Thoughts of a Janitor

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Harvey Sloane followed his push broom along the fake marble floor of the cavernous shopping mall, wondering whether he was pushing it or it was pulling him.

"5:30 is too early to be up on a stupid Monday," he muttered to the thing in front of him. He followed it obediently until he came to the row of black doors at the end. He stopped and leaned against the wall, his deformed Nike tennis shoes wedged between the floor and his feet. He had always been kind of chubby. His dirty brown hair stuck out of his big head like crinkled paper wads in an overstuffed waste basket. He didn't bother combing it anymore. The same negligence showed in his clothes, a greasy Mickey Mouse sweatshirt, and rumpled blue cords that sagged under his bottom. He could have passed for one of those brown trash dumpsters, there, standing by the wall. He gazed down the open area.

"Man, this place is really huge when ya' think about it. It's like a castle. Man, if I could live in a place like this, run around all day, one big room," he breathed. His broom suddenly fell from his hands and hit a Salvation Army collection bucket, jolting him back. He stopped and lifted the lid of the swinging red pan.

"Shoot, they never leave anything, anymore." He picked the broom up and continued with a new row. He slowly passed the empty stores. Sometimes he got so he didn't see anything but white in there. His mind drifted back to the empty bucket. Christmas. In a few hours, this place would be full of people. "They'll be shopping for presents, rushing around, pushing, wanting to get it all done as fast as they can. What a waste. How stupid." It was nice now when he was the only one. "No pushing... no people... It was just as empty to him with all the people there as with none, maybe more.

"I like it like this, best." He stopped again and looked around. It was all stark and white again.

"The lights are never turned off in this place. It's always day." He suddenly realized all the noise, as if it got trapped and constantly echoed, the clicking shoes and talking. It was the music. It never stopped, 24 hours of that background, elevator music, Frank Sinatra's Songs For Santa played again and again." He frowned.

"I'd get rid of all this hype." He ambled to Santa's house and his mechanical elves. They never stop, just like the music. They were corralled in the middle of the mall, one pounded a toy horse with a little hammer over and over again, two ran after each other in a circle. Their legs never changed position. He could see the silver track they followed. Another just kept bending over to pick up a package. He took his broom and held the little elf in the down position. It tried to come back up. He pushed harder. The gears started to grind. It was funny until it started smoking. He quickly took the broom off. It didn't move. He glanced around and guiltily swept away. "Someone will see it and fix it, not my fault, should make those things sturdier, anyhow."

It was 6:30, Harvey had finished two wings of the building and was starting the next.

"All these stores," he mumbled, "how do they do it, sell junk by making people believe they need it." He stopped by a store with a clown and a big
ball above it. Big letters in the window said "fool your friends, great at parties!" There was a glass with ice in it. He looked closer. One of the pieces had a bug in it.

"Ha, what a joke," he laughed, "I wonder how much it is," he looked for a price. Suddenly, he heard some talking down around the corner. Then there was a sound like water falling. It was a whole bunch of footsteps.

"Well, what in the world," he glanced at his watch. The mall didn't open for three hours yet. He took out his broom and started sweeping towards the increasing sounds. They suddenly came into view. It was a funny sight; they scurried along the edges of the mall like discovered cockroaches, old people in sweatsuits, in single file, marching like they were hurrying to an appointment.

"Mall walkers," he breathed. They were people that needed exercise, but didn't like cold weather. "Mall walkers... wall mockers." He laughed at the switch in letters. It was ridiculous either way. They slowly circled around the parameter, sometimes becoming lost from sight in the other wings, but then popping around a corner, arms flailing, big steps- a hundred of them blowing like fish. He stood, leaning against his broom, staring at them without self-consciousness. He subconsciously viewed himself as the observer and not the observed, like he was invisible. It startled him when an old lady waved to him as she passed by.

"We appreciate all your hard work in keeping this nice place clean for us," she yelled and continued with her concentrated pace. He took a step back in apprehension.

"Uh...uh, yeah, sure..." he stammered after her apprehension. She was gone. He looked down in front of his broom where, by now, should have been a good amount of dust. There wasn't anything.

"Aw, who'll notice, anyway, can't get every speck." He started sweeping where he left off and tried not to notice all the people passing him.

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