

The Annotation

JAMES - 45, academic, shy

PENNY - 36, bookshop clerk, also shy

Setting - The aisle of a seldom-visited used bookshop.

The shop specializes in rare and out of print editions.

Necessary props include a bookcase and some assorted volumes.

Time: Present

(JAMES looks through a volume, while he cradles three others in his arm. He has another stack on the ground. PENNY, a shop employee, approaches him.)

PENNY

James, sorry. Richard wants me to tell you we're closing in ten minutes.

JAMES

I'm sorry...I...I do lose track of time when I'm in here.

PENNY

Have you found anything of use to you?

JAMES

An annotated bibliography of books pertaining to the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

PENNY

Really?

JAMES

You know me. I can't resist a good bibliography.

PENNY

Annotated bibliography.

JAMES

Yes, of course. It has to be annotated.

PENNY

They're so useful.

JAMES

Gives you the proper orientation to the subject matter.

PENNY

Keeps you from looking in the wrong place. They provide the necessary-

JAMES

Overview.

PENNY

Exactly. So you don't miss anything.
(beat)

You can't make up your mind.

JAMES

I'm trying not to go over the value of the gift certificate.

PENNY
Limitations do force decisions.

JAMES
It expires today.

PENNY
I know James. I gave it to you.

JAMES
Yes...Thank you again Penny.

PENNY
You are one of our best customers. I thought we should do something to show our appreciation.

JAMES
I do.

PENNY
You what?

JAMES
Feel appreciated.
(*beat*)
I didn't know you had gift certificates.

PENNY
It's an experiment. I talked Richard into trying it.

JAMES
Have many people used them.

PENNY
You'd be the first.
(*beat*)
Have you made progress on your book?

JAMES
Some, yes.

PENNY
Are you writing?

JAMES
Oh no.

PENNY
New thinking?

JAMES
Whole vistas of knowledge have opened up recently. With the idea of early contact from the Pacific Rim, I decided to expand-

PENNY

That's exciting.

JAMES

It is. It's now a book about the ideas and iconography of New World discovery from around the world, not just Europe and the Americas.

PENNY

Still 1375 to 1736.

JAMES

I've pushed it back to 1040. That's the year of the earliest Chinese document hypothesizing the existence of the continent off their eastern shore. Once you put China and Polynesia into the mix, it changes everything. This means-

PENNY

You can include Macro Polo in the introduction.

JAMES

Yes.

PENNY

I know you've always wanted to write about him. We have some Macro Polo bibliographies that just came in.

JAMES

I'd love to see them.

PENNY

And I'd love to show them to you. But we're now closing in seven minutes.

JAMES

Right. I suppose I have to make some decisions.

(beat)

You know I bought some language tapes.

PENNY

For...

JAMES

Mandarin. So I can translate documents and maps I might come across.

PENNY

Mandarin?

JAMES

It's just that you can't speak about the global importance of the New World idea unless you look at it from all angles, see the problem in its full dimension, pull apart the texts, see

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

what people are actually saying, you know? Get all the possibilities out on the table, organize them, and look for connections.

PENNY

But you can't know everything. I mean, I appreciate your passion...for the subject matter. But you don't need to know everything with such...precision. I mean a good approximation...

JAMES

You're right. You're right. You're so...right.

PENNY

I watched this movie the other night, *The Matrix*. Have you heard of it?

JAMES

No.

PENNY

I don't usually watch movies like that...There was a lot of shooting.

JAMES

Not a Merchant Ivory production.

PENNY

It was loud. But there was this one idea where they plug people's brain into a computer and violá. They suddenly know how to fly helicopters or use kung fu, and I thought of how...useful that would be to you...given your...comprehensive nature.

JAMES

I wouldn't mind death, but if you could live forever you could-

PENNY

Learn everything.

JAMES

Exactly.

PENNY

But it's folly to think that way? Some things...some people defy understanding.

JAMES

"Folly" is a fun word. Look it up?
(beat)

PENNY

All right. But just this one. We're closing.

(PENNY pulls a large dictionary off the shelf.)

PENNY

Ah, it's from Old French *folie* meaning "madness and stupidity" but also "delight." And...

(*realizing*)

Of course, it's related to the world "fool."

JAMES

What about a cross-cultural study of the "fool tradition"? That would be fun. You'd have to study all different kinds of fools-

PENNY

Commedia del'Arte.

JAMES

Hopi Kachinas

PENNY

Rodeo clowns.

JAMES

Shakespeare.

PENNY

That would be-

JAMES

Folly...meaning delight.

PENNY

When do you think you'll start writing?

JAMES

Oh, I have to finish the research.

PENNY

When do you know when to stop?

JAMES

I just keeping digging deeper and deeper until something clicks.

PENNY

What about with a person? Do you think you can know everything about a person.

JAMES

I suppose it's possible, theoretically.

PENNY

Less theoretical then. What about me? Do you think you could know everything about me?

JAMES

Hmmm...I don't-

PENNY

Because how many times have we gone out to lunch after a morning of you browsing the collection?

JAMES

Ten or twelve?

PENNY

Fourteen.

JAMES

You counted.

PENNY

I'm...comprehensive. So, come on, James. Do you think you could know everything about me?

JAMES

Well...

PENNY

Because I've talked a lot. I mean, you're a good listener. You...bring it out of me, and at this point, I figured you probably know me better than anyone.

JAMES

It's that I'm not sure I want to know everything about you?
(beat)

PENNY

Oh.

JAMES

No, what-

PENNY

It's all right. I understand. I was just testing the idea... you know...why not use a concrete example. And there our friendship is right there.

JAMES

But-

PENNY

Sitting on the shelf...in plain sight. Our whole relationship, an unopened encyclopedia.

JAMES

But what I meant-

Collecting dust. PENNY

No- JAMES

You don't need to explain...Richard wants me to close up.
He's taking me out tonight. PENNY

Richard? JAMES

He and I have been working together for a good while. PENNY

I suppose...I mean he's the owner, and you've worked here for- JAMES

Eight years. PENNY

That is a good while. JAMES

We get along. I mean we understand one another, to a degree.
On a certain level, it just works. PENNY

You can't argue with...functionality. JAMES
(beat)

You can, actually. PENNY

Hmmm? JAMES

Argue...with functionality. I mean do you use a Mac or a PC? PENNY

You need to ask? JAMES

Exactly. You use a Mac. Everybody who values beauty and
elegance and good, commonsense, rightness uses a Mac. It's
more than functional. It's- PENNY

Sublime. JAMES

PENNY

Exactly. So, you see, you are quite prepared actually to argue against functionality as a guiding principle of human relationships.

JAMES

Functionality isn't all it's cracked up to be.

PENNY

That's right. It can be downright-

JAMES

Oppressive.

PENNY

Totalitarian.

JAMES

And tedious, devoid of appreciation and intensity of feeling.

PENNY

Yes, where are the visionaries when you need them! The individual who will step up and say, "I have a vision and the courage to pursue that vision even if it means learning Mandarin or getting a third Ph.D or traveling to Tahiti, alone, to study Polynesian iconography because I believe my work is important and unprecedented.

JAMES

Slow down-

PENNY

And it is important and vital. But this hypothetical person, this mythical beast, says I am going to apply that same courage to every aspect of my life because that is the kind of person I am. I am smart and brave and kind and determined, and when I see something I want, I'm going to go and grab it." Where are the people who say that?

JAMES

Probably in the library. Look-

PENNY

What about this one?

(PENNY takes a book from the shelf.
JAMES inspects it.)

JAMES

A History of the Jamestown Colony.

PENNY

That's the one that disappeared, isn't it?

JAMES

That was Roanoke.

PENNY

Are you sure it wasn't Jamestown? The one where all the settlers disappeared or ate each other or were abducted by aliens, vanished to all who once loved them. Wasn't that Jamestown?

JAMES

That was Roanoke. 1585. Jamestown was 1607. It flourished and became the first permanent English-speaking settlement in the Americas.

PENNY

Oh, James.

(PENNY removes the books from his arms, sets them on the ground, and takes both his hands.)

PENNY

I am going to give you the overview.

JAMES

Overview?

PENNY

Oh god. Let me put this in the form of an annotation. Penelope Smith, published 1977. I suppose my title would be something such as "Prefers Books to People on Most Days" David and Ann Smith publishers. Buffalo, New York, an indeterminate number of pages.

JAMES

The annotation?

PENNY

Richard is taking me out tonight to propose marriage.

JAMES

How do you know?

(beat)

PENNY

Research. And I'm inclined to accept because, well, I prefer books to people on most days, but you can't very well marry the collected works of Lord Byron and give birth to little chapbooks can you? I mean there are vast realms of my soul Richard's PC-bound brain could not possibly understand, but I'm inclined to accept. Unless, unless...you indicate that you might consider taking a break from your valuable research and expand our relationship beyond the professional sphere.

(JAMES kisses her.)

PENNY

The New World.

JAMES

I don't want to know everything about you because then there would be nothing left to discover. I only want to feel that I could-

PENNY

Understand everything-

JAMES

Given immortality and a good-

PENNY

Finding aid.

JAMES

Here.

(JAMES gives her a book.)

PENNY

You've made your decision.

JAMES

Yes.

(PENNY looks at the book.)

PENNY

I love Skaldic Poetry.

JAMES

I know. Published in Iceland and everything. It's for you. I couldn't decide what to get.

PENNY

You've been looking for books for me?

JAMES

And then I thought Vikings. Because you have that instinct for pillage and plunder.

PENNY

It's true.

JAMES

So, lunch tomorrow? After we look at the Macro Polo?

PENNY

I'll find a place on my iPhone.