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World Weariness

A short story in which a tired octogenarian contemplates pushing back against the indifferent world, and ponders letting go...

by: Matias Travieso-Diaz

Some soothsayers predict that the end of things will come by fire, through an all-consuming conflagration that reduces to cinders everything that is or could ever be. Others insist that the end will be by water, from an endless deluge that submerges everything beneath a bottomless expanse of murk. Still others foretell that the very earth will someday convulse and reject the wickedness being visited upon it, burying it all under titanic discharges of rock and lava.

Simon's theory, however, was less dramatic. According to him, society was destined to disintegrate and human life would disappear from lack of interest. He could see the signs all around him: the nations of the world no longer reacted with indignation at the outrageous acts committed by one or another; people hardly evidenced emotion at the scenes of hunger, disease, poverty, and pain that were becoming commonplace; countless dramas were staged daily in every continent and went largely unremarked. The march towards the end was not being punctuated by roars of rage, but by universal ennui.

Simon felt mankind was increasingly weary of its existence as a species, a condition with which he was familiar after being alive for over eighty years and having buried all his family and most of his friends. Getting out of bed was nowadays a daunting task. Going through the routines of living, from brushing his teeth to flipping through the pages of the daily newspaper, were

unrewarding chores accomplished through endless streams of yawning. He needed something to energize him beyond strong cups of coffee, a jolt of electricity that would reawaken his senses and make him feel alive again. Yet nothing of the sort ever happened to him.

One Tuesday morning Simon received a message from the pharmacy advising they were unable to refill his prescription for blood pressure medication because the number of allowed refills was exhausted, thus a new prescription from his primary care provider was required. He proceeded to call his doctor's nurse and left her a detailed message with appropriate instructions. The following day Simon, being a skeptic, placed an early call to the pharmacy to verify that his prescription had been filled and he could go pick it up. The clerk advised that no order had come yet from his doctor. Simon was annoyed, but not surprised. The days of prompt, individualized attention were gone forever. So, he called his doctor's nurse again and left a message with a repeated request, emphasizing that it needed urgent attention. He would have wished to scream a little at the crone, but he was not able to speak directly to anyone in the practice.

By Friday morning Simon's wish for excitement had been granted. After another negative response from the pharmacy, he was full of combative energy, itching for a fight against the incompetence and indifference of those who should be taking care of his well-being. He left a scathing phone message demanding that the doctor or his nurse call him back at once to confirm that his simple request for a prescription refill had been honored. The ether remained undisturbed; it was as if he was trying to contact a dead relative via a OUIJA board instead of having a routine exchange with a health care provider.

Meanwhile, his supply of blood pressure control medication was running low and Simon feared his chances of suffering a heart attack or a stroke would be increasing soon, aided of course by his growing irritation. He became anxious and his blood pressure surged, as made apparent by a mounting headache that resisted a double dose of analgesics.

As the day wore on, Simon came to realize that he was a mere cog in the vast machine of the universe and his potential demise was of no importance or interest to anyone. Being reminded of his insignificance, he decided that worrying was useless and he should resign himself to whatever fate was in store for him. He relaxed and sat back on his recliner, a glass of lemonade at hand, and set out to watch the early afternoon soap opera, whose predictable plot did not seem to have advanced much in the fifteen years since the last time he and his late wife had watched the show.

Soon enough, Simon's eyelids became heavy and the glass fell out of his hand. He fell into a deep sleep and dreamt that he was back to the days of his childhood, when society was orderly

and others were attentive to his problems and took care of addressing them. He felt a pang of regret in his soul at having outlived the best part of his life.

Somehow, Simon realized he was still dreaming and resolved not to return to wakefulness. Let this miserable world keep turning without him; he was ready to say goodbye to life and its sorrows. His sleep became deeper, and then it was challenged by a sharp stab in his chest. However, he did not allow himself to wake up from the pain; indeed, he did not awaken even when a new message arrived on his answering machine. It was a call from the pharmacy to let him know that his prescription had been filled and was ready for pickup.

Through some miracle, Simon survived the night and, late that afternoon, was able to retrieve his blood pressure medication. However, on his drive back home his car was struck by a speeding, inebriated driver and he sustained severe head injuries. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital's emergency room, never regaining consciousness.

The end had arrived for Simon in a rather exciting, yet unanticipated way. Had he been able to formulate a coherent thought, he would have concluded that there are numerous ways for one's life — or the world's — to conclude, thus it is best to try to go on living as fully as one's circumstances permit, since surviving until the following day is always a chancy proposition.

Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over two hundred and fifty of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies, magazines, blogs, audio books, and podcasts. One of his four novels, an autobiography entitled "Cuban Transplant," and four anthologies of his stories have also been published.

Image by: Janusz Jurek.