

Christmas Wrappings

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“Miss, that’s the greatest and fastest wrapping job I’ve ever seen for a department store.”

Marjorie’s tedium got a lift as she looked up at the dark-haired, brown-eyed mature man. His smile caused her heart rate to increase. It felt delicious.

“Why, thank you. I’ve wrapped thousands in my life and learned at a very early age.”

“Your family taught you?”

“No, at the home where I was raised with all the other girls. Because I was good at it, my job at Christmas was to wrap everyone’s gifts, including my own. It broke the routine of that life.”

His expression changed from a smile to a gaping mouth. “Oh, I’m sorry to hear you had a childhood like that. Raised in an orphanage must’ve been tough.”

“Not really. It was all I knew from the time my alcoholic mother nearly burned down our tiny apartment. Then, welfare took me away. I was young.” Marjorie realized she was pouring out her life to a stranger and never did that. However, he seemed different.

“I’m Brad. Bradly Watson. I live here in the south side with my daughter.”

A daughter, she thought. He didn’t say anything about a wife. I wonder. “Hi, Brad. I’m Marjorie from across town.”



As she introduced herself, his smile and white teeth were captivating. The stubble of beard so many guys wore these days made him look heavenly—a touch of gray hair over his ears.

Brad nodded. “You work here full time?”

“No, I temp doing office work, and this job is one I do here just for the season. They like my work and speed.”

“You *are* terrific. The bow and curly tails on the gifts are perfect for my daughter. You live with family?”

“No, just me. Had another girlfriend sharing expenses, but she moved out last month. This helps ends meet.” She finished the wrapping. He stood in front of her with his hand on the stack of packages and seemed to be in no hurry to leave. Even being busy, Marjorie didn’t want to rush him off either.

He drew a big breath and glanced around. “Hey, don’t you get to take a break every so often? Standing and working like you do?”

“Yeah, pretty soon.”

“If it’s not too rude to ask, I’d sure like to buy you a cup of coffee and a donut at the lunch counter.” His smile beamed like sunlight and candy canes. His deep, resonant voice could have come from a radio announcer.

“I...er...my break would be soon, so sure. I’d love to.” She told one of the other girls behind the wrapping counter to take over. Brad gathered his packages and waited for her to come from behind the end of the counter.

As they sipped coffee and Marjorie nibbled on a Christmas cookie she preferred over the donut, she puzzled. “Brad, you said earlier you lived with your daughter?”

Marjorie let the question hang.

He looked off as if in thought, then turned to Marjorie. “My daughter is eight. Her mother died from cancer when she was three. Just the two of us since then.”

“Sorry.” Marjorie felt a stronger attraction to the handsome man, almost as if he shared an aura with her.

Brad looked serious. “You told me about your mother and the alcohol. That’s so sad. I once dated a girl in college with a severe drinking problem. She’d embarrass me on dates and at parties. Things got very serious, and I was spending nights at her place by my senior year. Finally, at graduation, I just bailed out. It tore us both up, but I had to.” His lips were tight and jaw muscles flexed. “Alcohol is a devil.”

Brad reached over and took Marjorie’s hand in both of his. “You, on the other hand, are an Angel.”

She blushed, and chills ran down her spine. “So where did you go to college?”

“Alabama. Bad memories from that breakup at graduation.”

“Well, what a coincidence.” Marjorie straightened her back. The orphanage I grew up in was in Tuscaloosa. That’s where they arrested my mother.

Brad’s face turned to stone. “What was your mother’s name, and what year were you born?”

His demanding voice surprised her. “Cecelia Garr. I was born in 2000. Why?”

The color drained from Brad’s face. “That’s who I broke up with, in 1999, and never saw again. I think you’re my daughter.”