

Empathetic Gesture

By Dana K. Glasscock

Clink! came the sound of some spare change landing in his rusted pot as I walked on by. I looked at the tired man sitting beside it. He had knowing eyes and a jaw set in tired understanding. *Does he have anyone to talk to, or that will listen to him?* I wondered as I ambled on. Giving him the spare change had become a daily ritual on my way to work. This, however, was the first time I had thought more than, *there's my good deed for the day*, and I couldn't get the nagging questions that had appeared out of my head.

The next day was Saturday and again I wondered about the man: *Does he notice when I don't drop the change? Does he even care that I do?* The questions persisted throughout the weekend until that Monday when I called in sick and began the walk that would lead me to tranquility.

"Do you care about anything?" I asked when I saw him, "Do you look at the people passing by and wonder about what they think, or why things happen?"

At first, he only stared at me. Then he said, "Why wouldn't I?" He patted the ground beside him and said, "Look at the world from my view and it will answer your questions." I grimaced at the dingy sidewalk beside him and balked at the idea, but something inside, the same voice with the questions, told me to do it. I sat.

That day we watched and I saw hundreds of people walk by. Barely 5% even noticed us on the busy New York sidewalk. Those that did either gave a condescending look or sympathetically dropped in some money. They didn't ask a thing, only gave it as a passing gesture that wouldn't affect their world for more than a moment. I began to wonder what was so important that they had to scurry along like bees in a hive. Then I thought, *that was me. I never once thought anything of the situation, only viewed it as an empathetic gesture, no more important than the temperature of my coffee.*

After three hours I got up, looked at the man, and nodded. He didn't say anything but the answer was clear. As I walked home the questions did not cease as I had hoped they would; instead they arrived with answers. I was able to see my world, my life, from a new perspective, only it wasn't that different. A mile in his shoes might seem unfortunate in some people's eyes, but in mine, all I saw was the destination. It isn't the shoes that count; it's the path you take them on. I knew that thanks to this experience my path would change, the direction it would turn to might not be the best path but hopefully it would have more than empty empathetic gestures along the way.