

Perfection

By

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INT. CAFE - DAY

Penelope's eyes fixate on her watch. Coffee aficionados wait in line behind her, their patience dwindling. A barista peeks over a cup of steaming coffee on the counter, drumming his fingers. Penelope edges toward the counter. Her watch's seconds hand reads 54, 55, 56... Time stays frozen a moment longer, then she snatches the coffee.

Penelope settles at a table near the window. As she readies her laptop, a page flip draws her attention to Jeanette, at a nearby table reading a book. Penelope recognizes the title, then leans over and makes a joke. They laugh.

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Penelope pulling up a chair

B) Penelope and Jeanette chatting and animated

C) Penelope touching Jeanette's hand, confidently but reverently, as Jeanette pulls away, their eyes locked

END SERIES OF SHOTS

Penelope looks down, then lifts her hand to reveal a phone number. She looks up as the door swings shut, with Jeanette out of sight.

Penelope sips tea as time passes. She finishes her tea. She stares at her phone, then the number, then reaches for the phone. She dials the number, but refuses to send the call.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Penelope walks along a sidewalk and checks the time. She freezes, balancing like a flamingo. 57, 58, 59... She resumes her gait but nearly collides into someone.

PENELOPE

Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry!

Jeanette turns as her smile and dimples surface. Penelope freezes, mouthing "sorry" one more time, with a question in her eyes and her hand clenching her wrist. Jeanette giggles, and Penelope timidly joins in.

INT. CAFE - DAY

As the fading golden sun streams in through the cafe window, Penelope cuts a slice of cake in half to share with Jeanette. She brushes away crumbs while readjusting the half slice, stealing a few glances up at Jeanette's expression.

Penelope spots one last crumb and furtively tries to swipe it away. Her efforts result in a glass of water tumbling off the table. Penelope's hand to her chest as she trembles with tears forming. Jeanette's eyes focus shifts in alarm, past Penelope, coercing her to turn. Penelope gives up and looks back in bewilderment, only to see Jeanette with a grinning, stuffed mouth. Penelope steals a glance toward a napkin, then at the bits of chocolate around Jeanette's lower lip. Her gaze floats up to Jeanette's alluring eyes, and she relaxes. Jeanette leans in. Penelope carefully wipes chocolate off her lip, smiles in anticipation, and kisses her.

EXT. PARK - DAY

The sunshine glitters along a spring green park's sparkling water.

Penelope buzzes about Jeanette along a trail, her camera beeping and clicking away as she snaps pictures of landscapes. Jeanette admires the yellow flowers, cuing Penelope to take a deluge of pictures of Jeanette, posing with patience and adoration.

They stretch side by side over the grass, watching the clouds give way to stars.

INT. JEANETTE'S OFFICE - DAY

People drone about outside Jeanette's uninspired gray-walled cubicle. Jeanette's left hand on her cheek props up her head as her right texts "I'm dying here" to Penelope. Jeanette's bleary gaze sees the clock showing 2:57. She drops her phone and tilts her coffee mug to reveal only dried coffee residue.

The clock clicks to 3pm. An email arrives and she opens it. Jeanette sees herself frolicking along the yellow flowers, basking in glorious sunshine. The right corner of Jeanette's lips curls. At 3:30, another picture arrives, and again every half hour. At 6, Jeanette replies "Dinner?"

EXT. OUTSIDE PENELOPE'S HOME - EVENING

A hand knocks on a door. The door comes to life with the sound of bolts unlatching. The door cracks open as an eye appears behind a chain, then an index finger. The door shuts. Jeanette cocks her head. The door swings inward.

INT. FOYER - EVENING

Jeanette walks in, but Penelope remains near the door, puzzling her. Penelope, her eyes pleading, turns to lock the door multiple times, listening for clicks. She abruptly hops over to another room, returning with a cute green bird on her shoulder. Jeanette lights up and gently coos to the little bird. Penelope slowly pulls the bird away and Jeanette follows it into the next room.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Penelope returns the bird to her cage as Jeanette beholds a table adorned with an immaculate arrangement of sushi and yellow flowers. Jeanette attacks Penelope with a kiss.

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Jeanette falls into the bed. Penelope turns off the lights, then remembers something and turns it on again, then off, then stops herself again, switching the lights back on. Jeanette yawns as she watches the brightness and darkness, imagining days and nights in the park.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

A) EXT. TRAIL - DAY - Penelope and Jeanette running

B) INT. PENELOPE'S HOUSE - DAY - Sock puppets dancing and singing in unison alongside a confused bird, causing Penelope and Jeanette to collapse into laughter

C) INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - Penelope introducing Jeanette to her parents.

D) EXT. PARK - DAY - A spring day, with Jeanette painting a beautiful flowery landscape while Penelope watches, transitioning to the winter, with Penelope painting a landscape while Jeanette watches.

E) EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY - Beneath an overcast sky, both in thick coats, Jeanette waiting while Penelope counts the seconds on her watch

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Jeanette's eye opens to see Penelope pacing about. A carpet of mismatched outfit combinations flows from the closet.

JEANETTE
(groggily)
Penelope?

Penelope tears a sweater off herself in frustration. Jeanette's knuckles whitening as she grips the bed in alarm.

JEANETTE
What's wrong?

PENELOPE
I wanted to wear a Thursday outfit,
but you don't like those as much.

JEANETTE
Penelope, it doesn't matter!

PENELOPE
I can wear something else. But that
screws up the other days. There was
a sweater...

Penelope crumples into herself silently as she launches clothes out of her closet, searching desperately. Jeanette inhales with resolve, pushing herself off the bed with her fists, her eyes searching.

JEANETTE
There! That one! I love that
sweater.

Jeanette slips away and pulls a sweater from the pile, demonstratively spreading it out on the bed. Penelope embraces Jeanette, sobbing. Jeanette holds her while lost in thought.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Jeanette is in her cubicle, joking with Greg, a coworker with blue eyes and rugged stubble, comfortably sitting on her desk. He leaves but Jeanette can't shake the laughter as she tries to get back to work. At 3:30, an email from Penelope with a photo of her and her bird arrives. Jeanette swiftly clicks "Mark as Read" and resumes typing.

INT. CAFE - DUSK

Penelope arrives and freezes upon seeing Jeanette chatting with Greg. Jeanette laughs at a joke, and spots Penelope, waving at her. Penelope stiffly approaches, remaining standing.

JEANETTE

Greg likes photography too.

Penelope rubs her temple, hiding an eye roll, then recomposes herself and sits. Greg nods and eagerly describes some of his experience to Penelope, who politely listens, nodding, with hard-won, fake smiles.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Jeanette and Penelope are in the park again. They kiss then hold hands as they walk past a winter landscape, the sky again overcast. Jeanette breathes in the crisp, fresh air.

PENELOPE

Hold that pose!

Jeanette smiles politely as she bides her time in front of the bare trees and frozen water. Penelope repositions herself with uncertainty.

PENELOPE

Could you face the sun a bit more?
Not too much.

Jeanette turns a bit.

PENELOPE

No, a bit less.

Jeanette tries to accommodate, and Penelope runs over, gently pushes her by the shoulders, then runs back.

PENELOPE

Perfect! Right there! You're
radiant! No matter the day, you are
my sunshine!

Click, click, click. Click, click, click. Click, click. Penelope starts fiddling with more settings on her camera. Jeanette watches with stoicism, then continues down the path.

PENELOPE

What? But, I was going to...

Penelope hurries after, but Jeanette does not slow.

PENELOPE

I had everything all set. Just a few more!

JEANETTE

You've already taken hundreds of photos just like those. I'm cold.

Penelope's exuberance drains from her eyes.

They reach the parking lot, kiss briefly and perfunctorily, then split toward their cars.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Penelope, gazes out the window, sitting alone at her familiar table in the cafe. She looks back at her laptop and continues to scroll through her photos, evaluating each. She chooses one and begins to edit it: brightening it, cropping tightly, undoing the crop, changing perspective, altering the colors, the detail in the shadows, and a deluge of other finer adjustments.

In an email window, under the edited photo, she types "You deserve perfection.", but erases and retypes it again and again. She again taps the backspace key as her gaze returns to the window. The text once again disappears, followed by the photo, leaving only a solitary blinking cursor.