

COLIN COHEN

**A CHRISTMAS  
GIFT**

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<https://evenpunkgirls.github.io/>



RUDI BRUSHED THE snow off herself and pushed her way through the glass doors of the mall—while pondering a big question: what do you get someone you love when he’s just about to die?

She’d been pondering this for months, and saving for it even longer, but now it was Christmas Eve. Which is why she was in a place she loathed.

She was reminded of how much she loathed it when she saw everyone staring at her—because of her makeup and hair and attire, and her ferocious scowl. A department store saleswoman even rushed toward a security guard the moment Rudi walked inside.

Rudi tried to ignore this, and focus on why she was there—to find Tommy the most special gift he ever had. But everything she saw was the same as everywhere else—superficial and meaningless, and, after going through dozens of places, she was ready to give up.

Though, before she did, she stopped in the food court for a cup of coffee. There she also found a shop that sold white chocolate—the last of Tommy’s favorite foods he could still enjoy.

At least it was something, she told herself after buying a large bag of it. She then sat at a table and sipped her drink, while staring at the mall Santa—a man with a bad beard and even worse stuffing.

“Phony and fake,” she mumbled. “Like everything here.”

Angrily, Rudi downed the rest of her steaming hot coffee and stormed toward the exits. However, just as she turned the corner of the corridor leading to the parking lot, something caught her eye: a miniature waterfall in the window of a toy store.

She stared at the waterfall for many minutes, as it reminded her of a place not far from her home—a place

Tommy loved more than anywhere else—a place he no longer was well enough to visit. It seemed the perfect gift, and she had just enough money to buy it.

“There it is, Mommy!” a child’s voice cried out from nearby. “There it is!”

Involuntarily, Rudi peeked her head around the corner, and she saw a little girl dragging her reluctant mother to the window of the store, where she pointed to a baby doll—one that looked both antique and lifelike at the same time. It was also expensive—something her mother quickly noticed.

Rudi noticed something, too. She noticed that the woman was searching. She was searching for the right words. She searched and searched, before looking down at her daughter and murmuring, “Maybe, maybe next year.”

“It’s okay, Mommy,” the girl murmured back.

“How about some cocoa?” her mother said with a breaking voice.

The girl nodded, and the two walked off with their heads down.

Rudi tried to ignore this. She tried not to recall all the disappointing Christmases she spent in her childhood, and she marched into the store. There she saw, behind the counter, a little old man—a man who looked older than time—a man who smiled warmly at her and wished her a Merry Christmas.

Knowing that old people were usually the most appalled by punks like her, Rudi looked around, thinking the man must’ve been addressing someone else. But there was no one else.

“What can I do for you?” he asked.

She responded by glancing at the waterfall. Though she pointed at the doll.

“You’re very lucky,” he told her, as he grabbed the item and placed it in its box. “This is the last one. I literally couldn’t keep them in stock. Would, would you like it gift-wrapped?”

Rudi looked out the store window, and she saw the mother and daughter in the food court, sitting down with their drinks. “Can you do it fast?” she asked.

“It won’t take but a minute,” he answered, as he took out a sheet of fancy gold wrapping paper.

“Could you do me a favor?” Rudi inquired, while continuing to look through the window.

“What’s that?” the man inquired back.

“You see that woman over there in gray—the one sitting next to the little girl in blue. Could you give the doll to her?”

“I don’t understand,” he muttered after glancing at the two.

“Tell her, I don’t know—tell her it’s a store promotion or a contest. Tell her anything.”

The man still didn’t understand, so he again looked at the two through the window, and he saw their sad faces, and suddenly he understood. He understood everything, and he again smiled warmly at Rudi. He smiled more warmly than before.

“What about you?” he cooed, as he finished with the wrapping. “Isn’t there something I could get for you to give?”

“I’m fine,” Rudi told him, before handing him the money for the doll.

She afterward rushed off, desperate to get away. But when she got to the corridor she stopped. She stopped and turned around—and she watched the old man limp toward the woman, with a large shopping bag in his hand. She further watched him offer the woman the bag,

and he saw her whisper something into her ear.

Like magic, the woman's face lit up—something that made Rudi smile. She smiled for the first time in months.

WHEN RUDI RETURNED to her small apartment, she saw Tommy in the living room struggling to put a gift under their modest tree—a gift wrapped with a big white bow.

Right then, with all her might she held back the tears. She held them back while recalling how this frail young man had been a football star only a year earlier.

Tommy soon turned to her, and he whispered, “You’ve caught me.”

“I,” she whispered back, “I don’t have a gift for you.”

“You’ve already given me a gift.”

He said this with a smile—one that made her blush. His smile always made her blush.

“I do have a little something for you,” she said, and she walked over to him and took off her bag, and she reached inside it for the chocolate.

But instead she pulled out a box—one wrapped with the same fancy gold wrapping the old man used on the doll.

“I don’t get it,” she gasped, with her head shaking.

“Get what?” Tommy asked.

“He, he must’ve slipped it into my bag. But how?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I don’t know. I really don’t.”

“Can I open it?”

“I don’t even know what it is.”

Gently, Tommy took the package from her, and, even more gently, he unwrapped it. He further opened the box and looked inside it with shock.

“What is it?” Rudi asked.

“It,” he mumbled, “it’s empty.”

Suddenly, Tommy found himself somewhere else. He was at the waterfall he loved so much, on a bright summer’s day—and he was alone, with the empty box in his hands. Even stranger, he was no longer sick. He was back to his old self—perhaps even better, and he was wearing an expensive suit, and an equally expensive attaché case was by his side.

Not understanding what was going on, he closed the box—and, after feeling around himself, he pulled out a wallet from his jacket pocket. Inside it he found his driver’s license, and saw that he was older, and living in a pricey neighborhood nearby. He also saw that the wallet was full not only of credit cards and cash, but of pictures, too. Pictures of a beautiful woman, and even more beautiful kids.

His life seemed perfect. Except for one thing: the woman wasn’t Rudi.

What’s more, he could barely remember her. It wasn’t just her face and voice he could barely remember. He could barely remember the first time she looked into his eyes—the first time he realized that such a thing could mean something. He further could barely remember the moment he first felt her hand pressed against his, and how this made him feel that he could do anything. And he couldn’t remember their first kiss at all.

As the seconds went by, despite all his trying, the memories of her kept fading more and more, and he knew it wouldn’t be long before he’d forget her completely and forever.

Which is when he dropped the box. He dropped it into the roaring water below, and at once he found himself back in his apartment bedroom and back to the sickness that was ravaging him. He was also back preparing

the gift he had spent all afternoon preparing.

Eventually, he finished tying the big white bow, and, with lots of effort, he lifted the box off the bed. Then, he struggled. He struggled to get both out of the bedroom and into the living room, where he placed the box under the modest Christmas tree, just as Rudi came home.

He soon turned to her, and whispered, "You've caught me."

"I," she whispered back, "I don't have a gift for you."

"You've already given me a gift."

He said this with a smile—one that made her blush. His smile always made her blush.

"I do have a little something for you," she said, and she walked over to him and took off her bag, and she reached inside for the chocolate.

Which he enjoyed that evening, wrapped in the arms of his gift.

*the end*