

Patty

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Finally, it's November. I do not know it from the calendar, not even the newspaper, but from the changeable weather, from the fallen leaves on the floor. People walk fast with their arms folded across their chest. The color of the sky becomes blur and gray. The dry air irritates the skin and provokes the running nose. There seems nothing to be expected in this month—Christmas is far away; Valentine's Day, old story. However, frankly, this desperate month, I still feel glad it comes. It's so far away from the blossoming spring and the lively summer, when Patty's heart beats and breaks. She has light brown eyes like ember, and slender body with slightly tanned skin like the color of caramel. She talks softly but firmly and straightforwardly. It seems that no one can walk in her heart, but what I don't know, not even she, herself, is that no one can really walk out from it, either.

"I want to know," said Patty with a glass of wine in her left hand, "There should be an answer. Things happen for a reason. I am the one who got hurt. I deserve..."

"Some sleep. You deserve some sleep." I covered a blanket on her and took away her glass. "How can you be so heavy when you still have an empty stomach? Or you just drink ten liters of it?" I swung the glass to her, turned back, and walked in the kitchen, filling a thermal mug with some hot herb tea and putting it on her side table beside her bed.

Patty stretched her arms, squinting her eyes. "Can't you just be gentle for even one second? Do you know how much I've gone through? You should experience it..."

"Sweet, you are totally wasted. Spare your tongue. Or the cops come." I walked toward the door. "See you at eight. Good night"

That night, I didn't go home. For no reason, I just sat in front of the gate of her apartment and smoked. Watching the smoke rings floated up in the air and disappeared, I tried to blank all my thoughts but in vain. The bitterness, hatred, mockery, and sweetness mixed and spilled over my heart into my breaths. Deep in my heart, I believed she would make it; brave as she was, she would conquer it eventually. I would see her stand upright in a scarlet red high heels walking in the office. She would squeeze a perfect smile to me. She always did. But it was that night I had that strong feeling—I didn't want her to be like that, to make it. It was that night I thought about her—how I met her, how we fought and held each other's back. "How come...?" I couldn't help feeling the happiness and anger and sadness. After stubbing out the last cigarette, I saw the dark dawn of the sky and my cell phone showed 5:32, July 31th.

It was February, 18th. The first time I really saw her and also the day I moved to the PR office. There was a cup of coffee on my desk. It was ordered by Melinda, the owner of this magazine company. I wouldn't send it to her office right away, because she liked it cooler. I was programming the proposal for the coming meeting when she did all the things...

"No...it shouldn't be like that...C'mon, I have no time..." Patty whined and kicked her desk. She stood up and her high heels knocked the floor. Nervous as I was, my anger burned inside my heart.

I slid my chair out and got in her way. "Patty, could you please not kick your desk? The coffee spilt out. And please be quiet. If you are not able to make it, tell your shoes."

All the staffs looked toward us. “Get out of my way! I have little concern of your ‘coffee business’ I only apologize for the time I spent on you. As for the ‘be quiet’ things,” she pointed to her high heels, “I am afraid there’s nothing I can help. They are high heels, after all.”

Feeling my anger being provoked, I stood up and said, “There’s something you should know. Well, since you insisted on wearing your so-called high heels, I wish you good luck on the upcoming meeting. FYI, Melinda doesn’t like that tapping sound.” I put down my glasses, “Second, as for the ‘coffee business’, I think it’s your business to explain to her, well, Melinda. Um, as far as I’m concerned, you’re late. By the way, I’m William. Nice to meet you.”

“Why should I explain ...?” Patty frown her brows and the fragrance from her streamed into my mind. It shows something...unforgettable.

“Will, how come a cup of coffee takes you a day to fetch?” Melinda yelled, I smiled and Patty’s face changed. She grabbed the coffee from my hand, trotting to Melinda’s office.

That’s the first time I met her, and impressive as it seemed, I didn’t remember what the outcome of that incident was. But I remember the fragrance she had, her widely-opened eyes, her ignorant tone and the elegant sight of her back. They are buried at the bottom of my memory box. Since we have so “great” the first contact, the following days cannot be too good. We carried out the tit for tat rule to the limit, either on the good or the bad side. For five years we’ve been each other’s most intimate enemy. Or the most alienated friend...? Alright, either will do.

Then, the story goes like all the dumb love stories. One day after those five years, Patty became sneaky, eccentric, and tender. Even the sugar in the tea could sense her wrong behavior. She sneaked out the gate like there’s a flock of paparazzi waiting for her; she has no time caring about the heavy work but how she looked. Punching the card on time like she couldn’t wait for another one second, that’s how this woman was in love. As far as I am concerned, that man called Nate, a newly-come photographer in our company, has a sunny smile, thoughtful behaviors...

“Ambitious and gorgeous,” Patty said, smiling, “he owns everything. He thinks like Liam Neeson; he smiles like Bradley Cooper, and he is as charming as George Clooney.”

“Oh, by the way, he’s not engaged. Of course I mean George, not Nate,” I stirred the coffee. The flavor was somehow strange. Did I forget to put some sugar in? “The hare does not eat the grass around his burrow. I will spare some pity for you, if I have any.” I leaned against the railings on the hallway and faced the lobby.

“Could you stop being sarcastic for one minute? I am just talking about him, not telling you I want to marry him” Patty stared at me like she would stab me at the next second. “Nate’s not gonna make it engage with her. Second, WE ARE FRIENDS, and I know it like the words are just carved on my heart.”

“Fair enough.” I sipped the coffee. It’s weird and sour. How come? “Now, can you see the mirror in the lavatory?” Patty nodded, “Go straight to it, and tell the one in the mirror what you’ve just said. And if she believes, tell me. Your dinner, my treat.” I drank the coffee to the bottom of the cup. And I have to admit it’s the most disgusting cup of coffee. God knows why.

“You are the strangest person I’ve ever met... Hey, tell me,” Patty grinned and whispered in my left ear, “You are gay, aren’t you?”

“No, but it would be easier.” Silence. On the way to my office, she followed. “It would be easier that I

don't have to date and explain to a dumb girl like you. He has a girlfriend. Oh, my fault, more. More than one girl, and no one ends good! Clear? He's a photographer, and that means you are mainly just one picture of his collections." I looked into her eyes, and there were tears welling in her eyes. I remembered that day was Christmas, and that's what I gave her—a punch on her heart.

She just walked away without answering anything.

After that, I didn't see her for nearly two months. Indeed, I didn't mean to count the days, but her disappearance somehow made me feel guilty. I counted the guilt piled up in my heart day by day. That spring was eccentrically cold, and I didn't know why. Since when global warming becomes so obvious that I couldn't even ignore it? Rumor said that Patty hanged out with Nate. They held hands, made out under the street light, and spent some days at each other's place. It's funny that sometimes rumors are more honest than the truth. At least, we would face and take it.

Then, it's May. Each year, our company would hold a fashion show on this month. As a Creative Director, I had no mood dealing with other things but the show. I couldn't sleep well for the whole month. And it was that night, the night before the show, Patty gave me a call. When she called me, I was vexed at the color of leggings. I picked it up. Both of us held our breath. No one answered. It's like a century long.

"You should know there's a show tomorrow." I broke the silence, and Patty still didn't answer. She took several breaths like she was about to be suffocated. And there came her whisper-like sobs.

"I knew everything before I fell in, and now I just fail like I deserve it. He just wants to keep a distance from me... When I asked him to name a relation between us, he stopped me." Patty spoke in a calm voice like that's something happened on others, on the newspaper, not on her.

Grabbing the keys, I threw on my coat and pushed the door open. "I'm listening." Walk down. Drive.

"It's strange. I am supposed to call a 'friend' at this heart-dying moment, but when I search my phone contacts, you seem to be the one who is closest to a 'friend'. I'm not saying you are a friend of mine. You wish! It's coincidence, and I'm not here begging you for help. Got it?" Patty murmured some words. She's definitely not sober, but she intended to be like that. I knew that.

"Pretty much." I answered, and I pulled over my car on the road side. I walked upstairs. "So, what you gonna do? Take the preemptive action to dump him or take the revenge by telling his girlfriends his affairs?" I pressed the door bell.

"Actually, I want both. I don't know how to deal with a real jerk except you, but...hold on. I have a guest at this freaking 1 o'clock" Patty opened the door and I saw her smile, that relieving smile.

"Feel like dying in the living room. Well, epic." We smiling, I swung the wine in my hands. "I think you may need this to live through this sucking night."

"But there's a show tomorrow. If you screw it up, Melinda would kill you." Patty said. I sat on her sofa and patted the place on my right side. She made herself seated, and filled up two glasses of wine.

"Then I will tell her there's a bigger and more fascinating show happened at this night. And I feel sorry that she cannot see it." Smile and toast. That night, we talked like we didn't have any fight. Patty confessed that she struggled through days to make everyone believe that she didn't love Nate, but she did love him. She didn't want to take the risk loving a person. It would cost her too much. Love is a great gamble. She knew it, indeed.

"I know he's pretty much a great photographer. He likes beautiful things, and he's also surrounded by

them. Once I asked him why we couldn't be 'officially' together. He just said...things get blurred within the focal point." Patty looked straight on the ceiling "Crap. But I still take it. And there are more and more characters in our story. Finally, I shouted out all my feelings, and he just walked away from the door...several days ago. And yes, he just came, and we had something. But I clearly know there's 'nothing' between us. How can I be so cheap?"

I didn't answer her. I just listened. Not even nodded or showed any facial expression. It's a predictable story, but the pain it brought was always unpredictably hurting. And that's the last time I chatted so intimately with her before they really broke up.

The next day, the show still ran successfully. I focused on faking each smile to go through it. That bitterness didn't last for long; at least, I didn't have to count the guilt in my heart. I didn't call Patty because that's what we did in the daily life. Keep normal and regular can make life easier. No news is good news, after all. I put a cup of caramel latte on her desk every morning. It must be a hard time for her. And deep in my mind, I hoped Patty could have her own happiness. She's smart, glamorous and principled, and she deserves the happiness she wants.

I saw Patty work hard for the whole June and July. She came to the office before eight, and went home after eleven. She locked herself in the office, but I knew she was actually escaping from the whole stuffs. At July 30th, I heard Patty have a fierce fight with Nate on the phone in the tearoom. It's near the off time. After she hanged up the phone, I took her away from the office. I didn't know why I felt angry and bitter. And I never got into anyone's business but hers. We just quickly walked on the streets for nearly an hour.

"Where the hell are we going? My purse and my work are all left on my desk. LEAVE ME ALONE!" Patty shouted with all her strength and the tears streamed down her exquisite face. She looked into my eyes, revealing hatred, helplessness and bitterness. "Yes, I deserve it. I deserve the whole crazy love shared by dozens of girls. I should hate him, but I love him. How could it be?"

"You should just walk away. And that's what I'm doing! It is I who always clean up all the mess he made. I took a bottle of wine to you at that crazy one a.m. I told you all the things you should beware of. I even send you a cup of your favorite caramel latte every single morning. You are lonely enough. What the hell do you mean to 'leave you alone'? You can keep faking it but I would never buy it!" I roared all the words to her. She looked stunned.

"Then why don't you just mind your own things?" She calmly said the words. That's the first time I don't know how to answer a question from her. We stroke a silence between us for so long like eternity.

"Want a drink? My treat." I said the last few words, and we walked to a lounge quietly.

That night, Patty told me they broke up. She caught Nate having affair with another girl on her place, her bed. That girl was her assistant. "That little bitch," Patty said, "But Nate was even bitcher than her. He chose to drive me out of my house. Serious? It's my bed and my house! Were it not for the eyesore scene, I would never run away like hell." Patty drank to the bottom of the glass.

"Well. So... is that an apology call? I mean the call you picked up at the tearoom." I ordered another cup of scotch for each of us. Patty nodded, and I could barely see her being confused.

"I loved him, but I don't know how he could always ignore it. I am extremely exhausted. Really." Patty said. I felt her head on my shoulder. She was tipsy, but she whispered in my ear that the day was the very first day in the two seasons she felt easy and safe. I patted her shoulder and sent her home.

I didn't go home that night. And it's that night I thought about all my feelings to her. I finally knew how the weather became oddly cold, the coffee became sour and my temper became unstable. I knew it, but I didn't want to admit it. Not at this moment.

Finally, it's November. Everything, like passion, love, hatred, seems to perish in this season. They seem still, but they are actually moving on to the next level. I think it's time. It's the time to move on.

Melinda gets married on this desperate month. Her fiancé is a guy who doesn't look good but treat her like a princess. She loves the scene on this month, the end of the fall and the beginning of the winter. The end of the fall is a pun—She finally can end up falling in failure and become a hostess in a happy family. I see her look into his eyes, and that's it. Love.

“Thank you for being my best man, on both the work and the wedding day.” Melinda blinks at me. I smile and nod. Patty is her bridesmaid. She's in a white dress with openwork lace, blinking her eyes. Her eyelashes catch everyone's sight, and me. I keep silent, for any slight sound would ruin this moment.

As the wedding song plays, Melinda and her fiancé locks their arms walking in. They walk slowly and carefully, like giving their whole life to each other. Patty and I follow them, and I see Patty's eyes welling with water. Her beauty takes my breath away, but I'm still hesitating.

“Are you willing to marry her as your wife and swear that you will love her and respect her forever, no matter good or bad environment, healthy or sick, rich or poor ?” The pastor announces to Melinda's fiancé .

“I do.” Miranda's fiancé speaks the two words in a soft but firm sound.

“I do.” Turning to Patty, I look into her eyes, and utter these two hard words. I am not doing this because of being touched. I love her, really. Patty looks into my eyes. Confused.

“Are you willing to marry him as your husband and swear that you will love him and respect him forever, no matter good or bad environment, healthy or sick, rich or poor ?” The pastor announces to the bride.

Waiting.

“Well, I have to consider it.” Patty smiles wittily like mocking at my confession. All right, I think that's it. At least I have tried it, and we still can be friends.

“Now you may kiss the bride.” The pastor announces the last sentence, and I see them kissing with blessing. I wish them happy, though...

Suddenly, Patty turns around, “After all. I haven't dated any gay friend.” Hugging me tightly, she kisses me on my lips.

“SHUT...UP” I smile from ear to ear and kiss her back.

【END】