

The month was December, the air was cold and the weather was not ideal. Slush covered the roads and the sides of the roads were black from exhaust fumes. Everybody in the small grimey city viewed this month differently, depending on who you asked.

For Harold Lichpoch, a man who lived with his girlfriend Lola who worked as a bar waitress, it was the most inconvenient time of the year for him, and though Lola faced the same problems, she saw the month for the brighter things in life, such as the snowfall and the chance to stay warm together in their apartment. Harold saw it as the time of year where their car won't start half the time while simultaneously making last minute decisions on what to do for Christmas to express his gratitude towards Lola. Lola would tell him she didn't mind if he never got her anything for Christmas at all, but knowing Lola's life before they met, he figured it was the least he could do to get her some sort of gift for the holidays. This year, however, as if things weren't getting tight enough, as Lola was going to cook a warm meal for them to eat, the lightbulb in their oven had gone out.

"Oh no!" Lola exclaimed.

Harold got up from watching television, "What happened dear?"

"Tsk, the light in the oven went out." Lola shook her head, hand on her hip whilst she still had her oven mitts on.

"Impressive, I've probably had that oven for at least a decade and this is the first time the light has gone out," Harold peered into the oven, "I don't even know if the place I got it from is even open anymore."

"Could you walk over to the electronics store and get a new one?" Lola inquired.

"Are you kidding?" Harold looked back at Lola, "And talk to the nut that owns that place?" He closed the oven door.

"I don't know, I think he seems quite nice." Lola took off her oven mitts and placed them on the kitchen counter temporarily.

"He ticks me off," Harold sneered, "Everytime I talk to that guy he always asks about how you're doing, what's his deal?"

"Is that so? Well I wouldn't take it personally," Lola placed a hand on Harold's shoulder, "I just think he truly appreciates the life we live and feels happy for you and I, don't you think so?"

Harold shrugged, "Seems logical he'd care about his customers, they're what keep his lights on at the end of the day." He walked over to the coatrack to put his jacket on.

"I think he values us as neighbors more than just being customers," Said Lola, "And I'm sure he'd give the shirt off his back if we were ever in trouble."

"Yeesh," Harold shuddered, "Wouldn't want to think about *that*."

"Oh, you're silly." Lola playfully rolled her eyes, "Just make sure to tell him you're looking for a 40 watt bulb when you get there."

"Yeah yeah," Harold zipped up his jacket and put on his scarf, "After we make conversation about what he had for breakfast or something."

"You don't find many people like him these days, Harold! You know that!"

"Well... Yeah, at least he runs an honest business. Not like that corner store up the street..."

Harold headed down the stairs and made his short walk to the electronics store.

In there, Arthur, the store's portly orange haired owner, was making additions to the store's interior for the season.

Harold walked in and was soon to notice the display of Christmas themed decorations decked around the store. A faux Christmas tree stood in the corner with packaged, wrapped boxes underneath it, red garland bordered the walls, and Arthur was just decorating the counter when he noticed Harold walked in.

“Hi Harold!” Arthur greeted him, “How can I help you today?”

Harold couldn't help but look around the store. “Well, I came in for a lightbulb, but I notice you've made some changes around here.”

“Oh, yes! I love the sights and sounds at this time of the year, and people seem to love it when I put up the decorations, so I'm making it a tradition to do it every year! Whaddya think?”

“It's impressive, but...” Harold looked at Arthur's cheerful gaze for a moment. A thought struck him as he looked Arthur in the face for once, something he couldn't really bear to do for over a second usually.

“...Do you celebrate Christmas?”

“D'aw, is it obvious?” Arthur grinned and shrugged.

Harold looked around, “I, uh..Don't understand.”

“Right, well, truth be told, I don't actually celebrate Christmas myself, and none of my family ever had either. Heck, they resent the holiday cause they're sick of seein' it everywhere, and I get that, but there's something so magical about Christmas when you look past the guy it all originated from.”

Arthur continued to decorate by taping paper cut-out snowflakes to the front of the counter, “The trees, the tinsel, the pretty gifts, families coming together to exchange gifts on a special day, it's like, things get beautiful for a month because of it, y'know? I really like going for a walk to see the lights they put up in the park too, the dedication people put towards the holiday is really something special.”

“I guess that's something to consider..” Harold had continued to behold the decorations around the store. “But what about your own holiday? What's so different about that from Christmas?”

“Oh, don't get me wrong, I love Hanukkah a lot too, eight days of gift giving, getting to have a good meal with your family, playing games – I wouldn't even know where to begin to explain it all! But there's always that edge that at least a few family members have knowing that every holiday we've got is based on some unfortunate event, or, so it usually seems that way, but what do I know, there's so many layers of Judaism you'd have to take it out of the oven a few times to—”

“Hey!” Harold interjected, “That's right! I came in to get a lightbulb for the oven!”

“For sure,” Arthur set down the cut-out snowflakes, “40 watt I assume?”

“Yep.” Harold nodded.

“Right, I should have one over here, but like I was saying,” Arthur walked over to a bin on the shelf and examined a couple bulbs, “Ever since I was a kid I've enjoyed the holidays I'd celebrate with my family, undoubtedly, but seeing the department store displays, the movies, the decorations, the cheer people get when they see these things, it's something I've really come to appreciate. My mother would pull my ear whenever she'd see me watching movies like *It's a Wonderful Life* on TV, or those stop motion films about Christmas they air every year, but I don't let it get to me 'cause those things make me happy at this time of year.” Arthur walked over to Harold and handed him a bulb, “But how's this one?”

“Seems alright.” Harold looked at it. “How much is it?”

“All my bulbs are a dollar, I can go ring it up for you now if you like.” Arthur walked over to the cash register.

“Yeah, sure...I get you love both holidays and all, but what about putting up Hanukkah stuff? Aren't there other Jewish people who come in around this time?”

“Well, if there were, then I would have no idea, because the Jewish population of this city is mainly around Southington Avenue. I only live on this side to run a business, but I don't mind it at all, it's certainly not as bad as some other parts of town.”

“Really? I've seen people beat each other up down here, how much worse can it get?”

“Ooh, I rather spare you the details of what I hear on the radio, things can get real ugly if you meet the wrong people, but I'm very glad you have somebody like your girlfriend on your side!”

Harold rolled his eyes and reached in his pocket for a dollar. “Whatever.” He handed the change to Arthur.

“What's wrong, Harold? Have things not been working out?”

“No, it’s not that, it’s just—” Harold paused, considering what Lola said and if it was worth getting frustrated with such a guy like Arthur. He sighed, “Y’know, Lola and I are doing quite lovely, actually, and, I appreciate the concern, I’m just, I’ve been a bit off lately, is all.”

“Try not to stress yourself out during these times, make the most of it with your girlfriend!” Arthur said gleefully, “Winter’s the time to appreciate your lover’s company and to have some of that holiday cheer rub off on the both of you, and I’m sure she’d have some wonderful ideas!”

“She does really like the season herself, maybe she knows a bit more than I do. I only see winter for the sleet, the cold, my car not starting--”

“There’s heads and tails to every situation, Harold, and I want you to spend this Christmas enjoying what you’ve got. And if you need any gift ideas, I’d be happy to suggest a few things when you visit again.” Arthur smiled, tapping his fingers on the counter.

“Heh, thanks.” Harold put the bulb in his pocket.

“Oh! I almost forgot!” Arthur reached under the counter and grabbed a small candy cane, “Would you like one?” He grinned.

“Uhh...I guess.” Harold reluctantly took the candy cane, “Maybe Lola will like it.”

“Oh I hope so, happy holidays!” Arthur waved to him.

“Sure.” Harold stuffed the piece of candy in his pants pocket and left the store to go back to the apartment.

Harold entered the apartment, with Lola happy to see him. “Oh, goody, you’re back!” She exclaimed. “I got the bulb,” Said Harold, pulling it out from his pocket, “Arthur managed to find one amidst all that stuff he has.”

“Well I’m glad he was able to help you.” Replied Lola.

“It was real interesting going there, let me tell you”, Said Harold, “He’s got all these Christmas decorations up and he doesn’t even celebrate the holiday himself.”

“Well that’s thoughtful!” Replied Lola.

“Yeah, he shares the sentiment you’ve got about winter, I guess, mystified by all the sparkly decorations and stuff that gets put up every year.” Harold put the bulb in his pants pocket and began to take off his jacket.

“I know you don’t see it the same right now Harold, but even with the state of the place we live in, there’s something wonderful about Christmas that just brings people together!”

“Now you’re talking exactly like the guy,” Harold hung up his jacket on the coat rack, “What’d he do, plant a Christmas mind virus in your head while I wasn’t looking?”

“Come on Harold, think of it this way;” Lola wrapped an arm around Harold, “You and I, together at home, watching movies on Christmas while we sip some hot cocoa, holding each other until we decide to fall asleep on the couch...how does that sound?”

As pessimistic as Harold was, he actually really enjoyed this idea. “Heh...I like the sound of that.” He then remembered the piece of candy Arthur gave him. “Oh! That reminds me.” He pulled out the candy cane and showed it to Lola, “Arthur gave me this, so I figured you’d like it.”

“Awe, I love candy canes! Thank you Harold!” She took the candy cane and kissed Harold on the cheek.

Perhaps there was something wonderful about this season for him after all.