Gray Sky, Blue Eyes and Black Coffee

Tap, tap, tap, and tap… My fingers were rapping on the keys.

“Nah, this sucks,” I thought. “Delete it.”

The buzzing of the laptop was drowned out by little giggles and screams.

“Get it done,” I told myself. “Focus… focus.”

The sun was shining through the window behind me, creating a glare on the screen of my laptop. Simon, my blonde-haired two-year-old son, was standing on the top of the couch adjacent from me. His little hands gripped and slid down the curtains as he let out a screeching scream. He lifted his legs and flopped his bottom onto the couch.

“Simon! What are you doing?” I asked. “I told you no curtains!”

I looked up at the naked window behind me. Two holes above the window on the brown-painted wall revealed where a curtain rod once hung.

“What’s the noise up here?” my wife asked as she walked up the stairs. Her blonde hair was pulled back in a ponytail. She pulled a tissue from the pocket of her blue robe and blew her nose.

“Shannon, Simon jumped on the couch,” my three-year-old son Arthur said.

“Simon repelled off the curtains,” I said. “Arthur, call us Mommy and Daddy, not Art and Shan,” I said. “I’m sick of replacing these freaking curtain rod brackets. It’s ridiculous!”

“He’s bored and you’re on your computer, ignoring him,” she said.

“I have a deadline. What do you want me to do?” I asked.

“I don’t know, but I can’t have the kids screaming when I’m on the phone with providers. I can’t concentrate,” she said.

“You think I can?” I asked. “I’m walking to the Wawa for a coffee.”

“Grab me one,” she said. “Make it black. You made it too sweet last time.”

The door slammed behind me. The naked trees and rooftops in the forefront of a cold gray sky implied the transition from autumn to winter. The sidewalk moved below my feet like a conveyor belt. I went on autopilot.

While walking through the lot I saw a girl sitting on the ground with her back against the wall. Wearing a black hat and an apron, she played with her phone, a cigarette hanging from her lips. A tall black man held the door as I entered the store.

While filling the cups I felt a cold hand on my shoulder.

“Excuse me dear,” she said.

Her eyes were the color blue that shadows cast on snow. She headed toward the register. I poured sugar and cream in one cup, left the other black, and followed behind her. The cashier put a quart of milk and two bananas in a bag.

“Could you put the bananas in a separate bag?” the old woman asked. “I don’t want the milk to freeze them. I like them to freeze in my tummy.”

 The cashier, with her dreadlocks pulled back in a ponytail, smirked and responded, “Sure.” She looked at me through her librarian glasses and raised a brow.

“I would assume that you didn’t want the bananas to get squashed,” I said.

“I usually buy my bananas in Aston where my husband likes to get them, but he died two days ago,” she said. “I don’t know what to do without him.”

I wrapped my arms around her frail little body. “Everything will be okay,” I whispered in her ear.

“God bless you,” she said. “Thank you for your love and kindness.”

She proceeded to the exit as I paid. As I walked past her in the parking lot, she grabbed my bicep and stopped me.

“Love is the most important thing in life, not money. Remember that,” she said.

Her blue eyes peered into mine. The sun pushed the gray clouds aside as it beamed from behind her, landed on my face, and cast a shadow on the asphalt behind me. She smiled.

“I’ll be getting rid of a lot of things. I have a television I’ll never use, if you want it,” she said.

“Thank you, but please give it to someone who needs it,” I replied. “TV rots your brain.”

“Yes, it does,” she said. “But he loved his baseball.”

We embraced a goodbye hug.

While walking home I imagined the old woman in her youth, sitting with her husband on a couch draped with an afghan. They watch the Phillies game while their children wrestle among a scattered pile of Lincoln Logs and Matchbox cars on a tired gold shag carpet. The wood paneling is riddled with splintered holes from where a curtain rod once hung. Her story is unknown and I’m still writing mine. Who knows where it will take me? I can see my house in the distance and my wife’s coffee is black. I’m fine