

The Little Things

I peeked in the bushes, holding a few stray branches out of the way so that they would not catch on to my frizzy brown curls. I pulled my white bonnet further down over my head and wiped dirt off of the cream lace shoulders of my dress. I took another step through the rhododendrons, scanning each interstice for my younger brother. “Ben? I’m going to find you...” I taunted, pawing through the leaves. Realizing that he certainly was not in the bushes, I walked out of them and suddenly felt a tap on my shoulder. In a whirl, I whipped around. My mother stood before me, her hands on her hips. She wore a blue apron smeared with flour over her pale green dress.

“Rose, dear, whatever are you doing?” she asked, her brow furrowed.

“I’m playing hide-and-seek with Ben,” I explained, patting at my bonnet frivolously.

“Well, the biscuits are ready, and Miss Daily only likes her biscuits warm.” She clucked her tongue. “Hurry along, we haven’t time to waste. I already started the rhubarb pie for Dr. Brosen. His nephew’s coming to visit in only an hour!”

“That’s nice,” I said absently. “Ben!” I called. “I have to make a delivery. Sorry.”

Ben crawled from behind the willow tree, his boyish grin fading. “Aw,” he moaned. He scampered over to where my mother and I stood.

I ruffled his hair affectionately. “We can finish playing when I return,” I assured.

“Only if it’s still light,” my mother added. She handed me the basket of hot, fresh-baked biscuits. My mouth watered and my stomach growled when the sweet smell met my nose.

“Now hurry on, Rose. You’re already late,” Ma pushed. She leaned over and solicitously tucked a few of my loose curls into my bonnet.

I began to frolic towards town, holding up the skirt of my dress so that the mud from last night’s rain shower would not stain the cloth. I turned and blew a kiss to my mother and brother and drifted away from the garden.

The spring sun was masked only by a thin strip of clouds. Light wind played against my smiling face, and I twirled as I went, basking in the perfect weather. A few moments later, I was in the town, and I slowed down my brisk pace. I watched the people

mill around the town, bustling about their business. My father happened to walk by me, leading his horse, Claudia, with a rope. He smiled his effervescent smile and tipped his hat in my direction. “How do you do, princess? Going to make another delivery?”

I beamed. “Yes, Pa.” I trotted over to him. I leaned close to him as if sharing with him a secret. “Ma said she’s baking a rhubarb pie for Dr. Brosen, but I’m two pennies certain that she’s fixing up another one with the extra dough.”

He laughed. “Well, I s’pose I’ve got something to look forward to, then.” Pa stopped chuckling suddenly, and he reached into his pocket. “I made you something in the shop today, with some scrap metal.”

My eyes widened in anticipation. “Oh, Pa, you didn’t have to—”

He waved me off. “I wanted to.” He laid the necklace gently in my hands.

I brightened as soon as I saw it. It was a silver chain with a small charm, which I assumed was the piece he had made in the shop. The charm had no particular shape, but when I shifted it around in my palm, the light caught in a way that made it shimmer as if it were magic.

I almost cried, it was so beautiful. “Pa, thank you so much,” I gushed, falling into his arms in an embrace. He squeezed me back.

“I’ve got to go, princess. See you at home,” he said.

I smiled and waved as he walked on with Claudia. I turned and continued walking while at the same time fastening the necklace around my neck. Once it was on, I felt as proud as a knight in shining armor.

I shuffled forward, the dirt crunching beneath my shoe soles. I skipped up to Miss Daily’s front doorstep and knocked on her old wooden door. I waited a moment, and when she did not come right away, I knocked again. This time, she called out, “Who is it?”

I coughed. “It’s Rose, Miss Daily. I’ve brought your biscuits.”

“Oh yes,” I heard her say. I listened to her footsteps and she opened the door, her eyes lined with the impending permanence of wrinkles. Her graying blonde hair was tied back into an intricate knot. She kept her hand on the doorknob as if she were going to close it at any time. I swallowed and held forward the basket of biscuits.

“From my mother,” I explained. “She gives you her best regards, as do I.”

“Thank you, my dear,” she said quietly. There was something peculiar about Miss Daily today that I could not quite place my finger on. There was a tense look to her old blue eyes. She continuously glanced sideways as if someone was watching us.

“Are you all right, Miss Daily?” I asked. Ma sometimes would be worried about her, being that Miss Daily was a widow and all. Miss Daily had never really seemed to have recovered from her husband’s death in the war.

Her eyes suddenly bored into mine like daggers. She stammered, “I—I, yes. I’m fine, dear. You’re sweet to ask,” she said.

I cocked my head as Miss Daily’s eyes flitted about again. “Are you sure I can’t do anything else for you, ma’am?” I tried again.

She stopped and repeated her somewhat troubling stare. She breathed in and out once, shut her eyes for a few seconds, and reopened them. “If you must know, and perhaps it’s better you do, all I wish for is that you be careful in the near future. Just...just hold on to the little things that bring you joy; don’t concentrate so much on the bigger things.”

I pursed my lips. “Why are you telling me this, if you don’t mind my asking?” I ventured, thoroughly confused.

She sighed. “Don’t worry about why. Just keep in mind what I’ve told you.”

“But—but is there something I should know about?” I asked, suddenly worried.

“No—darling, please, I’m going to go sit and have some tea now with these lovely biscuits. Good night.”

“But Miss Daily—”

“Thank you, Rose.”

I set my jaw, nodded at her, and spun on my heel. As I walked back onto the street, I tried to puzzle over Miss Daily’s words. Her words flew through my brain again, but I could not dwell on them at the moment. I was late. I needed to get back to mother.

A few moments later, I arrived home, bustling. Mother stood at the door, a disapproving expression plastered on her face. She held the rhubarb pie in front of her. I tried to avoid her eyes as I gently took the pie from her hands and folded it into the cloth. “Sorry, Ma...Miss Daily got to talking, and Pa stopped me up on the way there...”

“We’ll deal with it later,” Ma said tightly. “Just don’t dillydally this time round.”

“I won’t,” I said, and I hurried off back towards town, clutching the pie protectively.

Once I was back in the village, I navigated quickly to Dr. Brosen’s small practice. It was a nicer place, and there was a bronze knocker on his door, which I used, feeling important to an extent.

To my shock, it was not Dr. Brosen who opened the door. A nurse would answer the door on a normal occasion, but Dr. Brosen did not accept patients on Sundays—only if it was an emergency. But neither did a nurse greet me. It was Dr. Brosen’s nephew who opened the door.

I coughed as he smiled at me. “Hello, miss,” he said, and bowed his head slightly. I did a bit of an ungraceful curtsy, and my cheeks went pink. He smiled again.

“My name is James. I’m Dr. Brosen’s nephew.”

“An absolute pleasure to meet you, Mr. Brosen,” I said automatically. “I sincerely apologize if I have inconvenienced you and Dr. Brosen with my tardiness. I hope that you and Dr. Brosen will forgive us, as the fault was entirely mine.”

He waved his hand dismissively. “Oh, don’t apologize for anything of that sort. You’ve done nothing to inconvenience us. And please, call me James. I can’t stand to hear ‘Mr. Brosen’ all the time.”

I nodded once. I handed him the rhubarb pie. I looked him over. He had hair dark brown in color, and he wore traditional tan trousers and coat.

“This smells absolutely delicious.” James looked at me. “I realize that you may have not expected me to answer the door. My uncle is treating a patient. It was an emergency. The poor man tripped over a bent nail or something of the like and broke his leg.”

“How awful,” I said, shaking my head.

James shifted. “Would you like to come in?”

I opened my mouth slightly, a tad thrown off balance. “Oh, I—”

“I realize it’s late,” he interjected. “It would only be for a few minutes. Sorry, I don’t wish to bother you, only my uncle wishes for me to observe him at his task.” James dropped his voice. “I don’t want to sound disloyal, but I’ve never taken an interest in the

medical field. But my uncle so terribly wants me to become a doctor. I'll be living with Dr. Brosen any day now, though, so I suppose I should become used to all of this."

"Why will you be living with him soon?" I asked. James gestured for me to step inside, and it appeared as though he would not take no for an answer.

As I walked with him to the parlor, he explained. "My mother's dying, you see. She has the fever. She wanted me to visit my uncle today to tell him that it could be only a few days now until she's gone, and she wants me to ask him if he'll let me stay. He's already made it clear that I can live here. My father died in the war a few years ago, so my uncle's really all I've got left. My mother said she wouldn't be satisfied unless she knew for certain I had a happy, safe place to live after she died."

I sat down on the sofa, and he took a seat across from me. "So I came here to verify that I could stay, and tomorrow I'll be going back to tell her. This way, she can have peace of mind."

James set the pie on the coffee table. "You didn't tell me your name," he pointed out.

"My apologies," I said. "It's Rose."

"Would you like anything to drink, Rose?" he asked. "That's a wonderful name, by the way."

I smiled and shook my head. "No, thank you, sir."

He chuckled and shook his head. "Please, oh please, don't call me sir, either. Just James, if you will."

"Sorry."

"Don't apologize. Most likely, I'll be schooling here soon, if I can convince my uncle of it. He wants to teach me, but I think I'd quite rather just go to the school like everyone else. But I can't have you calling me 'Mr. Brosen' or 'sir' if I'll be going to school with you."

I laughed. "I suppose that might sound odd."

"Exactly," James said. "I'm afraid, however, my chances of going to the school will be unlikely." He looked at the floor. "My uncle is so very firm about what he wants. I suppose that's why he's such a good doctor. If he wants that man's broken leg to be fixed, well, then it will be, no matter what."

“You seem to be in a predicament,” I speculated. “A difficult one.”

“Yes.” He shook his head. “I should just be thankful that I have a nice place to stay.”

“But you wouldn’t be taken to an orphanage. Your father was an officer, yes? Dr. Brosen has spoken of his brother before.”

“He was. And you’re right; I wouldn’t be taken to an orphanage. But I’m sure I wouldn’t be happy wherever they would take me.”

There was a soft silence in the air for a moment. I bit my lip as his soft green eyes caught mine. “I suppose I ought go now,” I said, standing.

He clumsily stood up in return. “Perhaps. It’s darkening outside.” He waved his hand towards the door, and I followed him as he showed me out.

In the vestibule, he bowed, and I curtsied. “A pleasure to meet you, Rose,” he said.

“A pleasure to have met you as well, James,” I returned. He opened the door for me, and I stepped outside. I turned and waved, but then I stopped and took a step towards him. I grabbed his hand and squeezed it. “James, all will be okay. You worry, but I promise, although it may seem hard, you must see that everything will be all right.” I tingled. Where had that come from?

A little startled, James’s mouth opened slightly ajar. He looked down and nodded. “You’re right. Thank you.” He brought my hand to his lips and gently planted a kiss on it. My cheeks turned hot.

I swept myself away, holding up the full skirt of my dress and trotting into the melting orange sunset, my mouth stretched into an everlasting smile, feeling the pulsing strength of these smaller moments.

I jolted awake to the sharp beeping of my alarm clock. I shut off the mechanical noise and froze, the wisps of an extremely peculiar dream lingering in my brain. Something so strange had happened. I desperately reached into the corners of my mind, swiping for fragments of it, but I surmised nothing of the jumbled puzzle pieces.

I put on a pair of jeans and a lacy white blouse and tumbled down the stairs. I tried to dispose of the tangle of my dream, but it nagged at me all morning. I popped a waffle into the toaster and angrily bit my lip in attempt to determine why the dream bothered me so.

I drizzled maple syrup over the waffle, and my stomach growled when I smelled the sweet breakfast. My mouth parted when this happened. The feeling of the craving for food had somehow linked back to my dream. A glimpse of a warm spring day spliced into my vision. I shook my head and forked through my waffle.

Suddenly, I heard a cry emerge from upstairs. I jumped off my stool and ran upstairs into my brother's room. I opened the door and saw his vulnerable figure on the bed, twitching and making distressed noises. I rushed over to him and gently roused him. His eyes jerked open. "It's okay, Ben," I said. "It was just a nightmare."

He was sweating. "No, no," he cried, his face contorted with fear.

I knelt down and squeezed his hand. "Ben, all will be okay. Everything will be all right." I inhaled sharply, and suddenly I was at a door, squeezing someone's hand and telling him the same thing. A feeling of sympathy. A kiss on my hand. Heat rising in my cheeks. A transcendent sunset. I was sucked back into reality. I exhaled. What had that been? My head spun.

I stood abruptly, and felt this strange pull in my muscles. I walked over to my room and pried open my jewelry box. I gently lifted the necklace my father had given me out of the box and laid it in my palm. I shifted my hand, and resplendent light splintered off of it in different directions. A tear slipped out of my eye. I remembered it now; *a horse, a tipping of the hat. An embrace.*

A gift.

A sack of warm biscuits. An aging woman. Speaking words I don't understand.

My mother came into my room and gave me a kiss on the cheek. "Good morning sweetie." She furrowed her brow. "Something wrong?"

I swallowed. *An aging woman. Miss...Miss Daily. Strange words. I can't remember.*

I gasped. I *can* remember.

My father came into the room as well and smiled his warm smile. “Is that the necklace I gave you, princess?” he asked, a tinge of natural contentment in his voice.

More tears trickled down my face as I fastened the necklace safely around my neck. I threw my arms around my father.

I smiled, my eyes clouded with mirth.

It's just the little things that bring you joy.