. He called the adoption agency and was able to speak with a woman in their records department. She gave him the name of the family that adopted his brother. A quick internet search yielded an address for them. They lived in nearby Taft. The family owned a business in town and he gave them a call.

He was reluctant to show up in person. He had found that people have very mixed reactions to seeing a dwarf for the first time. Some people don't care at all. Others do care and treat him like he is 4/5 of a human being. Jim had learned you just couldn't take the chance.

The family was polite and helpful. They told him that his brother was slightly handicapped and had a very difficult time growing up. He had spent a few years in prison for a crime his parents say he did not do. They had told him he was adopted when he was a teenager. The news did not seem to go over well. He told them that his mother, their mother had just died and he would like to offer him the chance to go to her funeral. They were hesitant at first, but they ended up giving him his brother's number. Jim figured he would just give a quick hello, introduce himself and give him his phone number in case he needed anything. He was nervous as he dialed the number.

"Hi, I'm looking for David Lang?" he said nervously

"This is him," said David

"David. You don't know me. I'm your brother. Your biological brother. My name is Jim Kershaw."

There was a long silence between the two of them before his brother spoke.

"They told me I didn't have any brothers or sisters," he said

"Well at the time of the adoption, that was true. I was born five years later. I didn't even know I had a brother until I cleaned out my mother's closet and found the adoption records." said Jim

"I see. Well, Jim, what do you want?"

"David, our mother died the other night. I wanted to call to let you know and to let you know when the funeral is," said Jim.

"Oh. She's dead huh?"

"Yes, she died of a heart attack. She went quickly. She didn't suffer at all."

"Well Jim, I appreciate the call, but I have no desire to see her. She's been dead to me for a long time."

Jim wasn't quite sure what to say. The conversation wasn't going quite as well as he had hoped.

"I just wanted to introduce myself and let you know what was going on. You've got my number if you need anything."

"Yeah, thanks," he said and hung up.

Jim figured that would be the last he ever heard from the man. He was back at home in his house sipping decaf coffee after dinner when his phone rang. He recognized the number as being his brother. The same number he had called earlier.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Jim. It's me, David. Look, I just wanted to apologize for yesterday. I was angry at my Parole Officer and I took it out on you. I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry. I spent almost three years in prison for something I didn't do. It hasn't been easy trying to adjust. No one will hire an ex-felon. If they do, the job usually isn't worth it in the first place.

"Why don't you tell me about it?"

The two of them spent the next two hours talking about their lives. David had a very difficult childhood and even more difficult early adulthood. He had spent almost five months in solitary confinement while in State Prison. Jim could not imagine what his brother must have gone through, especially since he figured his brother was probably a dwarf, just like him."

"My adoptive parents are good people, but I just never really fit in with them, you know?" said David

Jim told him about his own upbringing and told him he wasn't missing much. He pretty much felt the same way about his parents."

"I never imagined I had a brother. I've been thinking about it ever since. It's the one thing in my life I have to look forward to now."

"I know what you mean. I never imagined it either. I can't believe my parents never told me." he said

The two of them spoke over the phone several more times. Jim was running back and forth between LA and his home in Malibu. He wanted to finally sit down and meet his brother in person, but it just wasn't possible right at the moment. He knew the dreaded day was coming. He finally had no choice, he had to tell Cassandra. Needless to say, she was not happy.

"Jimmy, how could you be so stupid? Did you take money from a loan shark? Do you have any idea what you've done?" she screamed

Seeing her disappointed in him, hurt more than anything. She was right, he had been incredibly stupid. Of course, if he hadn't done what he did, they could very well be living out on the streets right now.

"That's still better than owing money to a loan shark. What happens when you don't pay him?"

"Look, in just over a month from now, we start filming my series. All we need is an extension. Just a month, then he'll have his money. He's not going to beat me up, if he does he won't get his money back. I can't work if I'm black and blue."

"I wouldn't be so sure," she said

The day after the loan was due, Jim's phone rang. He could see the number was blocked. He knew what was coming. He and Cassandra figured that if they sold everything they owned, they could only raise about sixty thousand dollars. Cars, stocks, you name it. Jim even had to sell his Emmy he had won in 2004 while assisting a production crew. It just wasn't enough.

"Hello?" he said

"Mr. Keersaw? Where is my money?" asked Mr. Joss

"I'm close. Can I just have a few more weeks? We're starting filming next month and....." he was cut off as Joss hung up on him. He knew he was screwed. In the end, it was hopeless. They might be loan sharks, but there were still laws to be followed. He went down to the Malibu PD and spoke to a detective and told him what had happened. He wanted to make certain that if anything happened to him, they would know exactly where to start looking. The detective was sympathetic but told him that until Joss actually did something to him or his family, there wasn't

much he or the police could do. Jim went home and waited for the inevitable. He didn't have to wait long.

Joss and two of his henchmen showed up on Jim's front door the next morning. Jim had a gun in the house but knew he couldn't use it. They had guns as well. He thought about calling the police but figured it wouldn't do much. Even if they were arrested, they'd post bail and be right back at it. He didn't want to make Joss any more upset than he already was. Joss knocked on his front door. Jim opened it and let the three of them in. the three of them said nothing as Jim led them into the living room. They sat down. Cassandra was holding their son, watching them from the kitchen.

"I trust you know why we're here?" said Joss

"Yeah."

"So, where's my money Jimbo?" asked Joss

"I don't have all of it. I've only got thirty thousand," said Jim

"That's it? Where's the rest of it?"

"I'll get it to you when I start working on my TV series. It's going to start filming in just a few weeks. You can get the rest of it then. I can even pay you more if you like." said Jim

"Jim.....was I not clear on the terms of our agreement?" asked Joss

"Yes, sir....you were very clear."

"So then, I can clearly recall, you looking me in the eye and promising me you would have my money at the specified date....remember?"

"Yes sir."

"Now, here we are and you don't have my money. You see the problem we have here Jimmy?" he said

"Yes."

"Go get the thirty thousand. Bring it to me," said Joss

Jim got up and walked over to the kitchen. He looked right at his wife who gave him a death look. He opened the drawer and took out three manila envelopes containing the money. Most of the money came from their son's college fund they had started. Guess he would have to be satisfied with community college now. He handed the envelopes over to Joss. He looked inside of them and put the money in his pocket, handing the envelopes back to Jim.

"Jimbo, I'm going to give you exactly one week to come up with the rest of my money. If you don't have it, I'm going to burn this lovely little make-believe house to the freggin ground. Am I clear?" said Joss standing up

"I owe you forty-five thousand dollars. I know it's a lot, but please, can I just have a little more time. I work in Hollywood. I make big money when I work. I just need a little more time.

"You think forty-five thousand dollars is a lot of money? Now Jimmy I spend that much on hookers and blow every week. It's not the money. It's the simple principle of the matter. I loaned you money with the understanding that you would pay me back the money by a specific date. You failed to do so. You gave me your word that you fulfill your end of the agreement. Your word doesn't mean shit to me at this point. If you were a man of your word, I'd have my money paid in full and I wouldn't be here, now would I?" he said

"No, no you would not be here. I failed to do what I said I would do."

Said, Jim

"Jim, in my world, there are consequences for failure. In life, there are always consequences for failure. I loaned you the money because I wanted to see you come through on your end of the bargain, but you didn't, now did you? I wanted to believe that there is just one asshole, one lousy, worthless, pathetic piece of humanity out there that can rise above his limitations and prove me wrong. Clearly, that person is not you. One week Jimmy. Don't let me down again. It won't be pretty."

"Now, you hold on just a minute. You don't come into my house and threaten me or my family...." no sooner had Jimmy spoken when one of Joss's goons smacked him and sent him tumbling backward. His wife put their baby down and ran to get Jimmy's gun. She ran into the living room and pointed it at the men.

"GET THE HELL OUT MY HOUSE!" she screamed and pointed the gun at Joss.

"One week Jimmy. I better have my money," he said. The three men got up to leave and left out the front door. Jimmy watched them climb into a limousine and drive away. He was bleeding and shaking at the same time.

"Jimmy, you have to get those people out of our lives. Just get them their money," she said and went back inside.

Jimmy sat down on the steps and put his head in his hands. He had only one choice left. He had to go to the producers of his show and ask for a loan. They would probably laugh at him, but he had no other choice. Forty-five thousand wasn't very much to them either. He hated having to grovel for money, but this was the corner he had painted himself into. He went back inside and called one of his producers and told him about the situation. There was an ominous silence on the other end. He told Jimmy that the new Chinese owners of the show wanted a Chinese dwarf to play his part. They already had a replacement lined up. It was not the news that Jim wanted to hear. He was being fired before the series even started. He hung up the phone and went back outside.

He asked himself how it had all come to this. How he had gotten himself and his family into this mess. He had made a terrible mistake, one that could ruin his life. He had already asked his agent for a loan, but his agent was in the middle of a split with his wife and wouldn't be able to help

him out financially. The hole he had dug himself into was now almost too deep to climb out of. He went back inside and told Cassandra the news. She didn't take it well.

"Well, I can't be here when they come back, Jimmy. I'm going to take the baby to my parent's house."

"Everything I did, I did for us," he said quietly

"I know Jimmy. I know things were tight for us, but there were ways out of them. Ways that did not involve loan sharks and people like Mr. Joss."

"What's done is done. If you want to leave, go ahead. You probably shouldn't be here anyway when he comes back."

"I don't want to leave you, Jimmy. Not now. I just don't want the baby to be here if they come back and start shooting."

"They won't shoot. They're not stupid. Gunshots in this neighborhood are going to draw the cops, that's not what they want."

"I can't believe there's nothing the police can do. You said you never signed for the loan. There's no way they can trace the money back to you. We should just leave. Just leave and run away. They're bound to stop looking for you after a while."

"Maybe. But what if they come knocking on your parent's door? I doubt very much they're just going to forget about me. Loan sharks don't just forget about bad loans. Joss doesn't need the money. With him, it's something else. Some kind of a sick game he plays with people like me. I played and lost. Now he's come to collect."

"I just can't believe there's nobody that can loan us the money."

"I'm an unemployed actor. Would you lend 45,000 dollars to an unemployed actor?" he asked

"No, no I probably would not," she said

Jim's phone rang. It was his brother. He thought about letting it go to voicemail, but he didn't want to upset him. He really needed to talk to someone right now anyway.

"Hi brother, how are you?" he asked

"Good....how are you?"

The two of them spoke for the next hour or so. David asked if everything was ok. He might be slow, but he wasn't that slow. He could tell by Jim's voice that something was wrong. Jim wanted to tell his brother that he was a dwarf. He told his brother that he was an actor in Hollywood, but it didn't sound like his brother watched a lot of television, at least new television. He told Jim that he liked watching sitcoms and shows from the 1980s before TV got all "weird" like it is nowadays. The more he spoke to his brother, the more guilty he felt for not telling him the truth.

He never told him that his part on the show had been given to a Chinese dwarf, or that he was up to his eyeballs in problems with a psychotic loan shark, or that his marriage was in trouble if he didn't pay this psycho loan shark. There was so much, he wanted to tell his brother, but there was so much he didn't. His brother was pouring his heart out to him and he wasn't reciprocating. Maybe he was ashamed, or maybe he really didn't want to know if his brother was a dwarf. He prayed he wasn't. It was not something he would wish upon his worst enemy. His brother asked him again if they could meet, but he told him, he was still too busy shooting to get away and that he would call him as soon as he was available. He hung up, even more depressed than he was when he answered. A feeling of impending doom began to sink in. He was screwed. There was no way he could pay off the money.

He was turned down at two banks for a home improvement loan. The fact that he made over two hundred thousand dollars last year didn't mean anything. The banks wanted proof that he was still working and the means to pay the loan back. He still had the unsigned contract his agent had sent over two days before sitting on his desk in his office. He went to two dealerships to try and sell one of their cars. He got ten thousand for a car that had cost over fifty thousand brand new. He pawned off almost everything he could find and still could only come up with fifteen thousand dollars. The one bright spot in all this was the fact that his mother's house was up for sale. She had paid it off three years ago and the sale would be almost straight profit. Jim had spent over an hour with the realtor. The house did need some repairs, but Jim had no time or money to do them. They set a price that was well below market value. The realtor said at that price, the house should be sold within a few months. He just had to find a way to keep Joss at bay until the house sold. His mother had put his name on the deed as well. There was only two thousand dollars in her bank account at the time of her death. She had put all her money and savings into the house. The realtor said 250,000 should be easy to get for her house.

Jim called Joss and told him that he had a few hundred thousand coming to him once the house was sold. Joss checked online and called the realtor. He then called Jim back and told him in no uncertain terms what he was willing to do.

"I will allow the deadline to pass if you agree to give me all of the proceeds from the house once it's sold," he said

"What? Joss, I only owe you forty-five thousand? Come on man, you can't really be serious."

"Serious? You are past your deadline. Consider the extra amount of the late fees. You ain't got many good options here Jimmy. Take my offer, it's all you've got."

"I'm sorry Mr. Joss. Look, I understand I'm in a bad situation here, but I need the money from the sale of the house. I'm willing to pay you back 70,000. That's principal plus interest. That's the best I can do."

"Well then, you better have the rest of my money by the end of the week Jimmy boy," said Joss and hung up the phone.

Jimmy was so angry, he punched the wall. He instantly regretted it and most likely broke one of his fingers. He put his hand on a pack of frozen peas and sat down in front of the TV, only to discover that his cable had been turned off from not paying the bill.

Cassandra had been calling several times a day wanting to know what was going on. Jimmy told her about Joss's offer. She wanted to know why he didn't take it.

"Because that's my house too Cass. I'm not going to just give it over to somebody like Joss."

"It's a bad deal, but at least it gets him off our backs."

"Yeah. Well, he can't kill me. If he does, he won't ever get his money. He'll probably just beat me up and make life miserable for me until I give him the rest of it."

"Do you think he'll burn our house down?"

"No. He's just bluffing. If he did, the police wouldn't have to look very far to find out who did it."

"Be careful Jim. I love you. We love you."

Jim hung up and waited for tomorrow night when Joss and his associates were bound to show up.

Joss's limo showed up at 7 pm. There were three of them total. Joss came to his front door and opened it, not even bothering to knock. Jim met them at the door and they all went into the living room.

"Where's my money, Jim?" asked Joss

"I don't have it. I only have fifteen thousand," he said

"I see. So, you are thirty thousand dollars short of our agreement."

"Yes."

"Jimmy. Do I look like the kind of guy that tolerates failure?" asked Joss

"No sir."

"Good. I don't deal with failure. Now, I was going to come over and beat your little deformed ass within inches of your life, but then, I remembered a conversation I had a while back with one of my associates. I thought of you."

"Really."

"Well, not really you, that little wifey of yours. What's her name?"

"Cassandra."

"Cassandra? Yeah, I like that name. See I have an associate of mine who makes pornographic films. Very violent and brutal ones. Some of which are banned for sale here in the United States. Well, he needs a midget or dwarf for some of his films. She won't get paid of course, but she will be working her ass off to pay off your debt to me, no pun intended. Now, these aren't your

regular run-of-the-mill porn films, no they appeal to a very selective and very disturbed segment of our society. I hope she isn't shy."

"You son of a bitch!" said Jim and charged at Joss. One of his men grabbed Jim and threw him against the wall. The other one kicked him while he was down. Joss came over and kicked him as well. Jim was in so much pain. Joss rolled him over and stood on top of him with a boot on his chest.

"You came to me, Jimmy. You came to me. Don't ever forget that." said Joss

"Boss. We got company." said one of the men looking out the window.

"Maybe it's his wife. She's the one I really need to be speaking to anyway. Take this piece of shit outside and put him into the car."

"Jimmy, I hope you did not do something like call the cops. Jesus would that piss me off," said Joss as he and his men dragged Jimmy out of his house and onto the front lawn.

The three men stopped dead in their tracks. Jimmy was in pain but managed to stand up on his own feet. He focused his attention on the figure in front of them.

He had never seen anyone so massive in his life. The man was almost seven feet tall and weighed in at over four hundred pounds. He stared at the three of them for a second before he spoke.

"Jimmy? What's going on here?" said the man. He recognized the voice as his brother Dave's voice.

"Nothing David. Get out of here."

"Jim, did these guys do this to you?" he asked

"Sir, this is a private matter between my boss and Jim here. It's none of your business." said one of Joss's men

"I'm making it my business," said David. He charged one of the men, grabbing him by his shirt and lifting him off the ground. He drove his head face-first into a window on the limousine. The other goon reached for his gun, but couldn't get it out of the holster in time. David grabbed his arm just as he had his gun drawn and snapped his arm over his shoulder. The man screamed in pain. David then picked the man up and body-slammed him on the roof of the car. He then picked him up again and slammed him on the ground. The other guy tried to grab his gun but was bleeding so badly, he could barely see. David punched the man several times, each blow striking him like he was being hit by a piece of iron. When he was done, he turned and looked right at Joss.

Joss had left his gun on the seat of the limo. He turned and tried to run away, but Jimmy had snuck up behind him. As soon as Joss turned to run, he tripped over Jimmy and fell backward. David lifted him off the ground with one arm. Hoisting him several feet off the ground and drove

him into the side of Jimmy's house. He then picked him up and body-slammed him and the sidewalk. Joss was bleeding and barely conscious. David had grabbed one of the guns that had fallen on the ground and put it right against Joss's head. He grabbed one of Joss's fingers and snapped it, causing Joss to scream out in pain.

"If you ever come near my brother again. I'm going to rip your arms and legs off your body. Do I make myself clear?" said David

"Please.....don't kill me, please." sobbed Joss

"I don't ever want to see you again. If I do, I'm really going to get mad. You wouldn't like me when I'm mad." said David

"Joss, when the house sells, you'll get your money. In the meantime, you stay away from me and my family....got it?" said Jim

"Whatever you want.....just get this guy off me," said Joss.

"Get out of my house," said Jim.

The three men hobbled over to the limousine. One of the men opened the driver's door. Joss grabbed him and pulled him out of the way. He got in the limousine and drove away. Jim knew they were gone, but they would be back, probably with reinforcements.

"You ok, brother?" said David as he carried him inside.

"Nothing a cold beer wouldn't fix," said Jim

He quickly realized that his brother was so big, he couldn't even fit inside his little house. He grabbed the beers and went outside. The two of them sat and talked for hours. He told David everything. He wasn't going to lie to him anymore.

David had gotten permission from his PO for an overnight visit and permission to leave town. He was going to surprise Jim and his family for their first reunion. It had probably saved Jim's life.

Two months later his mother's house was sold to a cash buyer. When the paperwork had been signed and the check deposited, he took out what money he owed Joss and arranged for a meeting. He made sure it was in a very public place. Joss wasn't even there to collect it. He sent one of his associates. He had his arm in a cast and had stitches all over his face. He said nothing to Jim as he took the briefcase and walked away. Jim didn't know if he would ever see Joss again. It would just be something he would have to live with.

Jim later found out that the chances of his parents carrying the gene for both dwarfism and gigantism were about 475 million to one. They were simply astronomical. Maybe to the rest of the world, but not to Jim. He always liked to play the odds.