

Breathing mazes

My clock is subtly ticking... With every movement of the hour's hand, I lose more than I am able to give. I can see the sunset blending along with the heavens. This results in a beautifully painted space full of colors, light, and hope. Hope, such a powerful collection of letters.

Time moves faster and faster as I slowly dissolve in the monotony of their day. One more ticking of the clock...One less chance of me getting to them. I do remember the beginning of my story with these creatures. All they knew was how to value empty things and all I knew was how to make them suffer. I have seen it all. The face of the regretful, the anxious father who could not touch his child, the lonely woman next door who had no one to talk to about her boring never-ending day. I have seen people afraid to hug themselves. Some are scared of their breath, hands, and few of their fears.

Tick-tack! Next to me stands one of them. His pale skin has melted and you can easily notice his cheekbones. He has a long hawkish nose, a well-sculpted chin, and two deep hazel eyes. 'What a being!'-I think out loud. The lower lip keeps trembling while he struggles to remember how to inhale. He gathers all his weak strength and tries one more time to fight against a great marvelous nothing. I admire this colossus. There is something strange in him that I have never come across to before. Maybe it is the sparkle of his irises that captivates my limited intellect. It is everything but solid. It is a fluid warmth that leaks from his eyes into my invisible physique and makes me sorrowful. It brings forth all of the 'what if's' that occupy my mind...

The clock's hands seem to have stopped or it's just the never-ending second that makes me feel this way. I continue contemplating... There are millions of them. Millions of shiny eyes, millions of hearts empty of courage, millions of teardrops, and visages ...Too many...too many numbers to count. Yes, that's what they are! Pathetic, breathing numbers! They come and go along with the sun, never to return again. Just like this very second. After the ticking, it will vanish into the ether and I will long for something gone forever.

He is still here. I can feel his breath craving for another's to be poured on his bumpy forehead. Yet, there is no one next to him. As he came, he is meant to go. Solitary he lies supine on the hospital's bed, looking at the dull ceiling. I wonder what's there to look at ? Maybe, he views it as a stage where the play of his life is acted out. Maybe not. I will never know.

One more ticking. After all, I don't feel any regret. I don't feel anything anymore. They deserve every bit of what they are experiencing. At the end of the day, that's what they wanted, isn't it? Living with themselves, for themselves. Living an egocentric type of solitude. They...they are the ones who forgot the warmth of the neighbors' presence. The ones who loved gadgets more than each-other. Creatures with dying hearts deserve to be left alone with no one but their breath.

Time passes. As they weaken, I strengthen. As they distance, I reach nearer to my goal. It is I, who controls the life of the youngsters and the elderly! I am the sovereign authority that they can't even see! But they fear the unseen! Humans have known and used the enormous power of fear very well throughout history. Haven't they? Answer! He doesn't reply. No one does .I glance at him again. Such a lifeless puppet! - I whisper intensely. The hospital's room seems emptier than ever. The thick air floats above our heads, drizzles over our noses, fills our lungs, and kills both of us slowly.

Time elapses... Someone comes hurrying and gives the human next to me something very strange. "It came! It came!" -he cries with his porcelain face turning marigold. He feels ... cheerful. The old heart starts beating faster and the swallowed fingers cautiously hold the paper. Burning with a fierce joy, he reads with a shaky but certain voice: "Dear...gran... Grandpa!" I come nearer so I can decipher the writing.

"...We miss you every day and we pray to God for your health. Surely, you will come back home! And ... Don't forget to tell the virus..."

Tell the virus?! What a piteous phrase! "Tell the virus that we are still next to you. Your battle motivates all of us to stay stronger. And..."

One, two, three teardrops fall from his foggy eyes right into the letter. Dissolving with the ink. '...grandpa, the sun seems more radiant than ever since the lockdown. Maybe because I miss being kissed by its warmth or because the glass is very clean. Everything is cleaner, grandpa! Our hands, our house, our feelings, too! My dad doesn't go to work anymore. He sits with me and every evening we count the stars outside the window. Ms. Violet, next door, was very miserable after they fired her and her husband. With no money left to feed their family, they were desperate for help. But don't worry, we left a box with rice, pasta, and sauce in front of their door. "They need us and we need them."-that is what mom said. Grandpa, my silver-haired, grandpa! They say that near the city's river dolphins came. They say that birds are not afraid to go out of their nests anymore. They say the earth is healing. You must heal, too! You are the strongest man alive. Remember? Do not assume I have forgotten your words:" Son, in pain, you grow". This phrase made me ponder for so long, Grandpa! Trying and struggling to find the answer somewhere inside me. But now, I suppose... I understand it better. Maybe, I still don't but for sure I learned something. I learned that people are momentary creatures while alone, and perennial while being together. "

I stop reading and sit on the old man's sweaty palms. His Socratic beard, timeworn face and wrinkled eyelids make him look solemn. He cries and smiles at the same time as his eyes move back and forth, reading through the lines. Perhaps, looking for some hidden feelings or a familiar signature. He seems... different. Still old but different. Indisputably.... stronger. "Such complex beings"- I assume. Complex breathing...mazes.

It's late again. The mid-summer dawn transitioned into dusk leaving no room for the vibrant orange of the July sun. The clock's hands slowly break. One after another.

The mustachioed lips move and I climb near his neck to listen.

'Thank you!'-he whispers twice.

"Thank you for paving our way into finding the elixir of our problems, or at least making us understand them better."-he continues with an uneven breathy voice.

Silence. The air seems heavier and heavier as he mutters something. "Indeed, you are strong, but know that nothing...nothing is stronger than the human soul!-says the old man as if he knows I have been listening to him all the time.