

### Excerpt from “The Custodian”

Suddenly the swishing of the mop stopped. The custodian took off his checkered derby cap and placed it under his arm wiping off the sweat from his brow.

“She’s gone.” He announced to the silence.

The voice of Billie Holiday began to wail out “The Very Thought of You,” as Mr. Harris came to his door dressed in his pajamas and a robe. Mrs. O’Hara exited her room wearing bright red lipstick and a necklace made up of cubic zirconias. The jewelry caught the dim light in the hallway. Her long robe swayed around her delicate slippers like an evening gown. Mr. Harris walked out and bowed in front of her as the music played. He took her in his arms, and they began to waltz around the hallway spinning in circles as the custodian looked on.

The custodian then moved towards Mrs. Garcia’s room. He entered her room and carefully removed the IV from her arm. She sat up and walked over to her wooden chest and took out a pair of worn pink ballet slippers. She gracefully leaned down and placed them carefully on her feet. She combed her long gray locks into a bun in the back of her head and moved out into the open corridor. She placed herself in the middle of the room and began to gracefully spin and leap as Mr. Harris and Mrs. O’Hara danced around her.

The group suddenly stopped as a roar of music came out of Mr. Gleason’s room. He exited his room playing his trumpet in a grand execution of “The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B.” Mr. Harris and Mrs. O’Hara began to sway to the music like a couple of teenagers.

Mr. Harris suddenly picked up Mrs. O’Hara and tossed her to the left side of him and then the right. He swung her high into the air as she kicked her feet out. He then gently brought her down onto the floor as they continued to dance.

Mrs. Garcia laughed in the corner as she began to jitterbug in her ballet shoes. She leapt and turned in a joyous display.

Mr. Gleason continued to roar out tunes from his now gleaming trumpet. The custodian looked on as he stood watch by the large door. He smiled and clapped his hands as he stood with one ear close to the doors. Suddenly, he heard a click of the radio being shut off as the nurse stretched to hear something in the silence. The custodian quickly raised his arms up as everything seemed to stop in time. The horn was silent. Mrs. Garcia stood in a plie reaching toward the sky. Mr. Harris and Mrs. O’Hara stopped frozen in mid-motion.

There was silence. The nurse looked around her office and listened for anything unusual. She then clicked her radio back on and continued with her paperwork.

The roar of the trumpet could then be heard again as the custodian lowered his arms and clapped and danced by the doors. He watched as each of the residents took on a youthful energy.

Minutes roared by as all too soon the clock above the large doors began to chime two in the morning. The residents all looked over at the large clock.

“It’s time now,” the custodian said as each of the residents began to slow down. “You’ll have tomorrow night. Come on now,” he announced.

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