

Visiting hours were almost over, and the nurse turned off the lights, leaving Mal alone in his tiny hospital room. He had been in darkness many times before, posed in the Macy's amongst other mannequins, unable to speak or move yet perfectly aware of his surroundings. Yet the cramped size of the room, the pile of presents on his bedside table, and the plastic invading his orifices, left Mal frantic and claustrophobic. Even worse was the slight curtain of light from the outside hall, the same one that had heralded the Blue Fairy before. If he hadn't wished so hard to be human, if he hadn't asked her to grant his wish, he would not need to fear death, or be trapped in a body that felt too much and moved too little.

He wouldn't have seen Julie smile, or have consoled Phoebe's fears, or received that pocket watch from Dan. People had talked to him, confided their secrets and desires in him, and Mal had finally known the love of a family, the love that only a person could give or receive. How could he return to the Macy's, to a life where he would never be able to experience this again, where he would be marooned, abandoned in even the largest, most crowded rooms? The faintly-lit Christmas decorations all over his room already reminded him far too much of the Men's Department he'd finally escaped. As the high-heeled footsteps echoed throughout the room, keeping time with his heartbeat, he knew that he would rather die.

"Hey there, big boy, ready for your ticket back home?" The Blue Fairy slowly brandished her wand, prepared to cast another spell.

Mal reeled, jerking his head back and forth, "...No...this...fine..."

The Blue Fairy lowered her wand, almost dropping it, "This is...fine?"

"Fine..." Mal asserted.

“You know you won’t live for very long.”

“Fine...”

“I’m not a murderer Mal.” She said, “I never grant wishes that result in a loss of life.” Mal said nothing. After a few minutes, he still said nothing. He wasn’t going anywhere.

The Blue Fairy sighed, and walked out the door, shaking her head. Once again, Mal was left alone to wonder when he would see anyone next. His ears picked up the sound of shoes against marble again, but he knew that they didn’t belong to the Blue Fairy. This time, Julie’s mom came in, her eyes red.

“Mal...I am so sorry for all of this...” The needle in Mal’s arm slid around as she scooped up a handful of wires and tubes. “I won’t lie to you. I hated you. I hated your family. Your snooty brother and perverted sister.” Mal’s eyelid twitched. How on earth did Julie’s mom know about Phoebe?

“I overheard her in the hall the other day,” the tubes fell from her hands. The needle slipped under his skin. “I didn’t come in. Your mom was there. The last thing I wanted was a passive aggressive jab about how I got exactly what I wanted.”

She was looking at the wires again—no, she was looking at their plugs—and her eyes were striped with arteries; tears seeping out of peppermint bark truffles.

“You were a terrible boyfriend,” she continued, “Julie said you were attentive but I saw it as just controlling; most of your fights started over some tiny change of her expression. She called you ‘kind and loving;’ as if that made up for your fits of violence. But your real attraction”—a grimace twisted her lips—“is...was your great taste in wine...beer, liquor, any spirit.”

Mal stirred. This body had a history, a life and a family who came to see him when he was ill. That same family welcomed in Julie's family, even though Julie and Mal weren't married. Even despite the body's shortcomings and cruelties, the mannequin from Macy's couldn't help but feel like he ruined this man's life.

"That night," she sniffled, "I went out for a drive to cool my head...you know, you were there..." she was trembling, staring at the plugs again, "I saw you...I thought of Julie...and her bruises...and I just wanted you to suffer like Julie did and I slammed the gas and went right for you...but now you know you're suffering...and I just want...I need to..."

Tears gushing out of her eyes, the mother tore out every plug and cord that was in Mal's body. A harsh, filthy air rushed into his nose and throat, reeking of iron, iodine, and guilt. As each cord was removed, he could feel his mind slipping. He was drifting off into a new darkness, with no lights and no doors, but those last few days he had spent in the hospital meant more to him than all the years in the Macy's. Before he closed his eyes forever, he could see snowflakes falling by the window, and he felt Julie's mother lift him up like a large rag doll.

"Merry Christmas, Mal" the mother sobbed, "Here's your present."

"Fine."