

An Empty Cup

OPEN, read the sign at Cafe LeBlanc. It read this almost every day at 6:00 in the morning, but today was different, not the sign, but the cafe. Logan sat in the cafe, pondering how the day would pan out, quickly taking sips of his coffee, a unique blend he liked to save for special occasions, as he excitedly fidgeted with the various machines for making every type of coffee under the sun.

When the regular customers came in that day, they would be greeted by a different person behind the register, they would get a slightly different cup of coffee, and the cafe would have a slightly different atmosphere. The biggest change, in Logan's opinion, was the music; he had set up nice speakers and a record player. Rather than the silence that used to fill the cafe, now there was the constant murmur of blues, bebop, ragtime, or some other niche variation of jazz in the background.

Recently, his parents had reluctantly retired and left the cafe in his care. Logan had looked forward to this day, but despite the minor changes he made, the cafe had the same layout, smell, and stock.

Logan sat and sipped his coffee, and simply listened to the music that he chose to play as he waited for someone to arrive. This morning, he played a classic, *Autumn Leaves*. The song was nothing bombastic, but nothing simplistic, it was one of Logan's favourite charts. The song must have had at least a thousand variations, yet each had its own quirks, unique solos, each had a sense of uniqueness in a sea of standards.

Eventually people began to file in. Without ceremony, Logan took their orders, made their coffees, just like he had with his parents in the previous days, months, and years. He made polite conversations, but the topics were the same as always. They discussed the weather, travel, the latest TV shows, and the like. He enjoyed the small talk well enough, but throughout the day nobody mentioned the new music, or speakers, or the slight changes to the blends.

Once everybody had left, Logan began to do the chores before closing, sweeping, mopping, wiping down surfaces. He quite enjoyed having customers in, but emptiness gave him

room to think, the silence allowed his thoughts to chatter. He methodically completed the tasks, changing the music periodically. As he swept, he listened to *Moanin'*, a track by Art Blakey, one of his most frequently listened. It was a light song, with a small set of instruments, none overpowering, but they worked together to make a quiet greatness. Eventually, once all the tasks were complete, he turned off the lights and went up the stairs for a night's rest.

The next day, Logan awoke early in the morning. He got up and headed downstairs. The sun shone through the windows of the cafe, and he made his morning coffee, the same blend as he had the day prior. Before getting started he took a moment to think and picked something to listen to, hoping it would wake him up just a bit. Eventually he settled on an energetic song to start the day, *Tank!*. It was a unique song from a show he enjoyed. Once it finished, he drained his cup, and walked out the door, still rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

First, he headed to the bakery of Ms. Risetete (who often went by Rise). She was a French baker who had always supplied the confections for LeBlanc, and in Logan's opinion she was one of the finest bakers in the city. As he entered, he could smell the aroma of baking bread and felt the familiar warmth of Rise's bakery. The plump woman walked out from the ovens she was tending and offered Logan a hug, he returned it.

"I'm glad to see LeBlanc isn't making any changes to who supplies their treats."

"Please Rise, I wouldn't dream of it, the customers would throw a fit."

"I assume it is the usual order?"

"You know LeBlanc as well as myself."

Logan walked out of the store after some polite conversation, in his arms he carried a bag full of pastries, warm and slightly damp at the bottom layered in two paper bags, as well as a smaller bundle that Rise had said was for Logan. As he returned to LeBlanc, he put the food in its display and began to setup for the day.

The next day, Logan did much of the same. Logan took and fulfilled orders, made coffees, and sold pastries. The conversations were pleasant, but many were retread paths of generic small talk and idle chatter. As time passed, the blather faded as fewer and fewer customers remained. Eventually once again, Logan was alone.

Sitting by himself, Logan could feel an increasingly familiar, wavering discontent. He had enjoyed the day, but he wondered if this is what he would be doing for the rest of his days, repeating the same activities day in and day out. He banished the thought; he loved his work and loved the cafe. The discontent seeped into the crevices of his mind, and try as he might, he could not dig them out. There was a growing pit deep in his stomach, as if he hadn't eaten in days, a hunger for something more.

Days passed and Logan repeated similar steps as he had the days prior, buying supplies, making coffee, cleaning the cafe. Over the days, his enjoyment of these activities waned, as he went through the motions, he became like a corpse floating with a tide. The moments he was actively doing tasks and working with customers were fine but as soon as he was doing nothing, the gnawing at the bottom of his stomach fed on his worries and grew larger, it continued to tell him that what he did was not enough, it was hungry, it needed more.

He needed a break. The work was not too strenuous, yet the tasks he had enjoyed were becoming laborious. As the days trudged along, he searched for things to change, looked into sale prices for property, and began to wonder if he should change the path he was walking down.

As the patrons filed out of the cafe, Logan found himself alone. He sat staring at an empty cup of coffee. It's not that he was sad or frustrated, just that a malaise had layered over his mind like a fog. And as he was preparing to settle into lifelessly completing the chores he had before closing, a song came on over the speakers, *Whiplash*.

The trumpets blasted in, piercing through the fog over Logan's mind. As the music burned away the haze, Logan could *feel* it. The beating of the drums, syncing with his heartbeat; the thrumming of the bass, vibrating his bones; his very soul could feel the rhythm of the music. For the second time that day Logan lost himself, not in malaise, but in awareness, the music awakened him and he forgot his surroundings. Then, for a moment, the pit in his stomach disappeared. For the first time that day, Logan felt *alive*.

Logan stayed sitting for a second as the song led into silence. His shoulders relaxed, like a weight had been lifted off them. His eyebrows unfurrowed from the worried expression they had donned. He let his eyes close for a second as he sat in the silence. His lips loosened and tilted

upwards into a small, content smile. Feeling more relaxed than he had in quite some time Logan rose from his seat and began to sweep, humming under his breath as he did.

Logan plodded down the stairs to the cafe the next morning. He felt tired. As he started up the machines it seemed that they were all conspiring with his groggy limbs to screw him over. First off, the espresso machine refused to start, in all his time working with it, it had never done that. He could not figure out for the life of him what was wrong with it. Next, as he was trying to fiddle with the machine, he knocked his own cup of coffee over the counter, right onto himself and then on the floor. The cup shattered into a sharp mess and coffee stained his clothes. He let out a long, dramatic sigh, and tried to decide whether he should first try to sweep the shards of coffee mug or mop the spilt coffee. Just as he was pondering this, customers started to come in.

The morning was a frantic mess of Logan putting out (thankfully metaphorical) fires, explaining and apologizing to customers why they could not have their usual orders, and messing up orders as he couldn't seem to hear properly in his frazzled state.

At lunch Logan excused himself, went into the back room and repeatedly thumped his head against the back wall.

The rest of the day was not nearly as bad as the morning, but Logan was still left in a frazzled state. Just in this one day he must have had more coffee than what some of his customers had drunk that week.

Just as Logan was contemplating closing early that day, a new customer walked through the door. She looked just as tired as Logan felt. As she walked to the counter Logan could see her tapping her hand at her side to the beat of the music.

“Could I get a double shot Americano? With a bit of milk, no sugar.”

“Sorry, the machine is broken...”

“Oh, I'll just take a regular brew then. By the way, I like the music.”

“Thanks. Here is your coffee.”

The woman grabbed her coffee and went to sit down. She got out her computer and sipped at her coffee. Just before she started to work, Logan noticed her closing her eyes as she

sat. All she did for the next few seconds was listen to the music. Her shoulders released. Her eyebrows unfurrowed. Then she got to work, appearing much less tired than she had 5 minutes ago. Logan smiled.