

Flatscreen

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Sarah swept her thick brown hair up into a quick bun at the back of her head. She watched from behind the counter as a young boy dressed in a winter coat and snow pants paraded through the door. He disregarded wiping his shoes on the mat by the door, his boots smearing slush across the floor. She felt annoyed at first by the mess, but justified his actions by thinking that she was about to mop the floors anyhow. He surveyed the multiple flavors of ice cream, as he leaned against the glass, either ignoring or not seeing the sign that read in neat letters *Please don't lean on the glass.*

After a moment he made his way over to the counter and stuck his hand in the fishbowl

Filled with penny candies in small plastic bags. He fumbled around in the bowl before selecting one bag of fuzzy peaches and one of raspberry shaped candies.

“Is that all?” She asked, ringing in the candy on her cash register. The boy nodded.

“That will be ninety eight cents please.” He stuck his hands in his pockets, emptied a handful of nickels, dimes and pennies onto the wooden counter, took the candy and walked out to join his friends.

Sarah counted the change, eighty six cents. She opened the cash register, placing the coins in their proper place, before counting out the other twelve cents from the change she kept behind the cash register for instances like these.

A few more people came in to the convenience store after that. People mostly came here to buy milk, eggs, bread and other such things. The last man who came in bought a pack of cigarettes. He asked for a pack with a picture of a family for the warning sign, instead of a photograph of the effects of cancer on your lungs, teeth, or other body parts. He explained that he had young children at home and didn't want them seeing those images. She nodded, and wanted to ask him why he would be smoking around his children in the first place, had he heard about second hand smoke? But she kept her mouth closed. The man smiled, paid her, and left.

Sarah got out the mop and bucket to start washing down the floors before closing up for the night. She didn't mind closing up the store each night. The small convenience store had few employees. She understood that her boss appreciated the help, so she didn't resent working

the long shifts that she did. And it kept her occupied, with less time to spend at home puttering around the kitchen and living room wiping down the already spotless countertops. Her only request, when she applied to work in the store, was that she could have her Sundays off. She wasn't religious, but liked a day of relaxation where she could drink hot mint tea and cook the food that she would then freeze and eat the rest of the week.

She was about to close up for the day when Harry, a man who came in often, walked through the door. He never bought than a pack of gum every few weeks, and Sarah expected that he didn't have very much money. He was an older man, Sarah guessed that he might be in his mid sixties, and each day he wore the same deep green corduroy overalls, one strap connected over his shoulder, tugging at the corner of the fabric, the other lying limp.

Although Harry rarely purchased anything, he nevertheless came in every day to browse the shop, and have a conversation with Sarah. Green and red sour keys were his favorite candy, and Sarah treated him to one each time he came to see her. He said they reminded him of Christmas.

Harry would sometimes tell her about how he used to go to see movies on the big screen when he was a child. He would put so much butter on the popcorn that it would leak onto his lap, but he wouldn't care. Nine year old boys rarely care about such things. He told her that he never went to the cinema after he grew up, but he would always miss those old movies.

Sometimes he would tell her how much things used to cost, compared to today. Sarah

would point to an item, say a piece of liquorice, and Harry would say “Only three cents. But three cents was a lot more back then you know Sarah”.

Once a few months ago he mentioned that the sole of his left shoe had broken. He didn't complain though, Harry rarely complained about anything.

“Sarah, you wouldn't be sellin' socks, now would you?” He had asked one day when he came into the shop. Harry often formed his sentences that way, never directly asking for what he wanted, or assuming anything.

“Sorry Harry, we don't sell socks,” Sarah had replied. Harry seemed to shift uncomfortably and Sarah looked down at his feet.

Harry coughed into his sleeve, and then said casually, “Well the rubber at the bottom of one of my shoes seems to have broke, and my sock has gotten quite wet...”

That was the year she bought Harry a new pair of boots for Christmas. Nice winter ones that would keep his feet dry and warm. He cried when she gave them to him. She called them an early Christmas present, since it was only mid November. Ever since then he's preferred the green and red sour keys as opposed to the other ones.

Today when Harry came in he seemed different than usual. She thought that this was to be expected though, considering the conversation that they had had the day before.

It was a fairly calm and uneventful day at the shop, when Harry made his daily visit. He didn't bother with small talk on that day, and had an air of sadness and importance to him. He

came over to

Sarah, and asked her if they could take a seat on the chairs that were set up at the back of the ice cream store. Sarah obliged, and went to sit down.

There, Harry told Sarah about his illness. He had been diagnosed with cancer a few days before. He said he didn't want any sympathy, he just thought that she should know. He told her that the doctor had given him three months to live, four at the very most. It was a brief visit, and Sarah had wanted him to stay longer and talk with her. He mumbled something about needing to be somewhere and went on his way.

After that, every time she would hear the bell ring at the top of the door, indicating someone had come in, she would look up to see if it was Harry. It was never him though. She went about her day in a kind of daze, everything she did having a slightly different significance.

And so there he was now, with a different air about him. He said hello, and looked at the ice cream flavors. Just as the little boy had done, but took great care not to touch the glass. He stayed there for a moment, reading the descriptions on the small labels on each tub of ice cream, although he knew he wasn't about to buy any of them. He meandered over to the counter then, and took out a folded piece of paper, crumpled around the edges.

"Sarah," he asked, unfolding the paper and smoothing it out, "could you help me with something?"

"Of course," she answered, smiling.

“I have a form I need to fill out; you don’t suppose you could help me with it?” He handed Sarah the piece of paper.

Sarah read the print at the top of the page. It was a form for ordering a Dolby Flat Screen television. It was a fancy high definition television with big surround sound. She didn’t know how Harry was going to pay for it, but she thought that she would help him fill out the form nonetheless. Sarah grabbed a pen from behind the cash register and they went to sit down in the same chairs they had sat in the day before.

The process of filling out the form began with the standard questions such as name and date of birth. These questions went by quickly, Sarah reading the questions aloud, Harry answering them, and Sarah writing them down. They got to the harder questions, such as method of payment and other such things, when Sarah stopped.

“I don’t mean to offend you, Harry, but this television is, well, it’s pretty...expensive?”

Harry smiled, “No payments till April.”