

The Statue

The old man methodically mopped the patterned tile floor in the university's great hall. He did this every night in the same manner. Northeast corner first, then across the length of the room where he always paused for a snack. He stood and chewed while staring out the giant window covering the southern wall. Then he picked up his mop again and swish swashed his way across the other side, humming along to the muffled melodies escaping his headphones. Last, he wheeled his bucket back through the entryway and locked the door.

She watched him from her shadowy corner, in the same manner, every night. Patiently waiting.

She used to live in a different building on campus, overlooking a beautiful garden that changed with the seasons. Tulips first, then a sea of petunias. Rich purple asters in the fall and last, boughs of winter greens and twinkle lights that glowed magically under the thin layer of snow that sometimes fell.

For a statue perched on a stump with butterflies atop her knee and wildflowers at her feet, perhaps it would make more sense for her to prefer the nature in that garden, but it was the students who stole her heart. Their movements and facial expressions were captivating and from the small snip of garden path the statue could see, she lovingly watched them all day bustling along the garden path on their way to somewhere else. Oh, how she wished she could follow or call to them. But abiding statue code, she remained perfectly still, always.

Two years have now passed since a small forklift came, carefully wrapped her in blankets and plucked her from that sweet garden corner. She was transported across the campus and up, up, up to the top floor. She was deposited in a massive room full of cushioned chairs on a pretty tiled floor. A pulpit sat at the front of the room on a large circle rug. A piano in the back. The ceiling was incredibly high and covered in ornate finishing. The wall opposite her was a giant window, its view impossible to see from her place.

While she missed the path terribly, each summer weekend, the room filled with excited students, their nervous parents, and confident university speakers. More people than she had ever seen together at once. The statue took them all in and they marveled in her presence. They stood next to her, took photos, and even sketched her dark lithe figure against the tall white walls. But soon after, as the air chilled and leaves fell, the room went mostly unused and the statue grew lonely again. The old man still came every evening to mop the mostly clean floor. He often smiled up at her height, a lovely gesture, but she missed her students so.

One night, upon hearing the door lock, the statue could take it no more. She scooped up her butterfly friends and gently set them near the flowers. She unfolded her long thin legs and strode across the tile floor to the far window. Scared of being seen, she stayed tucked in the corner and peaked through the expanse of glass.

Below the window was a magnificent scene. The entire campus unfolded before her, a giant fountain at its center with leaping jets of water, shimmering lights, and all her beloved students. She was immediately filled with incredible joy. No wonder the old man stopped here every night to have his

break. As if on cue, the old man suddenly emerged from the corner of her view and followed one of the paths to a distant building. His slow shuffle noticeable against the pace of the energized students.

From that night on, the statue spent each night at the window, mesmerized and happy again.

While the students came and went, the statue and the old man continued this way for many moons, until suddenly something seemed different with him. The woosh of the mop had a broken rhythm. Sometimes he did not bother with his headphones. He worked slower. Sighed often. Some nights he paused in front of her for great lengths and stared. Then one night after the old man finished mopping, he spoke words to her in a language she did not understand. He gestured to the window animatedly. Fearing the worst, that she had somehow been discovered breaking code, the statue remained in her metal garden and waited out the night.

The next evening the old man entered per usual and mopped with a pace she had not seen for some time. He even hummed a cheerful tune. But when he reached the entryway, he lingered. His eyes settled purposefully on her, tears glistening in the corners. He spoke again to her, softer this time, and pulled the door shut. The clicking lock echoed across the room.

Brimming with curiosity, she crept to her post near the window. But this night she ignored the students and fixed her gaze on his path. He appeared, like always, trudging methodically away from her. Just as the statue allowed relief to wash over her, the old man stopped abruptly. He turned toward the building and looked up. She froze, scared any movement would be seen. His eyes bore into her shadowy corner and he smiled while giving the tiniest wave.

The next evening the old man did not return.

There was a new man with a new mop and a new routine. But upon finishing his work, he looked at her and smiled. And from across the room, in a calm soothing voice, in the same language of the old man, he spoke to her. Then he shut and locked the door.