

A Glorious Day!

It is a good day, a day where I feel absolutely glorious. My fur is all groomed, my ears pleasantly pointy and whiskers looking fine. The sun seems to dance on them as I inhale the wonderful aromas that the world has to offer: delicious smoke from a meat vendor on a corner ahead, the smoke from the cars that is invisible but ever present, the smoke from a cigarette adding a sharp undertone, like the tang of a cherry on a sundae, but all ultimately dominated by the aroma of the coffee I hold.

Such fine coffee! It makes me look posh and elegant when coupled with my suit. It is the colour of a cloudy day, where the weather is neither too hot nor too cold and any splash of colour, in this case my beautiful, orange tail, is welcomed. Not a person I pass, with their glum looks of determination, their infectious attitude of conformity; nay, not even their proclamations and shouts of misfortune, can ruin my mood.

I take a sip of coffee. My tongue remains unburned, my paws unsinged. Where will my feet take me, I wonder? Such a purposeless, happy day.

It is with my head down and my eyes on the ground that I chance a blow (more a trip really) with an unfortunate passerby. My coffee nearly spills on my wonderful grey suit; I jerk the cup away from me and it spills on the ground instead.

The man has collapsed to a sitting position against a building. He's a rather glum looking fellow with rough, brown fur like the coffee he forced me to spill. Only a pair of trousers garnish this unfortunate man. A dog, unmistakably, with his silly floppy ears and pitifully short tail. What a snout on this one! So long and flat. And the eyes? Oh who troubles themselves with dog eyes? I consent to toss him a few pounds and try to move off on my merry way.

But my cup feels just a little emptier. I pause to look at it and twitch my nose. This time the sun does not dance in them, but rather shines to the tip. My left ear flicks as a little breeze tickles it. I look up at the world around me, away from the coffee, at the great monsters of glass and brick. I throw up a paw to shield my eyes as the sun blinds me, and I turn, arm still raised, to look upon the dog.

How is this, so happy a day, ruined by a chance encounter with some dog? I turn fully around and dodge a careless walker, forcing me to take a step towards him. How sad he looks, slumping against the brick in the gutter, cast away by the aimless... the aimless such as me. What do his eyes truly say, I wonder? Is it only sadness, contempt, scorn for the society that seeks only to toss him a few notes and leave him to his gutter? It is surely not wonder at my kindness.

Now there is the real token. Have I done him a kindness by giving him money, or have I only reminded him of his incapability?

The dog glances at me and takes another. For the second time our eyes lock, and I can see all the sadness I had expected. A certain delicacy is there too, a cycle of need running rampant. I wonder what he sees in my eyes.

With a flick of my tail and a flick of an ear at another damned breeze I steel myself and march over to the unfortunate dog. I never break his gaze, nor he mine. Not even the passersby can halt it. It is only when I consent to sit down beside him that he speaks.

“What,” he says, in a refined but clearly foreign voice, “do you want?”

I begin to answer, but nothing comes to mind. It makes my tail twitch and my ears droop. What do I want? I look across the street in thought, searching for an answer. There is a little tower built against a wall. It is made of bricks. The lower bricks bear all of the weight to support the smaller, higher levels. I wonder which brick I would be.

“I want...” I begin to say, hoping it will create some idea. What fulfils me? What do I have to live for? My tail stirs anxiously and I flick my lowered ear as it touches the wall. I let myself sink down along it and look up to the top of the high rise.

“I have no idea what I want. Love, perhaps, or happiness.” I reply, now glumly.

We sit there for a time, forced into silence because breaking it would mean to confront the gaping void in the centre of our being. I pull my legs in and let my tail curl around them so as to stop its damnable anxious wagging.

I rest my arms on my knees and my head on top and look at the passersby. What do they think beneath their scents and disguises? What hides behind their clothing and skulls? What tails are stopped from moving or forced to?

The dog shatters the silence at last, “I used to be respected you know. A scholar in my country; but now I am a penny-pincher reduced to begging for my living. My fur was groomed, but now it is in tatters. I cannot even afford a shirt!” His head drops into his arms as he pulls his knees to his chest. Shoeless, penniless, hopeless.

This dog could have been me. But no, I have resigned myself to a life of frivolity and coffee. I make my living on the misfortune of others, and what sort of a living is that when I could find myself on the street next to this dog at any day? Shoeless, penniless, hopeless?

“I am a fool.” I say aloud, “What good is life if it has no meaning?”

The dog's snout slowly changes, snout pulls into a smile and eyes grow more alive by the moment.

“I need to show you something, and I know that you need to see more than anyone else.” The dog pushes himself up off the wall and takes my hand to hoist me up. I

take my mug before I take the hand, and he pulls me through the crowd, dodging and weaving, leaving me barely able to keep what remains of my coffee from spilling.

For a long time we walk, past buildings I have rarely seen of every size and material. The crowd ends long after my coffee has gone cold, and the cityscape becomes a little more cracked and worn. The buildings have chipped brick and the occasional broken or boarded window. All of them are identical unless what I see is actually one endless two-story building. There is more rubbish clogging the gutter, more glass broken on the street, and fewer – if any – automobiles. In this part of the city, the hubbub and the crowds are a distant memory. The buildings of the city centre can still be seen, but its sounds arrive here as the dying echoes of a finished song.

The dog leads me up one of the broken walkways to a door, which seems solid enough, of cheap wood. It is strange that the grass here should look so fine at every house without fail. A neighbourhood held together by grassroots, a novel concept. I can see in my mind's eye, as the door swings open, roots being used as mortar to keep the bricks soundly in place.

And then the door closes. My canine friend takes a match from a bowl on a nearby table as well as a worn iron candlestick and, striking the match on the wall, lights the candle. It is a quaint little house, no furnishings to speak of; unpainted, un-insulated wood with brick as the walls.

“Kindly be as silent as you can,” The dog whispers, barely breathing the words, “and I will show you something that is worth living for.”

I take a step, but I worry my shoes will cause too much of a ruckus. So, I remove them and we both pad quietly up the stairs. The dog stops only once to whisper about a creaky board in one of the stairs I should step over. At the top of the stairs is a little room. There is a little fireplace at the far end that connects to the next house. The dog looks at me with the strangest expression – pity? – before we continue to a pillowed area.

Sleeping there are two little pups that surely can't be much older than six or seven. One is smaller than the other, with brown fur like the dog I met. The other is golden like the setting sun. Both of them are lost in their dreams, sleeping soundly, breathing rhythmically, completely at peace.

I am captivated by the beauty of this. I lower myself gently to the floor and cross my legs. The dog sits next to me. For a time, he lets me sit in silence, thinking. What do I have that is worth living for? Will I ever find a purpose so perfect?

Eventually the dog stands up, careful not to send a floorboard creaking. He helps me up to ensure I do not wake the pups. Back down the stairs we go to the empty room, past the table where the dog places the now extinguished candle.

When we reach the broken avenue again and the candle is extinguished in its rightful place, I ask him, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"You can learn. You can find what you believe is worth living for. I will find my way in the world, even if I must beat my way into it. You will find your way into yourself; even if what you find is too painful to bear. Know I will be here." The dog sighs a great sigh, utterly content. And it is there I leave him, never knowing his name but always where to find him.

I look down at my mug as I walk and toss out the coffee. My step is not one of a whimsical gentleman, it is one of purpose. I pad my shoeless way back into the world so I may discover it.

It is a day, a happy day, a day for change. It is a truly glorious day, a day where meaning can be found or lost, where coffee is ground, meat is sold, cars driven, cigars smoked. It is a day of simple kindnesses in strange places.

In short, it is a good day for a new beginning.