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## The Little Things

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## The Little Things

*Mallory Hellman*

Sam grins affectionately as he raises himself from the drab, gray chair and stretches. Turning toward the bustling airport corridor, he yawns and says with mock sophistication, "I'm heading to the lavatory. Don't get into too much trouble." A childish mischief emerges in his blue bespectacled eyes as he adds, "I know how you can be in airports."

In the four years I've known Sam, the past five months of which we've been engaged, he has never come to understand my fascination with airports. I thought that he, of all people, might share my excitement for seeing so many different types of people traveling to and from all over the world, hearing tidbits of their conversations and pondering how we must all be connected somehow. But as he walks obliviously down the corridor, reaching into the pocket of his corduroys and apologizing profusely after nearly running into a conservative elderly woman holding a cup of coffee in each hand, I realize that he doesn't share my appreciation for these, the little things.

To my left, the morning sun streams through the airport window and the tones of an adolescent boy's portable CD player blare, though muffled, through his headphones.

"Come on, baby girl, take a ride with me."

As the boy rhythmically nods his head to the beat, the woman next to him props herself against the window as she speaks at an

inappropriately sonorous volume into her cell phone.

“Hello, Caroline! We’re in the Atlanta airport right now. The kids are fine! Justin loved the gift!”

“Baby, baby, baby, I love you no matter what they say.”

Across the seating area sits a chunky Latino of about forty in a white undershirt and a pair of jeans. He has just acquired a bag of ketchup-saturated French fries from Nathan’s and is using a little two-pronged plastic toothpick to spear them and shuttle them to his mouth as quickly as possible. His wife, possessing much more elegance than he, holds a stack of napkins as she sits dispassionately at his side reading a book. Evidently, the gentleman notices my gaze and looks defensively in my direction mid-goggle, but I, with talent possessed only by an experience-hardened people-watcher, begin digging through my purse, concentrating on my ostensible search for some Skittles.

The woman’s pitch lowers as she runs a carefully manicured hand down her smooth, red suit. “I know, Caroline. I know. We only have four days in town, though, and you would be selfish to ask us to spend them all with you.”

The man in the undershirt does not lower his eyes until I, hyperbolically enthusiastic about my discovery, remove my Skittles from my purse and begin eating them with a ferocity almost matching his. Satisfied with my histrionics, he returns to shoveling the fries only to have his third or fourth ketchup-laden treasure fall from the now-greasy toothpick onto

his undershirt with a gooey splat. Hoping nobody has seen the incident, the gentleman quickly rescues the fry and studies the residual ketchup now occupying the front-and-center position of his undershirt. Mumbling soft expletives, he opens his hand to his wife, who rolling her eyes, hands over the napkins she has been so patiently saving for the occasion. She knew this would happen. I knew this would happen. Because we're all connected.

The deadlocked twenty-something across from me finishes writing in an earthy-looking journal, looks out the window, and heads to the information desk to inquire about the final boarding time.

"Can you please tell me when the final boarding call is for the flight to Durham?"

"Caroline, you're beginning to frustrate me. We've discussed this before."

Splat! There goes another french fry.

"Girl, you're the only one for me."

In just this tiny section of this one gate of one airport in the whole world, I've already seen an impressive array of people. I've heard so many things – glimpsed so many lives. I've been doing this for years, watching people in airports. It never ceases to fascinate me, and it probably never will. Deep inside each of these people, as outwardly different as they may seem, I see similarities, I see connections. I perceive that we are not defined by our race or the type of music we like or our partiality to french fries. Beneath the superficial trivialities, we are all made from the same elements: love, joy, sorrow, fear, lust, passion, we are moved by these to act the way we do. So, while my airport

experience gives me a perspective of the variety of people in our world, it also further proves how much we are the same.

“The call is at 9:15? Do you think I have time to get a cup of coffee before then?”

Sam returns from the bathroom, beaming as usual, and takes his seat next to me. Putting his arm around my shoulder he asks, “Did you discover anything new today?”

“Everything,” I reply.