

Room for a view

Sonya bright-eyes

Sonya would remind you of a tiny bird as she lies wrapped in her nest of yellow blankets, watching the world pass by her door and the daylight come and go in the courtyard beyond her window. She fixes you with her bright eyes and tells you she has a hurting heart or a pain in her belly if you care to ask and bend really low to be near to her. Such bright eyes.

She's old, older than eighty, and she refuses to drink. An ambulance deposited her a week earlier in emergency, kicking and fighting, agitated and confused. Her social worker had her brought in. Sonya carried nothing with her but an old handbag and a small, faded photo of a young woman with raven-dark hair and bright eyes.

Sonya had calmed down somewhat on the ward, but she was always like a bird about to fly away.

"Sonya, will you drink some water?"

"No, thanking you."

"Sonya, why don't you drink some water?"

"I don't drink too much. I don't drink too little. I drink just enough."

An i.v. for fluids is inserted into her bird-thin arm. She fights when the nurse puts it in, but leaves it there. Always, her bright eyes.

"Sonya, what do you want?"

"I want to go home."

A day later: "Sonya, what do you want?"

The bright eyes: "I want to go home."

So she went home. A social worker left her in her apartment, settled on a small cot just inside the door, since she can't manage a bed in her small place. The photo of the girl with the raven-dark hair and bright eyes was placed gently on a small table beside the cot, alongside a sandwich and a glass of water.

"Good-bye, Sonya," the social worker said, leaving. "I'll check in with you next week."

"Don't close the door," smiled Sonya. "I don't like to be locked in."

That was on a Friday.

The nurse from the floor could not forget Sonya as the weekend passed. It was hot in the city; even the birds looked thirsty. So she dropped by Sonya's apartment, ground floor, back corner. Sonya hadn't moved for two days. She was still lying in her coat on the small cot, food and drink untouched, her bright eyes watching the world through the still-open door.

This time she didn't fight when they took her to the hospital. This time, as the nurse wheeled her back onto the ward, she cradled the photograph of the girl with the raven-dark hair and the bright eyes. She smiled and nestled into the yellow blankets. The photo now sits on the radiator under the window.

"Sonya, will you take a drink?"

"No, thanking you very much."

Sonya, do you know what will happen if you do not drink?

Sonya smiles. "I don't drink too much. I don't drink too little. I drink just enough."

Always the bright eyes.

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Art Explosion

Illness and metaphor

Hygiene

PETKOFF. And how have you been, my dear?

CATHERINE. Oh, my usual sore throats: thats all.

PETKOFF [*with conviction*] That comes from washing your neck every day. Ive often told you so.

CATHERINE. Nonsense, Paul!

PETKOFF [*over his coffee and cigarette*] I dont believe in going too far with these modern customs. All this washing cant be good for the health: it's not natural. There was an Englishman at Philippopolis who used to wet himself all over with cold water every morning when he got up. Disgusting! It all comes from the English: their climate makes them so dirty that they have to be perpetually washing themselves. Look at my father! he never had a bath in his life; and he lived to be ninety-eight, the healthiest man in Bulgaria. I dont mind a good wash once a week to keep up my position; but once a day is carrying the thing to a ridiculous extreme.

CATHERINE. You are a barbarian at heart still, Paul. I hope you behaved yourself before all those Russian officers.

PETKOFF. I did my best. I took care to let them know that we had a library.

CATHERINE. Ah; but you didn't tell them that we have an electric bell in it? I have had one put up.

PETKOFF. What's an electric bell?

CATHERINE. You touch a button; something tinkles in the kitchen; and then Nicola comes up.

PETKOFF. Why not shout for him?

CATHERINE. Civilized people never shout for their servants. Ive learnt that while you were away.

From: George Bernard Shaw, *Arms and the Man*, Act II; 1894.