

## Hibernation

Let me tell you a story. It's the story of a person who's perpetually waiting. The seasons go by outside, the leaves change color and fall, the snow comes, the snow melts, the leaves grow again and flowers bud, birds chirp outside, but this person is just perpetually waiting, in his house, looking out of the window sometimes, but most of the times not and not even knowing what season it is.

It's the story of longing.

The days go by, he doesn't know what day of the week it is anymore. He goes out some of the days for a walk, always the same route. To the lake, sit there for half an hour if it's spring, summer, or autumn, and just stand there if it's winter. And back. Sometimes take a detour along the water and back. But always this and nothing else. Sometimes the dishes stand unwashed for several days. Sometimes he just eats frozen microwave food packs. His hair grows long, and finally he goes to the hairdresser, but only because he feels forced to. The thing he wants the most, is to just fall into a long slumber until the day finally comes.

Sometimes he plays records of vintage music, sometimes he can find comfort in them, in the form of a song that speaks his heart. Sometimes he reads in a book that provides company, and he feels like he can get a few wisdoms from it. A few insights. Maybe it will help him come out of hibernation. But the feeling of a perpetual hibernation never leaves him, because, at the end of the day, it's not up to *him*. Because of this, he prays to God even though he's not religious. Dear God... he prays, from the bottom of his heart.

He also plays the piano, beautiful melodies and harmonies that sound at the touch of his fingers. It is a demanding thing to play. Most of the time he has no motivation, but plays anyway because he is always waiting. To kill time. Nevertheless, he never practices for more than half an hour at a time.

On the 3rd of December, his doorbell rang. Surprised, since he never has any visitors, he goes to the door and peeks through the peeping hole. A woman stood on the other side. She was dressed in a dark green coat and gray scarf. It was not somebody he knew, and he hesitated on whether he should open the door. She rang the doorbell again.

He opened the door and said "who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm Beatrice. I've just moved into the building, on the same floor as you, and wanted to introduce myself to the neighbors. Here, I've baked some cookies, please help yourself!" said the woman.

He stood there dumbfounded, because for the first time in over a year he realized that his life had been isolated from the outside world.

"What month is it?" he asked suddenly, not really aware of what he was asking because he was not really aware of what was going on around him.

"It's December," said Beatrice.

"December..." he muttered, and stood lost in thought for a whole half minute, where after he realized how rude he was, and said, "please, come inside, would you like a cup of tea?"

"No, I'd prefer coffee, please," said Beatrice.

"Coffee it shall be," he said, and went to brew some coffee. Coffee was his morning routine, and afternoon routine, even though there was absolutely no purpose of it.

"So how long have you been living here?" asked Beatrice.

"If it's December today, then that must mean it's been two years. Yes, I moved here two years ago, almost exactly. Please, don't mind the mess..."

"It feels like you've lived here much longer, I mean, it's got a lived in sort of feel, you know, because it doesn't just look like an IKEA catalogue, it actually looks *lived in*."

"Yeah sure, if by lived in you mean everything's a mess... here you go, would you like your coffee with milk?"

"Just black, thank you."

Beatrice took the coffee and continued to inspect the room, there were some photos hanging on the wall, some of them landscapes, and others of people.

"Those are my own photographs, you know," he said.

"Oh, wonderful... and who are these people?" asked Beatrice.

"Just some... people... you know, friends, people who you don't really see anymore," he said.

"How come you don't see them anymore?"

Suddenly he felt a pang of pain and his chest tightened. He wanted to answer, but couldn't. Trying to find the words, he felt like his brain suddenly felt like a soup. An extremely large bowl of soup that could feed a family for 10 years. He thought for a long time how he could give a short and distinct answer to this woman interrogating him about his beloved photos. Finally, he gave up. "Please, let's talk about something else, could we? Here, let me show you the living room. I have more photos there."

Beatrice followed him into the living room and above the piano there was a print of the northern lights. She had always wanted to see them, but heard they hardly can be seen with the naked eye most of the times, that it had to be really strong for it to be seen and otherwise they'd just look like clouds that were moving fast.

"Did you take this photo as well?"

"Yes. This was about one year ago... I remember..." suddenly he was lost in thought again, and could not break out of his daydream for a long time.

Beatrice walked around the room, there were more photos hanging above the sofa, one of them containing the very person whom she was visiting.

"Here's you! Where was this photo taken?"

"What, oh... I'm sorry, I just realized how bizarre it is that it is already one year ago I took this photo..." he was still thinking about the photo of the northern lights. "This one, this is me in Spain."

"You look happy," said Beatrice.

"Do you mean I don't look happy now?"

"I... no that's not what I meant..."

But he realized that she was right. He was happy in that photo. It was a wonderful afternoon spent in a small town in the north of Spain, where he had visited a winery and walked around amongst the charming streets, admiring every building he came across. When was this? Two years ago? No... it must have been more. Maybe two and a half. It was before he moved to this apartment.

Beatrice started to feel uneasy and that she had said something wrong, "I'm sorry, I do not want to overstay my welcome. I just wanted to say hi, and I really enjoyed looking at your photos, they are beautiful, I hope you continue taking more photos. I hope you enjoy the cookies."

"No, don't feel sorry, you are right, I was happy in that photo! I just didn't remember it," he said.

"Why don't you remember it?" asked Beatrice.

"I... I didn't know it before, but your visit today has made me realize, I... I have been in a sort of hibernation... since about a year back."

"You mean you isolate yourself?"

"Yes... talking to you, made me realize that I haven't talked to another person for so long that I cannot even remember when the last time was."

"But why? Why do you do this to yourself?"

"I don't know..." he said, "I think, I am just waiting..."