

VIGNETTES

Beginnings

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“You have to accept whatever comes, and the only important thing is that you meet it with the best you have to give.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

Peter...

Peter Alcott stood watching the elderly, black musician coax notes of pure magic from his saxophone. It was as if the instrument was an extension of the old man's arms, so sweetly did he play it; even while he was muffled in the depths of a heavy coat and woollen gloves against the winter cold. Peter closed his eyes, becoming lost in the music. He often passed this way on his way home from work, stopping to listen and remember.

He'd always loved jazz, much to Jacob's disgust. His good friend since their early days together at medical school, Jacob could never see its merits, preferring the classics and opera. Of course this frank dismissal of a whole class of incredible music had provoked many an argument. *They used to...*

“Forget it...” Peter's eyes snapped open. “It's old history.” He sighed and shook his head. Jacob had been gone for nearly two years now and it was no use trying to bring him back so they could argue about the relevant merits of music.

In fact it had been on this very date that he'd disappeared. Peter frowned in puzzlement. Two weeks from now it would be January 12th, the coldest day of the year. It didn't bear thinking about if he was still out there somewhere, cold and homeless. All because of the blind stupidity of the government commission investigation.

“Old fool...” Peter grimaced. If only Jacob had asked, Peter could have secured him some kind of employment where Peter himself now worked at St. Vincent's hospital.

Even without a medical licence there were still things Jacob could do. Peter could not believe his good friend had drowned himself, either on purpose or by accident. His body had never been found, despite

the police dragging the East River for weeks, and an old homeless man saying Jacob had given him his good coat on a freezing day with snow falling; like he would never need it again. That part at least was true, because Peter had been asked to identify the coat, there not being any registered next of kin.

But it still made no sense. Peter was never going to believe his good friend was dead. Despite serious set-backs, he had so much talent as a physician, so much to live for. It was as if he has simply passed into another room and was waiting for Peter to find him again. *If only...*

Peter's brows snapped together, as he became aware the old musician had stopped playing and was now watching him patiently. "Oh, sorry, hang on..."

He reached for his wallet, extracted three, ten dollar notes and dropped them into the jazz player's open saxophone case. "There you are. Thanks for some great music. You brought back a few wonderful memories."

"No problem, Dr. Alcott." The musician nodded his acceptance, reaching to shake Peter's outstretched hand. "I'm here every afternoon when it's fine. My old bones don't like the cold so much anymore. But I'll be here, if you have any questions." As he spoke, his calloused hand slid from Peter's, leaving behind a folded piece of paper.

"How do you know who I am?" Peter stared at the note, feeling foolish. "This is crazy. I don't know you."

He looked up at the old man, who just winked, tapping the side of his nose conspiratorially. "I know exactly who you are. I made sure first. Now that's a note from an old friend. Take it and read it. You'll be fine. Just do what it says."

Then he took up his sax again and began to play as if nothing had happened. Peter stared at him, then looked back to the note in his palm and then up at the early afternoon pedestrians flowing around him. He wanted to ask if the old boy had made a mistake, but the warning look in the man's dark, rheumy eyes stifled the question before it escaped him. He pointed with his chin, indicating Peter should be on his way now. He was blocking access for the paying customers.

"Okay..." Peter shrugged, taking the broad hint. "Thanks."

As he walked away, he slowly unfolded the note, keeping it hidden within his palm. It was a note from an old friend and what it said stopped him in his tracks. His heart gave a hard thump of shock, and then began to race with anticipation.

He just *knew* it! *Jacob was alive after all...* He read the note again quickly, trying to decipher and understand the message behind the stark words.

"I have urgent need of medications. You are the only man I know I can trust. If you care for me as a friend, then meet me tonight on the lower level of Grand Central Station, platform 122. And please come alone."

Jacob

END