

4 PM Daydreams

Story by Nicole Alfonso

STORYLINE

It's early in the morning and we meet the man in a small, family-run canteen. He is holding a cup of coffee, a half-empty plate of corned beef with rice sits beside his left hand. He is silent for a moment. He seems to be pondering deeply about his cup of coffee, or maybe he's just waiting for his breakfast to settle. He looks at his watch, thinks twice before finishing the remainder of his coffee, stands up, pays the woman at the counter, and leaves for work.

The man arrives at his place of work, a relic of a building, beautiful, and brittle, a silhouette of what it used to be. He enters the building, clocks in, and proceeds down corridors that seem to grow narrower by the turn until he reaches a pale brown door and enters. We follow the man throughout his morning routine of changing out of his civilian clothes and into his uniform, this drab, undeterminable shade of blue. He fixes the hem of his sleeves one last time, closes his locker, and departs for the elevator.

The man goes through his shift in somewhat of a daze, seemingly half awake. Doing the same thing day in and day out would do that to you. Hours drip slowly, days start to blend into one another, weeks turn into years. This job doesn't demand much other than an understanding of floors and numbers, an adeptness at listening to commands, and a finger to push one button after the other. During his shifts, he encounters many a face the way you encounter people on the street, fleeting and oftentimes forgettable. He catches many conversations, sometimes at their beginning, often at their middle, and sometimes at the very end. He wiles away the time by pondering about his passengers' lives, 'why (go to) this floor', 'why that shirt', 'why in such a rush'. He finds himself asking questions about his passenger's lives and finding answers for questions of his own.

It's what makes them most human, these fragments of conversations, you see he rarely gets to see their faces, his focus, what is left of it, is drawn to the buttons and the floor indicator, the droning of the elevator as it carries them on that seemingly endless trip, going up and down and up and down.

On this seemingly uneventful day at work, pushing buttons for people who've decided they are too important, or too busy to do so, he encounters four people who make an insignificant day a little bit less so.

There is a woman, weary and well dressed, she is with her young child. The floor they needed to go to wasn't that far up, the trip was brief and quiet. They both kept mostly to themselves. They held hands the whole time.

There is a man flustered, with a furrow on his brows that he tries ever so hard to conceal. He seemed young but felt old. Young in the words that he used, speaking to friends on his phone. Old in his demeanor, in that furrow that won't seem to leave.

There is a couple, they carried many things and spoke of much. They tried to involve the man in one of their discussions. They pondered on many peculiar topics, the man found that trip quite amusing.

There was a woman. She came from elsewhere, somewhere far, seeking something though exactly what, she doesn't know. Something good, she hopes.

In meeting these people, having been allowed glimpses in their lives, it is gradually revealed to the man that his experiences are not all that unique to himself, to his existence. Much like the elevator that he attends to that leads to nowhere, in particular, we navigate the ups and downs of his thoughts, which if we would consider long enough, isn't far unlike ours.