*You Are Special*

The Wemmicks were small wooden people carved by a wood worker name Eli. Each Wemmick was different. Some had big noses, others had large eyes. Some were tall and others were short.

Each Wemmick had a box of star stickers and gray dot stickers. The wooden people went around the village sticking stars or dots on one another. The pretty ones got stars. Wemmicks with rough wood or chipped paint got dots.

The talented ones got stars, too. Some could jump over tall boxes or sing pretty songs. Others, though, could do little. They got dots.

Punchinello was one of these. He tried to jump high like others, but he always fell. So, the Wemmicks would give him dots. When he tried to explain why he fell, he would say something silly, so the Wemmicks would give him more dots.

"He deserves lots of dots," the wooden people would say. After a while Punchinello believed them. "I guess I'm not a good Wemmick," he decided. So, he stayed inside most of the time. When he did go outside, he hung around other Wemmicks who had lots of dots. He felt better around them.

One day he met a different kind of Wemmick named Lucia. She had no dots or stars. The Wemmicks admired Lucia for having no dots, so they would give her a star. Gut it would fall off. Others gave her a dot for having no stars. But it wouldn't stay either.

*That's the way I want to be* thought Punchinello. So, he asked Lucia how she did it. "It's easy," she replied. "Every day I go visit Eli the woodcarver."

"Why?"

"You'll find out if you go see him." Then Lucia turned and skipped away.

"But will he want to see me?" Punchinello wondered. Later, at home, he sat and watched the wooden people giving each other stars and dots. "It's not right," he muttered to himself. And he decided to go see Eli.

Punchinello walked up the narrow path and stepped into Eli's shop. His eyes grew big. The stool Eli sat upon was as tall as he was. He had to stretch on tiptoe to see the top of the workbench. Punchinello swallowed hard. "I'm not staying here!" the he heard his name.

"Punchinello?" The voice was deep and strong. "How good to see you. Come - let me have a look at you."

Punchinello looked up. "You know my name?"

"Of course. I made you."

Eli picked him up and set him on the bench. "Looks like you've been given some bad marks," said the maker.

"I didn't mean to, Eli. I really tried hard."

"Punchinello, I don't care what the other Wemmicks think."

"You don't?"

"No. And you shouldn't either. What they think doesn't matter. All that matters is what I think. And I think you are pretty special."

Punchinello laughed. "Me, special? Why? I'm not very talented and my paint is peeling. Why do I matter to you?"

Eli spoke very slowly. "Because you're mine. That's why you matter to me."

Punchinello didn’t know what to say.

"Every day I've been hoping you'd come,” Eli explained.

"I came because I met Lucia,” said Punchinello. "Why don't the stickers stay on her?"

The maker spoke softly. "Because she has decided that what I think is more important than what others think. The stickers only stick if you let them."

"What?"

The stickers only stick if they matter to you. The more you trust my love, the less you care about their stickers."

"I'm not sure I understand."

Eli smiled. "You will, but it will take time. For now, come to see me every day and let me remind you how much I care."

Eli lifted Punchinello off the bench and set him on the ground.

"Remember," Eli said as Punchinello was leaving, "you are special because I made you. And I don't make mistakes."

Punchinello didn't stop, but in his heart he thought, *I think he really means it*. And when he did, a dot fell to the ground.

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