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The Devil's Nudge

The first words I ever remember hearing were “the Devil's Nudge”.

I am still confused as to why the ‘Thems’ call it that.

I felt the putrid plume of sulfur as it seeped into the pocket I hid in. I could not see what was happening around me, but all I knew was what I could sense: *hot*. Gradually, the hot became hotter. The words I heard thereafter were:

“You will burn her up!”

“You sit still or I'll shove you up there with her!”

The Her they were talking about was the Her whose pocket I rested. I was still able to wiggle and roll around, but the Her was not moving. I would typically be jostled around in situations as frantic as this, but not now.

The Her was stuck.

However, I felt different in that moment. I felt freed. The sudden lick of heat made me come alive. I could move around even with the Her not being able to move.

Is this what a Freedom feels like?

As I got hotter, I felt myself glow. Suddenly, I had a vision:

I saw a different pocket. This one was rent in multiple places. While the one I had rested in for the past six years was also rent, the holes puckered where the Sweep had sewn them back together. This time around, the pocket seemed to be carefully clipped around the edges. I felt a cast of warmth from someone's hand brush up against me. It engulfed me and removed me from the pocket. While I could not see nor move then, I could sense it was the Sweep, a Him. The

Sweep's hand was calloused and caked with soot. It was perfect to build onto myself. It did feel a bit strange, but I kept getting bigger every day, little by little. I dreamed of the day I would be able to move around and help someone else. Maybe a Him or maybe a Her.

The Sweep tipped me into a smaller hand. This hand was clammy and soft. The hand belonged to a smaller person; a "Her" this time. I bounced around in the Her's hand, which vibrated in excitement. I rolled off of the Her's hand and landed inside a soft and pillowy surface. It was the Her's pocket. In there, I felt myself heat up exuberantly.

I opened my eyes for the first time. I could finally see what the Her's pocket looked like. It was a lot darker and tighter than I imagined. I could hear the Her's voice screaming for help but not moving. From that moment I saw the Sweep, I started to heat up exuberantly again. The heat from the fire made me even stronger than I had ever been. The energy radiating from the flames caused me to start shaking. Eventually, I lost my balance, and the pocket began to give way. The only reason I was able to see the Her's leg was because the majestic inferno illuminated the flue. The minute I looked down, the Her's skin began to smolder and bleed.

A Think came to me: she was in grave danger.

Suddenly, the *poof* of the flames became loud and urgent. The heat coming from the flames was even more intense than ever before. I looked down through the hole I was falling through to see the flames: a bright, flickering majesty with an irate disposition. They seemed to be reaching toward me but could not reach me.

"Little Clod," said the flames, "can you hear me?"

"Yes I can hear you," I replied, "can you help me? I am falling out of this pocket and I have to make an escape."

“Little Clod, could *you* help *me*,” the fire roared, “There is no more room here! I need room to grow, but the flue seems to be blocked. I will explode if I get any bigger! But oh, I can’t help it! I’m always hungry, so I need to be eating something!” The flames extended a hand to me and asked for my help.

“I’ll tell you what,” I creaked, “the thing blocking the flue is my Her. Here is my Think: the Her needs my help. Bring your flame up to me and we can burst this flue together!”

“Okay. I am coming up now,” boomed the fire. It rose up to me and managed to catch me before I could plummet from the Her’s pocket. As the fire engulfed me in its hands, I became even more alive. I pressed myself against the Her’s leg to brace myself; the burns started to miraculously fade away no matter how close the flames came to them.

“Hold on tight, little clod,” commanded the fire, “I will take you to the wall. Stay there and be on guard so you can catch your Her. You ready?”

“I was *born* ready!”

“Okay. One....Two....Three.....”

All of a sudden, I had a *freedom* again. Soot and stray firewood were strewn across the room amidst the busted flue chunks. Long strips of wood encased the ceiling, and webs of what looked like a fine white thread hidden in the corners like a delicate little cage.

Across from me was the Her. She was adorned with a black cloak where the previously fixed seams began to rend again. Just like I remembered from the flue, the Her’s legs were blushing but remained untouched. *Yes!* It was hard to tell since the burns were decorated with a thick layer of soot.

The Her was not dead but she was not fully awake either. She struggled to move, but she somehow locked eyes with me. The Her was much larger than my thinks had told me. Even

laying down, she could easily overpower me in one swift motion—and just that she did. She hastily extended a hand towards me. Taken aback by such grandeur, I tried to move away. She gave chase when I tried to escape again.

“If you think you can get away from me, you’ve got another think coming,” the Her’s voice became playful but firm. I made eye contact with the Her whose body was steadied and pointed to me like an animal ready to pounce. “Got you,” she cried. I became afraid that the Her may be a danger since she was so much bigger than the think told me. I trembled in the Her’s hands. I felt a fast, pulsating rhythm inside me.

“Don’t be afraid,” whispered the Her, “I won’t hurt you,” I felt as she stroked me with one of her fingers. The pulses began to slow down, and I could see that my thinks about the Her were true. My eyes pointed at the Her’s. It was then that I knew that we would make a great team. She then made her eyes point at the broken chimney.

“Did you do that,” she asked me. I nodded. I wanted to talk like the Her, so I focused. I let my thinks create a mouth. In my celebration, I sang my song. The Her’s face scrunched when hearing my song. She must have loved it.

“I suppose we should start by giving you a proper name,” she said again, “I can’t very well keep calling you my char.” My think told me that the Her was correct. It was time for me to have my own name. “We could call you Sootly...Ashkin...Emberton...” These names caused my new face to pout. I heated up again, almost burning the Her’s face by mistake. I did not want to put the Her in more danger, but my name was not going to be silly!

What would your think tell you if your friends hear your name was SOOTLY? Can they tell you that you will be protected by a Sootly???

“What about a real person name, but with the word ‘char’ in it?” I cooled down and turned back to the Her’s face. Perhaps a real person name may sound more like a protector and less like a silly old clown. “Maybe Charlemagne? Charles? Charlie?”

‘Charlie’ sounded like a beautiful name! The think told me it sounded like the name of a handsome prince or a gallant knight in shining armour. I looked back up at the Her.

I am the knight. I am the prince. Whatever I may feel like, I will know that my incentive is to protect my Her. And such an incentive I am happy to fulfill.

Artist’s Statement

The topic of my story was to rewrite the Devil’s Nudge chapter in *Sweep* from Charlie’s perspective. The original story was told from a limited omniscient third-person perspective which made this idea a challenge. I had to get myself into the mind of a small clump of soot and see if I could infer what would be going through its mind. The first aspect I needed to consider was the overall mood of the character. Charlie is an optimistic, whimsical, and kind-spirited character. He represents innocence while Nan’s character represents experience since she is more pragmatic and rigid in personality. The contrast between innocence and experience is a poignant theme in the novel which I placed in the forefront of Charlie’s character. As a golem, his life is all about protecting someone and amounting fully to that purpose leading to his eventual death. Throughout the story, he heats up to help heal a wounded baby robin and provide it with natural shelter. Therefore, I chose to make Charlie’s personal connotation more related to life and living. Furthermore heat represents his vocation as a golem. The other challenge was to describe the scene through the lens of a clod who could not see nor move. With that in mind, I had to infer that Charlie could only really experience the world through proprioceptive sensory perception. I would imagine he could perceive heat and hear sounds, but spatial awareness would be the most

prominent sense. Finally, I also had to write these thought-provoking statements without grammatical nuances. I decided to approach this idea like how I would imagine a young child speaking and exaggerate it. For example, I thought about how children have trouble with distinguishing between proper nouns and pronouns; they would usually simply refer to another person as “him” or “her”. I took that fact and exaggerated it for Charlie’s perspective. Children also lack nuance to be able to distinguish between abstract thoughts and reality and put that paradigm into words. Therefore, I described Charlie’s brain and thoughts as “thinks” which can physically speak to him and tell him new information. This idea came from the chapter “Goodbye Things” where Nan and Charlie play a game to figure out what is hidden by saying “Goodbye [object]”. To Charlie, “goodbye” was the only word that indicated something had gone, hid, or went missing. Therefore, that black-and-white thinking was crucial in giving a proper narrative.