

The Umbrella Man

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Given that the plumber had called her 'love' over the phone, Anna had been inclined to dislike the guy. But it was Friday afternoon and she could no longer stand the kitchen tap's metallic drip carrying through to the study. All day the noise had played out of tune with the *pitter patter* of the rain outside her bay window. With her deadline looming, she'd finally given up and found an app to get someone over within the hour.

He'd shown up at the front door in a damp black hoodie and mud-flecked work boots; the face matched the gravelly voice from the phone. 'Let's take a look at this bastard tap,' sufficed for an introduction, and Anna showed him to the kitchen. The tool bag thudded to the ground and the face disappeared into the cupboard under the sink. Anna looked back down the hallway and frowned at the trail of wet footprints.

*Let it pitter patter
Let it pitter patter
Don't mind the rain*

The bastard tap was fixed within two minutes, accompanied by a cheerfully detailed explanation of how to replace a washer. 'Oh... great,' said Anna, wondering if she would have time to finish her report by five. As she walked him out, the plumber suddenly stopped by the artwork next to the front door: 'What's this? Some kind of braille?'

Anna followed his gaze to consider the newly-hung piece; the faded brown paper with its cut-outs that signalled the intervals of musical notes. 'No, it's pianola scroll,' she said. And then, when he stared at her blankly, 'You fix the scroll inside a pianola. There are levers at the bottom that you pedal to make the scroll turn and the holes trigger notes to be played.'

The plumber (was it 'Dave'?) folded his arms, tilting from the waist as he leaned towards it. 'And these are the lyrics?' he asked, his finger reaching out to the ink typeface on the right-hand banner, 'Today, fix, to, umbrellas, any...'

'You have to read it backwards,' she explained, motioning to the bottom of the frame. 'So, it's, any umbrellas to fix today? It's called 'The Umbrella Man'' and then offered, 'It's a waltz from the 1930s...'

She was back in her grandmother's living room. Sitting next to her on the brocade piano stool—too small at that age to reach the pedals on her own. The ivory keys depressed themselves like magic as the scroll was brought to life.

*Bring your parasol
It may be small
It may be big
He repairs them all
With what you call...
Thing-a-mi-jig*

Dave straightened back up to face her. 'Well, there you go!'

She returned his smile. The ghost notes of the waltz hovered in the air,

*He'll mend your umbrella
Then go on his way...*

Lingering on the threshold, she watched him exit into the early evening. The kitchen tap was quiet now. Outside, the rain kept time.