On the Streets

The sharp jabs of pain in his stomach startled him from slumber.

He slowly crawled out of bed and neatly folded his sheets. He made sure he placed them exactly where he does every day. He glanced awkwardly at his unusually low bed. The faded dark blue frame filled him with gloom.

‘Another typical day,’ he thought to himself.

Brush. Rinse. Wash. He felt as though this pattern had been repeated throughout countless life-times. What might be a tedious action for others brought immediate ease and relief to him. It was his way of scratching that itch which inches deeper and deeper into the skin.

He started to boil the water. He knew all he could do was to throw that flavourless pasta, with a shelf-life expectancy of well over 100 years, into the hot water. He was surprised when he found the cupboard to be completely empty of the god-awful pasta, and he was equally surprised when he realized he was amused.

“I need to get some more,” he smirked weakly.

Before he was ready to acknowledge the simple fact that he ran out, he quickly did a search around the kitchen and hoped that maybe, just maybe, something strange or mysterious happened to that imaginary last packet of pasta. After five minutes of fruitless effort, he surrendered to accepting there was no more pasta.

When he efficiently cleaned up the mess he made during his “investigation,” he unwillingly got ready to leave his home and face the terrible foe known as winter.

“Right foot first, left foot follows,” he whispered to himself while he was stepping out of his door, as though he sought a comment or response from the always-rushing passers-by. Nobody noticed him. He knew the outcome of this “ritual” he performed every day, yet doing so always seemed to calm him and prepare him for his venture.

He looked around. Francis Avenue was still Francis Avenue that day. The ancient buildings rooted on either side of the street still looked as though they were made out of sand, eroding away in the wind. The overall impression that could only be described as “gray” floated prouder than the dead leaves and plastic bags. Border street, a busy location where all the white collars were programmed to walked mindlessly to get to work, was five minutes away. Although he loathed the thought of being there, he knew there was no other way.

Each step he took stomped on his nerves. He tried to take his mind off his worries by imagining the good days of the past. Were these dull gray walls once freshly painted and magnificent? Were these shops decorated with exotic flowers and smells? He was blown away from his dream-land by the waves of biting wind. No matter what the streets were like 20 or 30 years ago, the only decoration his eyes saw was the bitterness. Every spot he could see showed traces of the homeless.

“Is there some place they are not?” he asked the skies. The only response was the low rumbles of the clouds to confirm rain was coming.

He picked up the pace while paying close attention to the rhythm of his footsteps. He forced his eyes to his feet and his ears on his footsteps and the occasional splashes of rain and his mind away from turning back. It was the only thing he could do to make sure he did not quit like all the previous attempts.

While he focused most of his attention to the ground, he heard hasty footsteps charging towards him. He looked up. He stared at the group as it passed him by, it was formed by the people he once knew too well. How long has it been since he they were all in school together? A year? Time only tormented him. He studied their faces. They were bright and hopeful, with distinct features that were characterized only by their prospective futures painted on their appearances. They all possessed certain awkwardness, like a pressure on the mind. It leeched from their actions as they went out of their way to avoid the slightest contact with the poor, not even a glance was spared.

“Who could blame them,” he murmured unintentionally. It wasn’t long since he was doing the same. To the people with purpose, who dashed down the streets with their chins up high, the scum on the floor deserved a certain amount of pity, but the pity was shrouded by the expression of disgust.

He knew better. He had learned. The people on the ground had untold reasons and heartbreaking stories. Who wouldn’t want to keep living life without worries? A bird must fly out of the comfort of its nest when it starves or death awaits. These people were the same.

His pace slackened. He allowed the icy rain to find him and embraced whatever it could throw at him. He watched the unprepared pedestrians scurry for cover against the roaring elements, the prepared pedestrians, who seemed so oblivious to the worries of others, slowly pop open their dark umbrellas, one after another, like black lilies that sought the nourishment of the rain, and the people on the ground remain still, with no other option than to stand their ground. He witnessed the people rushing into brightly lit shops like heroes who gallantly fought against the storm while the true soldiers remain outside without light or warmth.

“Nothing will change,” he said to the rain.

Without realizing it, he stepped foot on border street. The people were as busy as ever, even in the rain. Some marched with umbrellas while others ran with briefcases as shields, but they all had one thing in common; they seemingly had an objective, a destination that made them mindless to all else around them.

He wanted to ask them so many questions. Did they observe how many flights of stairs they walked down in the morning? Did they remember how many pencils were left on their desks? Some time ago he didn’t know the answers to those questions either, but he observed. What else could he do?

The occupied street roared with the sounds of cars splashing, footsteps smacking, raindrops crashing, and water flushing as he locked his feet to the ground, disabling his urge to escape. He looked around. He found a spot where the homeless and the poor did not occupy, and he walked there quietly. He knew that even though he couldn’t see them, they formed the true borders on the street; they were the ones people saw, but chose to forget.

People walked past him one by one while he stood there alone. His eyes followed the pedestrians’ backs as closely as their shadows did. His gaze suddenly met the one of a young girl when he heard her ask her mother, “Why are these people everywhere?” His body knew the answer to that question, but his mind refused to accept it.

He sat down and found the icy, damp ground and his drenched clothes surprisingly pleasant. The people and cars traveled past him like a blur. He looked into the eyes of the people that passed him by, but nobody returned a glance. He was prepared, yet he wanted a signal or any trigger from the blurring crowd, but he knew nothing was coming.

He stood up and cried, “Could anyone spare some change?” -1266 words