

More Than Coffee

by Vickie Walker

Maddi adds a shot of espresso to the mug, froths milk and pours it, effortlessly adding the decorative leaf to the top. Another cappuccino. It could be a flat white, a latte, a macchiato, but it was all coffee. Just a job, doing nothing of meaning or importance for anyone.

Thursday and the place is full of visitors and shoppers. There are the regulars – a young mum with two noisy toddlers, harassed and worn; three gossipy women, pulling apart their friends and strangers alike; and the cute older couple holding hands.

She looks up. 10am. No Bob.

Bob comes twice a week, Monday and Thursday, has done for the two years she's been there. He likes a chat; she asks how his day is, they talk of the weather and news. She knows nothing of people's lives outside the cafe but knows how they like their coffee. Bob is no different, but she knows he's punctual and regular. If he's not here something's wrong.

"Evie," she asks her boss. "Seen Bob today?"

Evie shakes her head. "Unusual, he's not missed a day ever."

Maddi is concerned. "Do you know his last name?"

"Farrell, I think. Lives in the flats in Barrett Street."

"Oh, okay." Maddi is busy but can't shake the worried feeling, so after work she calls into the flats. A neighbour tells her an ambulance came that morning.

She finds him pale, alone in a hospital bed. "Hi Bob, remember me? From the cafe?"

He smiles weakly. "Kind of you to check on me."

"Does your family know you're here?" She sits down.

He shakes his head, "No family, all gone. I'm alone now."

"I'm sorry." Maddi is sad, sad she hadn't asked about his life, who he was, that she just went through the motions of niceness.

Maddi visits several times, bringing him a newspaper, some grapes. "Just saying hi," she chirps. "On my way home." She is his only visitor.

Her next visit, the nurse tells her he died in the night, and hands her a note in a spidery scrawl.

'Thank you for spending time with me. No one else did. I was an invisible old man, forgotten. I have nothing to leave but my appreciation for your visits and for listening when I came for coffee.'

Maddi cried. Her job had meant something to someone. She made their life a little brighter just by serving coffee.



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