

The man feeding the cats

It was an ordinary day - the same old way to school, the same old elderly couple sitting on the bench next to the road and the same old cats, which always made me annoyed with their constant meowing.

“Isn’t my experience on my way to school just wonderful?”- I thought to myself and continued with the tedious activity, which consumed most of my daily routine. As I was walking I suddenly felt something on my shoulder and I quickly brushed it off. ”Sigh! Here he goes again. Guess the old habits die hard”- I mumbled and looked up. There he was standing all high and mighty on the balcony of the second floor with a bag of chicken bones in his hand, throwing the leftovers from the food to the cats.

He was your average senior citizen- grumpy, with a gloomy state of mind which had engulfed him to such an extent that he was only seeing the things around him and nothing beyond that. I’ve rarely seen him going out of his comfy flat, let alone have I seen him smiling. Greetings were also a rare event for him. It seemed that feeding the cats was the only thing which pumped the blood in his vessels and I had no problem with that even though it was disturbing my already ‘joyful’ trip to school. Hopefully, there is also a positive side of this unordinary attitude. My mindset always makes me contemplate on the things happening around me through many questions so that I can gain a better understanding of life and this time the case was the same. ”Is he happy living such type of lifestyle? What is the story behind these curtains of unhappiness?”, and most importantly, “Why is feeding the cats the only thing he finds joy in?”. It is comforting to know that these questions are only circumstantial and will soon disappear into the abyss of countless other ones provoked by my simple ability to think thoroughly. Well, there is a thing we have in common with the elderly man - both of us are so absorbed into our own ‘little world’ that everything else loses any meaning. I hope it is for good.

What lightened my mood was the scenery which was lovely contrary to my expectations of a day in the beginning of the winter season. The warm wind was blowing gently through my hair and the sun was still showing its face over the horizon, illuminating everything in its path.

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Moment by moment time passed through the warm hug of summer and the soft touch of autumn when finally, lady winter showed her harsh nature.

“Did I make the most of my time right during summer vacation?”. As this suddenly went through my mind I felt a chill down my spine.

“No, that’s the forbidden question”- I told myself and shook my head. Everyone has this one question, which can’t be answered because just thinking of it results in a lump in the throat. It’s the same with everyone, or so do I think that in order to quickly erase the thought from my head.

Here am I, on my way to school like any other time but with different surroundings. Snowflakes, each one with their own unique identity, were falling slowly, covering the road in front of me and the trees, which looked creepy without their crown of leaves. The cats have taken shelter in the below the window caps, which briefly protected them from the tender snowflake touch and only made them shiver silently.

“How come I have not seen him lately... Well, never mind that.”

The moment I passed the block of flats I heard the familiar old screeching sound coming from the opening of the entrance door. Leaving the building was the same grumpy old man with an outfit, untypical for the harsh winter weather outside: he wore flip-flops along with shorts and a t-shirt, which completed his odd look. His bald head wasn’t covered by a hat and I could see the uneven locks of white hair his balding head wasn’t covered by a hat, giving me a glimpse of the small strands of his white hair. It looked like he was taking out the trash - he was holding a big bag in one hand and a small blue one in the other. After throwing out the garbage, he opened the small bag and spilled/poured its contents on the ground. He was so concentrated that he completely lost sight of me. Meowing, followed by 3 cats approaching the old man, filled the empty winter air. Leaning in to gently stroke the cats, he didn’t seem to be bothered by the icy- cold wind, blowing through his scarce clothes. This resulted in red spots on his wrinkled face.

“Now that’s what I call dedication.”- I thought to myself. The whole scene looked kind of/somewhat ridiculous to me. Was this because of his outfit? Was it because I could spot a slight smile on his face, which was a rare sight or should I say an unimaginable sight?

“It’s not like it concerns me of anything”.

I continued my way through the slushy path, engraved by the countless footprints, left by other people. The wind was singing its monotone song which

at some point silenced/engulfed/ the sound coming from the hungry cats, left all alone at the mercy of fate.

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Yet another month slowly passed by and lady winter made its retreat from the throne of the seasons by passing it to spring. Everything, which up until this moment has been asleep under the powerful winter spell, suddenly woke up and liveliness reigned yet again. Previously deserted gardens filled up with numerous blooming flowers, whose sweet scent lured the wandering bees. The cats were no longer trembling because of the cold and they were now happily chasing after each other under the shining sun. The dry and cracked tree branches also showed signs of life as buds appeared on them, foreshadowing the arrival of the spring.

I was cleaning the basement during the weekend. Unlike my surroundings, which were brimming with hope for the future, the obsolete items from the basement were totally out of the picture. Scattered all around the room (small enough for only one person to fit in it), they were giving off a different feeling – as if the room was frozen in a long- forgotten time. If you looked carefully around the room, through the faint light of the flickering lamp, you could spot boards, working tools and cardboard boxes, filled up to the top with toys and board games. All these objects made me go back to the past when I was a kid and adult problems didn't bother me at all. This was a time when I was focused on what was happening now and not on what will happen in the future. A peaceful time indeed.

“Discarding all these items will take some time”- I sighed and continued with my boring and daunting task.

Just as I was throwing a cardboard box with toys in the bin, a hunched figure slowly approached me. It was holding a cane and walked in a strange wobbly way. The old man who was feeding the cats surprisingly stopped beside me and I heard a hoarse voice, damaged by the countless days of smoking:

“Good afternoon!”

“Good afternoon”- I replied.

“It's quite a nice weather outside, isn't it? What are you doing boy?”

“Well, I am trying to free up some space in the basement by throwing out things I don't need any more. Want to help? “- I said jokingly.

He ignored my invite and his face got serious:

“But why are you throwing out the toys? Aren’t they dear to you? When I was your age I used to play with a small metal car- series 249. Sadly, they don’t produce them anymore but I would do anything to get a hold of one. After all, people associate different memories with certain objects.”-he said with a completely serious look on his face, without a hint of him making a joke.

“Umm, yes they surely do.”- I said, while trying to follow his train of thoughts.

He was right but I didn’t want to think as he did. Items from the past, in my view, belonged to the past belonged there and not in the present. People are meant to only move forward and clinging to the past is slowing down this process, preventing any further development. I actually came up with my own metaphor, describing the future- “the room with the fan”. I can’t explain the meaning behind it, because it’s unclear to me too. All I can say is that the simplicity and independence combined in this expression give me a warm sense of coziness every time it comes across my mind.

“So what are you doing? Taking a walk outside?”- I asked rather impolitely, changing the topic.

“You don’t like bringing up the past, huh? My bad then. I was throwing away this old guy here”- he said and pointed at his cane, which was a little bit crooked and had scratches all over it. “It won’t be of great use to me anymore. The daily walks around the neighborhood strengthened my legs to such an extent, that I think I will be able to run in the future”- he said and started laughing raspily.

While coughing into his hand, he threw the cane into the garbage bin without second thoughts.

“Looks like he has softened up a little. At least now he is more approachable”- I thought to myself.

“You resemble the young me a bit in in terms of face and build. Youth is comprised of the best moments in one’s life, so be sure to treasure them dearly. Hope we get to talk tomorrow”- he said and this time I was sure he smiled, because I could see it on his face.

Unsteady on his feet he started walking away...

“He doesn’t seem like a good company for an engaging conversation. I didn’t ask what his name was though. It’s not that important, I guess tomorrow also a day.”

Little by little , the distance between us grew larger and larger until I could only see a faint image of his back. I returned to my task without any thoughts troubling me.

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The sunrise, especially when knowing it was during the weekend, filled me with energy and enthusiasm. This is the most peaceful day of the week, when people are not occupied by their jobs and can finally spare a breath to look at themselves from a different angle. I looked up at the sky from the balcony.

Unlike the previous day, the blue infinity was filled up with dark clouds presaging an upcoming/ storm. A slight patchy drizzle appeared fell and the tiny drops ran across my glasses, hindering my vision. Taking a walk right before a storm is one of the greatest experiences for a man. The smell of the approaching rain hits the nostrils, while the soft, warm air wraps around you.

I exited my apartment building and headed to the nearest shop for a drink. I passed the garbage bins, filled up to the brim completely and most of its contents were scattered on the ground. As I reached the building, where the old man was living, I gradually slowed down. The cats were there like always but this time there was no meowing. On the entrance door I could briefly see some kind of notice. In the middle there was a blurry black and white picture of him. This came as a shock to me.

There was no one who could feed the cats anymore.

I quickly rushed to the garbage bins before they were emptied.

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