

The Old Man on Pontaluna Road

My purpose in life is to become an old man.

When the sun began to peek through the winter and the weather became more hospitable, an elderly man sat outside in a lawn chair in front of the small Baptist church on Pontaluna Road. He would raise a friendly hand at everyone that drove by, and they would greet him back with a nod and smile. Little kids would giggle, teens would crack a smile, and even dogs would wag at the sight of the good-natured man. I, just like the other members of my community, was excited whenever I caught a glimpse of him on the way home from school. Every day, I would roll down my window and grin at the man, my hand vigorously flapping in the wind. Every day, he would smile back.

The man was well-known among those that lived in Norton Shores: he was another customary part of everyday life in a small town that everyone had grown accustomed to. But, as autumn reared its head and the cold barreled in, the old man was outside less and less, and just like a summer breeze, he was gone too quickly; patiently, we awaited his return when the natural world welcomed him.

When Mother Nature finally fulfilled our cravings of warmth and let the sun smile down and gently touch the frosty earth, I passed the church every day in hopes of seeing the town's favorite cheerful fellow. Days went by, and I began to wonder. Those days turned into weeks, and I began to worry. There had not been any sightings of the man that was so prevalent in our community. It turns out that I was not the only one questioning his disappearance, and eventually word got out that he had been hospitalized earlier that year.

I have not since seen the man outside the Baptist church on Pontaluna Road, but I have seen him within me. I long to be the hand that touches hearts; I yearn to exude life from my fingertips; I ache to shed light onto others and plant seeds into their souls with my outstretched palms; I must unravel my fist to reveal an inflorescence of love; I crave the sun on my skin as I

send its rays through others. I am compelled to stretch out and radiate warmth to those around me before I withdraw from this world when the bitter chill of winter arrives.

An act as small and simple as a wave had become an event that I anticipated every day. Once it was gone, I truly recognized how significant it had been to me. And if it had such an impact on me, it must have had a similar influence on others. Eventually, I realized it was my turn to become the sunshine that melts the frost that had resided over my town. It was now my role to blossom into the flower that reached its petals out and cast a cool, protective shadow over the small sprouts around it. I must take the world into my arms and hold her lovingly after all the anguish and turmoil she has been through. It has become my duty to heal the world, one act of kindness at a time.

My purpose is to love others fiercely, as one benevolent man had taught me. It is to hold the door open for an elderly couple; it is to hug my mother one more time before I leave because I know she worries when I'm gone; it is to let my classmate borrow my favorite book, so loved that the cover is bent and some of the pages are torn; it is to buy orange juice for a homeless man and to double check my blind spot when my younger brother's in the car and to pet the cats at the shelter simply because it's Thursday and they probably haven't gotten attention since Saturday. My purpose is to love because if one is not glowing with geniality and emanating radiance—if they are not nurturing the lives of others as they had been nurtured themselves—how can they expect the ground to be fruitful beneath them? How is one supposed to water the flowers at their feet if their own well is not overflowing? How will the grass thrive if the sun does not stretch to the earth in which it grows? I am a person that must do unto others the goodness that they have done unto me. I long to become the man in front of the Baptist church on Pontaluna Road.