

A Ring For Her Finger

Brennan woke to the seventh chime. He sat up and stared out the window, sighed, stood then walked to the bathroom. He showered and dressed. In his bedroom again, he lit a candle, the one on the dresser, and looked out the window again. He shook his head, blew out the candle, then walked to the kitchen and fixed a simple breakfast, buttered toast and oatmeal, orange juice, coffee. He put the dishes in the sink, grabbed the wrong book from the shelf, and left the apartment. He looked up at the mostly clear sky. It was a beautiful day. It was a spring day, one of the earlier spring days of the year, still crisp with the lingering cold of winter. It would be a good day. He smiled, feeling in his hand the weight of the book. He walked down the street to the pub for the morning ritual.

Ashley was waiting for him, sitting in her usual chair at the usual table. She already had her coffee and scone. Brennan took the seat opposite her. Ashley studied his face for a moment. “Not much sleep?”

Brennan nodded. He closed his eyes, inhaled deep then exhaled slowly. He opened his eyes and looked around the pub. “The train didn’t go by. It was a bother.”

“What?”

“Don’t worry about it.” He looked at the book, sighed. “I grabbed the wrong one.”
Always, he thought.

“Brennan, what’s the matter?”

“No, nothing. I meant to grab a different book. I keep forgetting to bring it. How’re you this morning?”

“I’m well. Well, mostly, just tired from work.”

Brennan watched her twist her hair around her fingers. *Always nervous*, he thought,

nervous or maybe anxious. A dream shouldn't rush itself. "Been busy?"

She nodded. "We're a bit understaffed these days."

The waitress walked over to the table. Abigail.

Brennan smiled. "I'll have my usual. Thank you." She nodded and walked away. Silence. Abigail returned a few minutes later and left a tray with three espressos and two shots of whiskey. Brennan drank two espressos and a whiskey. He paused, looking at the empty glasses, studying the way the espresso clung to the white porcelain, how the remaining drop of whiskey didn't fight gravity at all. He closed his eyes, sighed, and stared again at the glasses. *Everything is burdened by the weight of it*, he thought, *everything carries it differently*. He produced a small tin from his pocket, pulled a small paper from the sleeve and gently placed a clump of thinly cut tobacco leaves. He rolled the cigarette and lit with what seemed the same motion. *Different movements*, he thought, *always different, always only overlapping*. He inhaled deeply, held his breath for a long moment, and exhaled. "Any plans for today?"

Ashley shrugged. "No, not really. Though I do have the day off. There are some things to do around the apartment, but nothing that *needs* to be done today."

Brennan drank the last espresso and whiskey while Ashley twirled her hair. He never understood the thoughts of the dream, the desires of the dream. All he knew was his love and his wish to show it as feebly as he could. But he was a thinker. If she was a dream, he was a thought, and as much as he thought his love for her was life he found life deafening and his love for her muting.

He looked at the book again and sighed. He exhaled a cloud of smoke. Of all books to pull from the shelf. How had he confused the two? Still, there would be another "I'm free also. And today is not a good day to read this. Do you want to go do something? Maybe a walk in the

park?”

Ashley smiled. She didn't smile. She became a smile. She looked down for a moment, as if to hide the fullness of it. “A walk sounds lovely.”

Brennan put out the cigarette. “Maybe we can get lost in the park like the good old days.”

Ashley nodded, still a smile. “I would like that.”

It could have been perfect, but he had taken the wrong book. *Always the wrong book*, he thought.

Sometime late October, Brennan arrived in the pub earlier than usual, before Ashley. He was carrying a book, the proper book, the one with the hollowed out center. He smiled. Today would be perfect, for all its imperfections this one thing was right. He looked at the clock. Ashley was running late. The smile faded. After the usual meeting time arrived and departed he fulfilled his ritual all the same. A new girl, Mary, brought the espressos and whiskeys.

When he returned to his room he found a small package outside his door. He brought it to his room and sat on the bed. He placed the book on the nightstand. He placed the book on the nightstand then looked at the little package. It was well wrapped in brown paper. He unwrapped it. Inside was a small box of dark wood. He opened wooden box and pulled out a wad of white cloth. He looked at it curiously. A piece of paper fell to the ground. He leaned forward and picked it up. He unfolded it:

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Dearest Brennan,

I'm so sorry. This belongs to you. What I mean to say is I cannot carry it anymore without you. I always hoped you would ask for it, that you would give me a ring and maybe someday a child. I've always adored your silence and distance. It let me breath in a way no one else did. They gave me closeness and a voice. But I need you to carry this. It's gotten to heavy for me. I just wish you asked for it. I wanted to share it with you, not lose it. It hurts that it had to end like this.

I'm sorry. Farewell.

Love always,

Ashley

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Brennan read over the note a second time then carefully unfolded the cloth. Inside was a finger, a severed finger, *her* ring finger, he knew. The edge was carefully wrapped and tied with a piece of thread. He stared at it for a long while. He wiped his eyes, shook his head, then grabbed the book from the nightstand. He breathed deep an exhaled slowly opened it. The center was cut out and the pages glued together, and a small velvet pouch sat inside. He took the pouch and returned to the bed.

He looked at the pouch and then at the box with the finger, then at the pouch again. He poured the pouch's content into his palm. A silver ring with an elegant, though small, ruby. He stared at it vacantly. Gently, he slid the finger into the ring. He sighed.

"I'm so sorry, Ashley. I wanted it to be more, but I always brought the wrong book. I don't know why. But I don't know how to carry this without the rest of you." Looking towards the doorway, he thought he saw her standing there—smiling her smile, being a smile, the ring on her finger, the finger on her hand, a child at her side, their child—thought. He thought it,

dreamed it, but nothing more. *Everything is burdened by the weight of it*, he thought, *and everyone carries it differently*. He held her finger in his ring in his hands and, he thought, he wept.