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The Little Things

The small details often hold more importance than the large ones; these are the ones that make life worthwhile. For instance, is it not odd how it is said that a butterfly flapping its wing can beget a typhoon on the other side of the world? Moreover, is it not odd how the smallest motion of a stranger can affect who we become? Sometimes, the consolation of a stranger can leave an impression that outlasts one of a family member or friend. After all, it is often the tiniest events that have the largest impacts. A complete stranger comes to mind when I think back to the worst day of my life. This person showed kindness and compassion to me even though she had no moral obligation to do so. On one of the grimmest days of my life, a complete stranger made a lasting mark on my life through positivity and encouragement.

I was in a white-walled room with blank-faced people. A large painting of a landscape hung on each side of the wall, placed there in an attempt to brighten up the room. Much like the positive outlook we all tried to have on such negative situations, it failed to work. Small televisions were mounted on the walls, but no one was really watching them. Magazines lay across the wooden brown tables, mostly *People* or *Cosmo*, but they went disregarded. Everyone sat in wait to see if we were the next in line for the news. Every hour or two, a doctor would come out of the doors to the ICU to call aside certain people. Some people would come back with a blithe smile, others would come back with a despondent but optimistic demeanor, and still others would come back with heavy hearts. At the time, I was sitting in a green-cushioned chair with my breath tangled in my chest and ultimately lost in my throat, when it was me that was being called to meet with the doctor in the hall. I knew what he was going to say; I had known since the last visitation hour that she would not make it through. “There was nothing else we

could do...” he started off, but I could not hear any more. I felt my heart ascend to my throat, entangle itself around my esophagus, and lunge down into my stomach.

As soon as the doctor walked off, I remained calm and collected, slowly walking to the bathroom a few feet away. I stood there for a minute to look at my reflection in the mirror. I had her dark colored hair, her small round nose, and most importantly, her smile. That is when it hit me; every emotion galloped through me. I was furious at myself for being so helpless, I was angry that they could not save her, but mostly, I was devastated because that was not just anyone’s mom lying in that bed back there. She was mine. Blood rushed to my cheeks, making it hot to touch, and it was only relieved by the cool, crisp tears that began to cascade down my face. I looked out the window and I could clearly see a metal roof, slightly rusted, not far from where I was standing. Unfortunately, my heart was not composed of the same material, and it was struggling just to make sense of the situation.

In the disarray of emotion, my body slithered down the wall I was leaning against. My heart pounded, shattering into different versions of many emotions that caused my knees to hit the floor. This is what it is like to be pulverized from the inside out, I thought. My pants were damp with the sobs continuously hitting them. I tried to convince myself to leave the bathroom, but for a while, I just could not do it. It was private in the sense that not a soul had entered since I had. Someone eventually did come in. She was a tall African-American woman with a slim figure. She sported a long dress and some kind of eccentric hat. I did not look much at her until she addressed me. She came over to where I was still crouched against the wall.

“Baby, what’s wrong?” she asked. It was a simple enough question, but it took me a minute to answer. My heart was in great competition with my pharynx for use of my mouth. When I did manage to answer, my eyes did not make contact with hers.

“My m-mom died,” I stuttered, more focused on the floor than anything. I thought to myself, “This floor had been walked on by many people in my shoes.”

“Oh, come here baby,” she said to me, reaching her hand out to mine. I took it, and she embraced me with warmth and genuine care. Something about being embraced made my tears come faster. It felt as though the pieces of my heart had been broken three times over.

“I’m so sorry,” she said, wrapping her arms tighter around my body. She then began to tell me about her daughter-in-law’s recent surgery, but honestly, I do not remember much about it. I do recall that she said everything was looking positive at that point. Soon, I knew she had to get back to her family, and she assumed I needed to get back to mine as well.

“She would want you to be happy,” was the last thing she told me before walking out the door.

It was such a small event, but it has had a big impact on my life. When I think back to that day, I think of that woman with her crazy hat. I never knew her name. Honestly, I do not even remember her face. I do not even remember why exactly I thought the hat was bizarre, but the details are not as important as the way she made me feel. I wish I knew something about her, so that I could find her and tell her how much she changed my life. She made me realize that the benevolence of a stranger can be one of the things that someone needs the most. A smile can go a long way, and a few gentle words can carry on even longer. To me, those words will carry on a lifetime. One day, I hope I can be to someone else the person she was to me.