

Beauty

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On a crisp summer morning, an old man sits on a small rowboat. The water beneath it is still, liquid glass reflecting all that surrounds it. The hull of the boat cuts through it easily, barely making a ripple. Birds chirp in the morning sunlight. Spiders crawl over their webs nestled between blades of grass. Swans lead the way into the water, their children following after.

The man looks around with glassy eyes. Everything is so, so dark to him, but he can sense the light. Sight needn't be required to see beauty. His hearing tells the stories of that surrounding him. One for the birds. One for the spiders. One for the swans as they splash in the lake. One for the water. One for the trees. One for the sun and the light streaming from it. Stories of beauty, heard and written, in the mind of a blind man.

Telling these stories is easy for him. They're like children's stories. Without the sight to see reality, one starts creating their own. Almost like a dream. Our subconscious releases our aspirations and wishes into our dreams, and thus so does the mind of a blind man. When reality turns dark, our imaginations turn bright.

To look is to gaze, to have clear distinction of what's ahead. To see is something else entirely. To see is to comprehend, to understand. A man can look at a flower, and see it as a flower. A man can truly see the flower, as something full of beauty. It doesn't take a man with working eyes to see beauty. If he can truly see, then he can feel it all around him.

Even the eyes of a blind man can sense it. The man sitting in the rowboat envisions the world around him. His imagination is his new reality. The samples he's seen become his tools. His mind is his medium. With his experiences as paints, he creates the world he sees in the blankness of his own eyes.

Like a quill pen on parchment, it sinks into his mind. It fills every part of his soul. Beauty. He senses it, and sees it, like no other.

He takes a deep breath, breathing in the scent of fresh morning dew, trees, and cool water. The old man builds the scenery in his mind. In his reality. Trees full of chirping birds, each singing their own stories. Golden leaves providing caterpillars with enough food so that, one day, they too will see true beauty. Dew drops trapped in spider webs, blanketing over the grass. Deer and rabbits sniffing at foliage, deciding which to consume.

“Grandpa!” A soft voice echoes across the lake. A small girl stands on the dock, a teddy bear in one hand. She smiles a half toothed smile. “It’s time for breakfast grandpa!”

The old man turns in her direction, smiling. He has made a story for her too. That’s all his mind is now: stories. He glances around, sensing the beauty all around him. It’s a shame to be leaving it all, but he’ll be back tomorrow morning. He makes a promise to the wind rustling the leaves, and to the sun warming the water. He’ll be back. It will not have to go unappreciated. His thin hands grasp the paddles, beginning to row himself back to shore. The small lake is a map in his mind. He knows where everything is located. He knows the number of steps it takes to get from one point to another. He’s observed, despite not being able to see.

His papery hands grip the rough wood of the dock. Small hands hoist him up. He smiles, imagining the blonde-haired, blue-eyed child before him. He imagines her mother in her place, and the days they spent on the lake’s surface. Beauty. He sees it in this child.

“I’m coming dear,” he croaks. His voice is like sandpaper, rough and ancient. He hears her giggle as she slides her small hand into his. As she leads him home, the old man is conscious of every pebble beneath his feet. Even through the soles of his boots, he can feel the earth beneath him.

His senses reset, preparing themselves for his welcoming home. Instead of grass, he smells freshly chopped wood. Instead of water, he smells warm bread baking in the oven. His stories switch. They switch from that of the great outdoors, to something more domestic. The old man imagines swirls of

steam drifting into the air, escaping from a fresh loaf of bread. He imagines a roaring fire, and the crackling of freshly cut wood in its flames.

He feels the earth beneath him turn to rough wood as he steps onto the porch of his cabin. The smell of bread and warmth are stronger now. Strong enough for him to know, he's home. The little girl pulls him forward. He hears the door creak, imagining the living room laid out before him.

The old man imagines couches covered with homemade quilts. Rugs layering the floor so that the young one's feet may not get cold. These images aren't new to him. He knows them, because he's seen them. Long before he lost his sight.

He lived in this cabin. He helped his wife knit the rugs beneath his feet and the quilts heavying the couches. He wrapped their children in them on cold winter nights. He sang them lullabies and told them stories.

Now that's all he's stuck with: stories.

He feels the small girl tighten her grip on his hand. The old man smiles, thinking of the story he has for her. The one he'll tell her at midnight. A story of the world around them. A story of beauty.