

"The Old Bench"

Every morning, an old man named Elias sat on the same weathered bench at the edge of the park. Rain or shine, people would see him with a gentle smile, feeding the birds and watching the sunrise.

One brisk autumn morning, a teenager named Sam, earbuds in, skateboard at his side, paused near the bench. He watched Elias toss crumbs to the birds and laugh as squirrels darted by.

Curious, Sam asked, "Why do you come here every day? Doesn't it get boring?"

Elias looked at him, smile unwavering. "No, son. This bench saved my life."

Sam raised an eyebrow. "A bench?"

Elias chuckled. "After my wife passed, I lost my way. Days blurred together. One morning, I came here just to escape the walls of my house. I sat. Listened. Watched the world breathe. A woman smiled at me. A child waved. A bird landed on my shoe."

He paused. "That day, I realized the world hadn't stopped, even though mine felt like it had. I just wasn't looking. So I made a promise — come here, be still, and be grateful. For the air. The sun. The strangers."

Sam nodded, sitting beside him. For a while, neither said a word.

When Sam got up to leave, he surprised himself by saying, "Thanks."

"For what?" Elias asked.

"For reminding me to look around."