

Dreams of a Tramp

A homeless man tries to survive in times of COVID

Dalong Hu

The Little Match Girl by Hans Christian Anderson

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

DYLAN, well dressed and confident in demeanour, stands before a podium, holding a trophy and in the middle of giving a speech.

DYLAN

Thank you, thank you again! Finally,
my grouchy and stone-faced self
wouldn't have made it this far without
the inspiration of my wife, a model
for unwavering faith and hope, Sarah!

Dylan walks off the podium, and hugs a beaming woman in a red dress, SARAH. She has a red ribbon tying her hair. Contentedly, Dylan has a broad smile and closes his eyes.

EXT. WIDE OUTDOOR STAIRCASE - DAY

Dylan is smiling that same smile, reminiscing about the past while sitting on a wide staircase. He wears ragged, seedy clothes, and a fraying knit beanie. On his wrist is a red ribbon, fastened as if a bracelet, the same red ribbon that Sara wore. By his side is a rough bag, with various belongings spilling out. The staircase is wedged between two stores, and facing a busy, noisy street.

It is during the COVID19 pandemic, and the people walking on the sidewalk, passing by Dylan, are all wearing masks. Dylan himself doesn't wear one, however.

Dylan openly seeks eye contact with the strangers walking by, and gives them big smiles.

DYLAN

Sarah always said she loved my smile.

Dylan looks at the red ribbon.

DYLAN

Even if times are tough, and all that
I had has fallen away, I can at least
still share this with others. Sarah
would be happy with that.

The people walking by mostly ignore him. A few nod slightly, but not much reaction can be seen with a mask covering their faces.

Dylan looks up at the clear sky.

DYLAN

Homeless huh. Never thought it would happen to me. But now that it has, I just have to persist.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Dylan hurries along, shivering in the cold, hugging a bag to his chest. The sidewalk is illuminated by street lamps. Dylan passes by many pedestrians wearing thick coats and gloves, but Dylan is still in his old clothes.

Dylan reaches the wide staircase that faces the street, where all his belongings are. Hurriedly, he drapes a dirty blanket across his knees, and opens the bag to wolf down the burger inside.

DYLAN

So cold today! But splurging like this, this delicious warmth, makes all that I saved up by garbage collecting worth it.

Yet Dylan is still noticeably shivering. A LITTLE GIRL in a pink coat is passing by with her mother. She notices Dylan, and separating from her mother patters over.

LITTLE GIRL

Hello.

Dylan looks up curiously from his food, and smiles widely.

DYLAN

Hello there!

The little girl pulls down her mask, and smiles back quickly before pulling it up again.

LITTLE GIRL

Mister, you look cold. My house is only a bit away. Here.

She takes off her pink coat, and holds it out to Dylan with both arms. Dylan is flustered, and quickly drops the burger in his lap to wave with both hands.

DYLAN

That's so sweet of you, but I really-

LITTLE GIRL

Here!

She thrusts the coat more firmly towards Dylan. Dylan looks her in the eyes, and takes it.

DYLAN

Thank you.

LITTLE GIRL

Mommy always said to look out for others. Byebye!

The little girl leaves as quickly as she came. Dylan stares at her as she rejoins at her mother. The mother nods at Dylan, before leaving with her daughter.

DYLAN

Well what do you know. I'm not so cold after all. (beat) Yes, no matter what, human hearts are warm...

While saying so, Dylan rubs the red ribbon on his wrist while smiling at the sky. A laugh is interrupted by a sudden cough.

EXT. WIDE STAIRCASE - DAY

Dylan is still on that same staircase, but has shifted locations a bit since there is some broken glass where he last sat. He has wrapped himself up in his tattered blanket. The pink coat the little girl gave him is too small to wear, so he uses it like a second blanket covering. In front of him is a tray with some coins in it.

DYLAN

Freezing. I don't even want to touch those metal coins.

He coughs a bit.

DYLAN

Shit. I really hope it's just a cold. If not... well I'd just be told to quarantine myself anyways.

He coughs again.

DYLAN

It's hard to move. To have to resort to begging... at this rate I'll starve to death.

At this point, a YOUNG MAN in a thick overcoat approaches with a bag of takeout, openly intending to give it.

Dylan smiles widely, but suddenly coughs violently. The young man is startled for a second, and stops at a distance from Dylan. After a while, he places the bag down on the ground.

YOUNG MAN
I'll leave this here.

The young man then removes the blue mask on his face, and puts it in the bag as well.

YOUNG MAN
Sorry, but it's the only one I have.
Please wear it, even if only for
others.

DYLAN (NODDING)
I understand. I should not add to
other's burdens in this time.

Dylan looks at the food, and smiles, though it is almost a grimace.

DYLAN
Thank you. Human kindness, at just the
right time.

Dylan looks up, but the young man is already gone.

DYLAN (MURMURING)
My body is breaking down. Even moving
to reach that food is difficult. But
still...

Dylan rubs the red ribbon tied to his wrist.

DYLAN
Human goodness. It is in our nature...
yes...

Dylan tells himself that, as if to reinforce it deeply.

EXT. WIDE STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Dylan is wearing a blue mask now while huddled in his blanket and the little pink coat. The takeout bag the young man had given him previously is now squashed among Dylan's other belongings.

Dylan coughs, and sighs. He stares up at the night sky, and sees a comet.

DYLAN

My beloved Sarah, do you remember when
together, we once wished upon a comet,
just like this one? *cough* If only...
I could see you one last time.

Dylan turns his gaze down, back to the cars racing past on the street, back to the passing pedestrians.

Suddenly, he stiffens. A woman in a vivid red dress that looks like Sarah is walking past him on the sidewalk. The red ribbon in her hair waves freely in the wind.

DYLAN

Sarah! It can't be! But she already...

Dylan bolts up, casting his blankets aside, and sprints down the staircase and towards the woman in desperation. The mask on his face is already strangely gone.

He reaches the sidewalk, and the woman is no longer there. He turns, and sees her backside up ahead.

Dylan runs after her, huffing and puffing, pushing aside other pedestrians. She seems to be walking at a slow, steady pace, and yet Dylan never gets any closer.

EXT. EMPTY INTERSECTION - DAY

After turning many corners and passing many streets, the woman finally stops at a wide, deserted intersection. There are no people around, and no cars. Despite it previously being night, here it is bright as if in the morning. Dylan also stops, panting, resting his hands on his knees and leaning over to catch his breath.

The woman, Sarah, turns around and smiles sadly.

SARAH

You've suffered so much, Dylan. Are
you still able to smile?

Silence, as Dylan catches his breath, bent over, with his hands on his knees. Sarah casts her gaze aside, as if fearful of the answer. Dylan slowly straightens his body to face Sarah. Meanwhile, Sarah maintains a downward glance and slowly walks towards Dylan with steady steps.

SARAH

Are you still able to hope? Perhaps my
last request was too much.

Sarah puts her hands on Dylan's shoulders hesitantly, but
Dylan suddenly draws her into a deep hug.

DYLAN

I still hope, and see others in good
faith. Even now. You and what you have
given me - I will never let go.

Sarah still hasn't seen Dylan's expression, but she smiles
knowingly, with relief.

EXT. WIDE OUTDOOR STAIRCASE - DAY

Dylan's body is lying on the staircase, looking peaceful as
he is covered by his singular scraggly blanket.

There is no trace of a small pink coat given by the little
girl, nor a blue mask on Dylan's face.

There is only a wide, warm smile. His hand with a red ribbon
tied at the wrist is wide open, palm facing the pedestrians
as if in a show of trust.

On the sidewalk, people come and go as usual. Occasionally,
one stares briefly at Dylan before going on with their day. A
YOUNG MAN in a business suit walks by.

YOUNG MAN

Strange. That tramp that creepily
smiled at people and always muttered
to himself is oddly quiet today.

He the checks his watch, before picking up his pace with
evident haste. Then he looks back and stops.

YOUNG MAN

...I wonder if he is alright?

His footsteps change direction.