

Everyone has something in life that is precious to them. Something that they really could never live without and would do anything for. The sort of item that would be very first thing that came to mind if someone asked the age-old question, "If your house was on fire, what's one thing would you save?"

For most normal people, the answer would be their children if they have any, or maybe a pet. Some would answer their favourite teddy, lots would answer their mobile phone. It is such a wide question with so many possible answers and for Tommy, the answer was his bathroom mirror.

Tommy lived in a one-bedroom apartment on the fifth floor of a council building. A tall, brown pillar with dirty squares littering its sides. It was the sort of place that the local government set up at least forty years ago as housing for the less fortunate, got bored of maintaining after 10 years, had a reboot when they needed a focus point to win votes in an election, then promptly forgot about again when they lost said election. As long as the residents paid their bills, there was no reason for anyone of any importance to ever set foot near it again unless they were the one living in it. It was a small metropolis of stale rooms, rotting staircases, piss-stained walls and draughty corridors that all meshed together into what most would rule as a derelict building not suitable for human habitation. Some people had no choice though. For its residents, it was their only option. Rubbish piled up outside the back entrance, the communal dumping ground for any household waste, and produced a smell so putrid that you could never walk past without some kind of makeshift mask to stop you retching. The refuse collection had stopped service years ago when the council left the area for dead. Tommy did not care about the conditions though. For him it was home, and with his job he was just about able to keep up with the bills. He had lived there all his life. Never known or wanted anything different. And was certainly not about to let someone tear it down.

Tommy had got the news from Jonah in the shop whilst they were on lunch break. The small force that ran the local grocery store always retreated into the cramped little backroom at One PM on the dot to have a good old gossip whilst eating their various meals. Tommy never really joined in with their gossip, he much preferred to listen to whatever they were rambling about; sometimes interesting, sometimes God awfully boring. Mostly Tommy sat there and ate his routine sandwich, ham and cheese with a good layer of pea shoots, whilst listening to whatever topic the team landed on as they sat down and munched on their lunch. Tommy loved the comfortable conformity of it all. They would all buzz around serving customers, stocking shelves, pricing items, organising the storeroom, begging for the clock to strike one until it finally did, at which point they ushered out any stragglers, flipped over the open sign on the door and swiftly assumed their usual chatting chairs in the good old 'staff only' room behind the tills. The conversation was never important, for instance the day before, Lilly had been waffling on about some new nail salon just up the street from the library. "Yeah, they've got them new ultra-violent drying machines aint they?", she said eagerly with a mouthful of crisps. Jonah replied, with an exaggerated roll of his eyes, "Please tell me you mean *ultraviolet* drying machines, Lil?"

"Oh, yeah that's probably right, I thought ultra-violent sounded kinda weird", she replied, nodding her head enthusiastically. "Anyway, yeah. This new nails place is supposed to be all like posh and fancy, and like-", she paused briefly to add even more crisps and become even less audible, "they've got foreign girls in there who s'pposedly know what they on about. I think I heard someone say they were Pollesh?"

"Polish.", Jonah replied with his eyes closed, as if in pain. "You do mean *Polish*, right?"

"Dammit Jonah you're always bloody correcting me on stuff, it don't matter do it, let me be!"

"I'm sorry", said Jonah patiently back, "it's just difficult to watch- sorry, *listen* to you stumble your way through the English language with quite such ignorance."

"Uh- Rude? I'll have you know Mister Jonah, that, I not only was the top of my English class in GCSEs, but managed to get a B plus, thank you very much." Jonah leapt up from his seat and began clapping vigorously, Dave joining him, chuckling. Without leaving her seat, Lilly bent over slightly and moved her hand to indicate a mock bow, then knocked her head back and tipped the rest of the crisp packet into her mouth. "So! Pop quiz, 'Lil. Where do Polish people come from and what language do they speak?" She finished chewing the remains of the crisps and swallowed, thickly. She then took a deep sigh and said dryly, "So, you think I'm some kind of literal moron then?"

"No, 'Lil, I never said that now, did I. I'm just asking you a simple question which I am *quite* sure you will know the answer to. Humour me, eh?" he asked, blinking innocently and patting his knees. With another sigh, Lilly said, "Okay. Polish people are from Poland and, funnily enough mate, they speak Polish of all languages."

"See? Wasn't that easy?"

"Oh, leave her alone Jonah, Jesus." said Dave. "Look, it's nearly One already, we oughtta get back out front for the next shift."

Jonah snapped his head over to look at Dave, a look of thrilled surprise on his face. He said excitedly, "Did you just say... One?"

"Oh, did I? I meant to say Two. Its nearly *Two*, we should get back to work, is what I meant."

Jonah shakes his head, a grin spreading across his face like a little boy when a prank is being played. "No no no no no, you said *One*, my dear friend. And you know what that means."

"Dear god, here we go. Every week. Every bloody shift."

"METALLICAAAAA", shouted Jonah, leaping up again and imitating an air guitar. Tommy giggled slightly. "That's right! The BEST band to have ever graced this beautiful earth, one of their BEST songs being 'One' from one of their BEST albums, 'And JUSTICE FOR ALLLLLLL'!", Jonah yelled as he did a running slide on his knees, still holding an air guitar. "I really don't get your stupid obsession with that band," said Lilly exasperatedly. "I mean, me and my mates call their music 'angry man music', you know? All thrashy and loud. You can't even hear the delomy!" Jonah stopped air guitar abruptly and placed his face in his hands with an agonised gasp. "There's no way." he said quietly. "Lilly please, there's seriously no way."

"What?!" she shouted, staring at him. "What now?"

"*Melody*, Lilly. Its *melody*, not 'demoly' or whatever you said. Jesus wept."

They all began to rise from their seats, brushing crumbs from their laps and making their way back into the shopfront, ready to reopen for the afternoon shift. "Oh dang it, yes, Tommy," Jonah pulled him to one side just before he headed through the door. "I've been meaning to ask you mate, have you heard anything more about your place?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"Christ I thought I had told you. Or, at least someone had told you— had the decency to warn you," Tommy's eyebrows furrowed slightly upon seeing the look of concern on Jonah's face. "Warn me about what?"

Jonah tilted his gaze to the floor, glancing up at Tommy fervently. "Well... you see, Tommy it's kinda difficult— apparently the council have sold your estate."

"Oh." Tommy stared blankly at him, his hands in his pockets.

"Yes," replied Jonah cautiously, "you gonna be OK? I mean like, you got somewhere to go?"

"Uh, no? I am sorry. I don't know what you mean. The shift is now. I need to go to the till. Sorry."

Tommy tried to sidestep past Jonah through the door to the shopfront, arms folded now and staring straight at the floor. "No, no hey hang on a sec Tommy man, c'mon," Jonah moved and blocked the door, Tommy bumping into him as he did so, "I'm sorry, I forgot you didn't like the whole one-on-one chit chat, I'm sorry mate just give me a second. Please. I haven't explained this properly."

Tommy stepped back two paces, still staring at the floor. "Apparently they've been discussing it for a while now, because your flat is kind of like on '*valuable land*', from what I can tell," Jonah said with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Theres a developer company that's been seriously looking into acquiring that land to put a large, higher-end-posh-folk-style apartment block in place of the estate." Tommy continued to stare at the floor, arms folded even tighter. Jonah stayed silent for a moment, looking at him. "You understand what I'm saying, right mate?"

"Yes."

"Oh. Well, um, I suppose that's all then." Tommy stayed silent, eyes south. With a sigh, Jonah pressed, "I just don't feel like you've quite got the message here, Tommy. It's serious and I mean it. You're going to have to move out at some poi—"

"No, I won't!" Tommy yelled and started forward with full force, knocking Jonah out of the doorway and nearly off his feet. Crisp packets came tumbling to the floor as Tommy bumped into the metal shelves next to the till. There were several loud bangs and subsequent crunches as Lily stepped out of the store room straight into the chaos. She threw her hands up in the air, snapping her head over to Tommy. "Come on Tom what the hell was that for? There's bloody crisps everywhere now for God's sake. Right before opening as well! Come over here right—"

"NO, stop, Lil it wasn't his fault, let him be." Jonah rushed over with a dustpan and brush. "Let him be, it wasn't his fault. Sweep that up will you?"

"What!? Hey its his own fault he—"

"Just fucking do it will you? Tommy! Look at me! Hey! Eyes on me, man, eyes on me." Tears fell thick and fast, streaming down Tommy's freckled cheeks, teeth clenched and bared. Bright red and quivering he stood against the tobacco counter, hands clasped firmly over his ears and panting heavily as his knees trembled. Jonah approached and reached to put his hands on Tommy's shoulders, bending down to peer up into his face. Tommy screamed and shook himself violently. "Woah Tommy, it's alright man, its ok, no hands, I get it." Stepping back, Jonah retracted his arms and held his open palms up either side of his head, still staring into Tommy's face.

"There look, it's fine. It's all fine and you did nothing wrong. Look at me, ok? It's fine." The grip over his ears loosened slightly and his breathing slowed. "Yeah mate, that's good, that's it, it's all fine, you didn't do anything wrong. No one's looking at you but me. Just me. No customers in yet."

"I'm- I'm calm now," mumbled Tommy as his arms fell down beside his arms, "Thank you, Jonah."

"Honestly its fine, man. Anytime, I'm here for you. Just take your time." Tommy wiped the tears from his face and sniffed. "Why don't you go in the back and take a moment, yeah? Yeah? OK?"

“Ok.”

“Alright. Good.” Jonah stood up from his knees and went over to gather up the last few crumbs from the floor. Slowly, Tommy trudged back through the doorway and over to the bathroom cubicles, stepping inside and locking one. He slumped down onto the toilet lid and put his face in his palms.