

The Blind Man

Olha Kobylianska

I've gone blind.

There's no sense in talking about why or how it happened. Simply put, the most awful thing has happened: I've gone blind.

There was another man in the hospital blind, like me. When they let us sit together, we were content.

"Can you see even a glimmer of sunlight?" I would sometimes ask my unfortunate friend.

"No," he'd say. "And you?"

"Me neither."

Silence followed; our spirits rose to fathom one another.

Why was it so good for the two of us to be together in our misery?

Before long, my friend was released. One day he saw sunlight, and they let him go. Kind people took him in. They released me when it became clear that I would never see sunlight again. My friends presented me with a staff, and with that staff I was to manage in life.

And so I walk the earth.

What I mean to say is, I go from place to place. And even though I know that I will never see sunlight again, I still try with all my might to catch some glimpse of it.

I open my eyes so very wide—so very wide, my dear friends—in hopes of seeing at least an illusory sun...at least a speck of it...at least that! In hopes that I might see the gleam of a tiny, blessed sunbeam!... But, alas, no. I see nothing.

Nothing...

In walking from place to place, for some reason I stretch my arms out in front of me with fingers splayed and carry my head high, as if ready at any instant to catch a momentary gleam of the sun. This I do even though I know the sun will not let itself be caught—after all, it's the sun! At times it seems that my fingertips are just about to touch it—and then I realize that what I'm touching are coins offered to me as charity.

I shut my eyes, for tears have gathered there.

I shut my eyes for tears have gathered there—tender tears of acceptance and gratitude for the offering being given to me.

Spontaneous tears. I did nothing to trigger them. My soul is already dark, even though it has opened wide, as wide as my eyes. I strain to hear, it seems, some trace of the sun-filled life around me. Lowering my head despondently, I sink into the depths of my being, straining to detect even a bit

of sun or light, knowing all the while that no blind man has yet caught the light of the sun with his soul, and neither will I.

Sunlight...

I call out to you! Consider that this is not the voice of an ordinary person calling out to you but the voice of a blind man. Inaudibly, without pleading in any way, as if casually...for how am I to make a plea in words like "Oh, my dear blessed sun!" and then add "I have gone blind..."? The sun shines for all.

It shines in the woods, and for people too. And where a puddle of some kind forms, the sun's sparkle reaches it too. Yet, in its age-old way, the sun never shines for the blind.

I then sink into the depths of my soul.

My soul has become as dark as it is deep. As sad as my eyes. I open my eyes before you, my friends, and you see me—but I can no longer see you! I cannot see you now, and as long as I live, I will never see you again. And I accept that, my friends: I accept that I will never—hear me!—never in my life see you again...

For the sun, only my eyes fail to serve. But you, my friends, have never shined a true beam of light on either my eyes or my soul.

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