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The Little Things

Patrick pulled the disgusting handkerchief out of his pocket and blew his nose. Here he was again, in rainy December weather with a cold. He sneezed, blew his nose, and straightened his jacket. He had agreed to take the night shift so Terrance could spend the holidays with his family. There was a gentle knock on the building door and Patrick shuffled to his feet.

“Coming!” He whispered. Patrick had a habit of talking when no one was around to hear him. Growing up his mother had always told him that the walls had ears, so when no one was around, he made conversation with the walls.

He cautiously opened the door and inched out into the pouring rain. “Mel?” He was startled to see the mail carrier looking out at him from under a huge leopard print coat. “What are you doing here?”

“Mail was delayed.” She shook her head and sprayed Patrick with water.

“It’s one o’clock in the morning.”

“So?”

“Couldn’t wait for tomorrow?”

“What, you want me to have more work tomorrow?” Even her voice sounded wet.

“No, it’s just, I mean... You wanna come in and dry off?”

“No. I gotta go deliver mail to the hotel across the street. They’ve been calling the mail office every fifteen minutes for the past five hours complaining about some important package.”

“Oh. Well, I’m sorry.” Truth was, he wasn’t.

“Yeah, sure.” She pulled a bundle of paper out from her cart. “Well here’s your mail.”

“Thanks...” Suddenly he felt nervous. “Well, stay dry okay? Take care of yourself.”

Mel was already walking away. Patrick felt a sudden urge to follow her, to go on a nighttime adventure around the city, to kiss her, to tell her his life story, to do anything, but she was too far ahead of him. He was walking back into the building when she turned around.

“Hey Patrick? Happy holidays okay?”

“Thanks.” He whispered.

Once inside the building Patrick took off his coat and slid out of his shoes. The doorman uniform had been a present from one of the wealthy families in the building, but it had long ago been ruined by rain and snow and sleet. He sat on the floor with the bundle of paper and began to sort.

“22A.... 46C... The Smiths... No, the Johnsons live in 23D now... Hmmm... Wrong building... Do we have a Lee family?...” He did not notice the door opening and the shadow of the young woman that appeared over him.

“Hey Patrick?” Her voice made the paper on the floor flutter.

“Oh, Ms. Johnson! I’m so sorry, didn’t hear you there!” He stumbled to his feet, suddenly painfully aware of his lack of shoes and jacket.

“It’s okay Patrick, and please, call me Patricia. I just wanted to give you a holiday present.” She held out an envelope and a cup of hot coffee. “You’ve been so good to me this past year, I wanted to make sure you knew I didn’t forget.”

“I wasn’t worried ma’am.” He winced. “Patricia.”

“I know Patrick. I just wanted to make sure you had a nice holiday, okay?” Her voice was gentle and Patrick felt like a child again.

“That’s nice of you. Thank you.” Gingerly he took the envelope and put it down on the floor. He held onto the warm coffee, enjoying the pain it created in his frosty fingers.

“Of course. Take care of yourself, okay? See you in the morning.” Patricia was moving towards the elevator when Patrick suddenly sprang to attention.

“Yes yes, of course! But wait one second, willya? Here’s your mail!” He held out a large stack of bills and she took them.

“Thanks.” She smiled. The elevator dinged and she stepped inside. He didn’t need to watch her to know that she pressed the 27th floor button and then slid into the back left corner and took her scarf off. He just knew these things.

Patrick stepped over the large piles of mail on the floor and reached for the key on his desk. He grabbed the heavy metal key and began to open the various mailboxes. He slid stacks into almost all the boxes before he sneezed again. He dropped the stack he was holding and it flew all over the floor. Grumbling, Patrick bent down to pick it up but his socked feet slid out from under him and he was suddenly face-to-face with the floor. He rolled onto his back and stared at the ceiling.

The painted figures on the dome seemed to laugh at him, and he closed his eyes. He desperately wished he could be anywhere but here. Somewhere out in rainy New York, somewhere on an adventure. Patrick groaned and stood up. He slid around in his socks collecting the papers he had dropped and barely stopped short of slipping again. Patrick reached for the directory of building inhabitants on the bookshelf above his desk when the wood came crashing down. Patrick looked at the pile on the floor, turned his back, and calmly sat down on the other side of the room staring at it. There was a nice hole in the wall where the shelf had been, and someone would raise hell in the morning about all the plaster dust that had spilled onto the floor. But that was a problem for tomorrow Patrick.

He lay down on the floor, the cold tile nice against his warm cheek. He wondered what his brothers were doing, they were probably celebrating the holidays or something nice like that. Patrick checked his watch, it was 1:30 am. For the first time in his life, Patrick decided to do something crazy. He was going to walk over to his desk, pick up the phone, call Mel and ask her out on a date. He pushed himself off the floor and padded over to his desk. In the crack between his desk and the wall a piece of

paper had landed, and Patrick tugged on it gently. The paper was dark and crinkly, and it almost came apart in his hands.

It was a letter addressed to a Miss Brown and was dated 1942. Patrick unfolded the pages and was quickly lost in a love story. The letter was from an admirer who wanted to ask Miss Brown for her accompaniment that summer in France. Patrick finished reading and put the letter back on his desk. He would never be apart of something that romantic. He suddenly knew he had to return the letter. Mel delivered mail, maybe she would know where to find this Miss Brown. Patrick's hand were shaking as he picked up his phone. Mel picked up after the first ring.

"Hello?" She sounded far away.

"Hey Mel, this is Patrick." He swallowed. "I was hoping you could do me a favor."

"Sure thing. What?"

"I found this letter and it's from 1942 and it's addressed to a Miss Brown and I know this sounds weird and it's really late at night but I have to return it, and you see, and..." Patrick was suddenly painfully aware he was rambling. "It's a love letter Mel. I just can't bear the thought of Miss Brown never knowing what happened to it."

"... I know a Miss Brown who lives in a nursing home on Pine Street. She's still got this amazing red hair."

"That's her! The letter describes her hair!" Patrick was ecstatic. "Nursing home on Pine? Meet you there in twenty!"

"Patrick. It's almost two in the morning. The woman's probably asleep, and who'd look after your building anyway?" Mel's voice was gentle.

"Doesn't matter. Any of it." Patrick was fumbling with his phone as he put his jacket on. "We'll leave the letter at the front desk, and I'll lock the building door or something."

"You sure about this?"

“Come on Mel! It’s the holidays, live a little!”

Patrick hung up the phone and blew his nose nervously. Taking a deep breath he headed out into the rain, nearly forgetting to shut the door behind him. Twenty-five minutes later he found himself standing, sopping wet, in the doorway of a nursing home with Mel.

“Hey Mel?” He looked at her.

“Yeah?”

“Have dinner with me after this?”

“It’s two in the morning Patrick.” She sounded worried about him.

“Fine, make it breakfast.”

Mel started to reply but stopped when a young attendant noticed them.

“Can I help you?” She asked.

“Yeah. We’re looking for Ms. Brown.” Mel’s voice was confident.

“We have something for her.” Patrick added.

“Oh. I see. Are you family?”

“No, friends.” Mel gave Patrick a strange look.

“Well, she’s in the dining room if you’d like to see her yourself. That’s right this way.”

The attendant lead them down a long corridor and Patrick couldn’t shake his nerves. The attendant threw open a door, and Mel and Patrick followed her into a lavish dining room. There were people everywhere -- some drinking, some sleeping, some snoring, some talking, some looking into space, and some being cajoled by their family to enjoy the holidays. The attendant pointed to an elderly woman sitting in a chair by the window.

“That’s her,” she said. “She’s a good one. Ninety-five but don’t act like it.”

“Thanks,” Mel smiled and the attendant left the room.

Patrick approached the woman by the window. He wasn't sure how to give her the letter. He'd gotten lost in thought when he felt Mel give him a little push.

"Just do it," she whispered.

Patrick swallowed. "Excuse me?" He smiled at the woman. "Miss Brown?"

The woman looked at him. "Is it still raining outside?"

"Uh yes ma'am."

"Hmm. Fancy that." She turned around to look at him more closely. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, my name is Patrick and I'm a doorman in a building I think you used to live in, and well, today, a little accident made this shelf in the lobby come crashing down and I found this letter behind the wall and I think it belongs to you."

"Really?" Miss Brown pulled a pair of glasses from her pocket and put them on her frail face.

"May I see it?"

Patrick handed her the letter and watched the raindrops falling off his shoe and into the carpet as she read. He was vaguely aware of her crying out, putting her hand to her mouth, and Mel putting a hand on her shoulder. Patrick wasn't sure anymore if giving her the letter had been the right thing to do.

"Patrick?" Mel said. "You okay buddy? Look what you did, huh? Look how happy you made her!"

Patrick looked at the tears streaming down Miss Brown's face and nodded. "Yeah, 'course. Right thing to do."

"I don't think I've ever enjoyed myself so much at holiday time. I've always felt so lonely. You, Patrick, have made me a very happy woman tonight." Miss Brown squeezed Patrick's hand. "You look like you know a thing or two about being lonely, so get out of here, away from all these old people, and enjoy yourselves."

Patrick and Mel said their goodbyes and headed back into the rain. They stood under the awning, protected by the rain, and looked at each other for a while. Mel had grabbed Patrick's hand and was holding on tight. Patrick finally broke the silence.

"Hey Mel? Wanna go to the Empire State Building? I hear it's beautiful this time of night."

"Yeah sure." Mel sounded nervous. "Hey Patrick?"

"Hmm?"

"I like you." She blinked. "Okay?"

He tightened his hand around hers. "Okay."

They walked the ten blocks in the rain occasionally sidestepping a puddle and occasionally walking into each other. They reached the Empire State Building at 3:00 am and ignored the strange look the security guard gave them. They took pictures for their building passes and pressed the button in the elevator. They were silent on the way up. The doors clicked open and Patrick edged out, drawing Mel behind him.

They stood by the elevator looking up at the sky. They could see barely see the stars. There was a gust of wind and Mel shivered. Patrick put his arm around her. He used his other arm to reach into his pocket and pull out some change.

"Wanna use the 'scope?" He said.

"Sure." She took the change from his hand and walking away from him, slid it into the slot.

Patrick watched her at the telescope and suddenly felt lost. He stepped away and pulled his phone out of his pocket. He punched in a number and waited as it rang.

"Hello?" A sleepy feminine voice asked.

"Hi Ms. Johnson, I'm aware it's incredibly late, or early, depending on how you look at it, but I just... I just realized I am so very far away from home and I'm not sure I know how to get back..."

Patrick's voice had dropped to a whisper. "And something told me you would know."

“Patrick? Are you alright?” She sounded concerned.

“Yes yes I’m fine. I just wanted to thank you for being there for me this past year.”

“Always. We gotta keep an eye out for each other in this big city of ours.” Patrick could hear her rustling bed sheets.

“Hey Patrick?” He could imagine standing by her window looking out onto the street. “Are you somewhere outside? Do you see what I see?”

Something caught Patrick’s eye and he looked over at Mel. Something shiny was falling from the sky. In fact, lots of shiny somethings were falling from the sky. “Yes Ms. Johnson. I see the falling stars,” he whispered.

“They’re not stars Patrick! I don’t know what they are!” She sounded excited.

Mel was waving at him. Patrick could hear her yelling “Meteors! It’s a meteor shower!” at him.

“Meteors Ms. Johnson. It’s a meteor shower.”

“Well would you fancy that!” She laughed. “Isn’t that an amazing sight to witness?”

“Guess so.”

“Patrick?”

“Yeah?”

“Did you ask Mel out yet?”

“Kind of.”

“Then you’re already home buddy. Sometimes we have to fall and get back up again to realize it, but we’re all where we’re meant to be. You got that?” She sounded gentle.

“Yeah, I guess I do.” He blew his nose. “Thanks so much, and really, I’m so sorry for waking you up.”

“Don’t worry about it.” She was getting back into bed. “And hey, Patrick? My name’s Patricia.”

“Nice to meet you Patricia.” And with that she hung up the phone.

Patrick put his cell back in his pocket and walked back over to Mel. He grabbed her hand and peered through the telescope next to her. She was talking, quickly, about the meteors about planets, about something science related.

“Hey Mel?” He said quietly.

“Yeah Patrick?” She looked at him with wide eyes.

“Happy holidays.”

And he kissed her.