

The View

by *Nyx Martinez*

I stared past the rusty window frame, out of the bus. The day was off to a gloomy start and so was I. Lost in thought, recalling things that would have been better left forgotten, I sank into a dark mood. Sad, isn't it, how when we're feeling down we tend to busy our mind with thoughts that only waste our time and further sap our spirits?

The bus rolled to a halt. Again. Manila traffic. I glanced at my watch. 6 a.m. Too early for traffic to be moving this slowly. I had a deadline to meet and hadn't gotten much sleep the night before. Angrily, I turned back to the window.

A young street vendor was selling black boots that he had shined to a dazzling finish. I could almost read his mind, feel his hopes. Today would be good. Perhaps he'd earn a few more pesos than yesterday and have a better meal tonight. Just maybe.

A prospective buyer stopped. He wore faded jeans and a worn shirt. Slung over his shoulder was an imitation JanSport backpack. He held up a pair of boots and admired them. *Someday, maybe someday*, he seemed to be thinking, *I'll have enough money to buy some boots like these*.

I wondered what his daily earnings came to. Two hundred, maybe three hundred pesos?—About US\$6, tops. The boots cost twice that much. His money was needed elsewhere. Lots of elsewhere. He probably had a family back home who needed to eat, and debts to get out from under. His money was spent before he earned it. The boots would have to wait.

The man looked wearily at the vendor. His eyes said it all. Not today. And probably not tomorrow. The two made small talk as if they were old friends. They laughed and shared another story before my bus inched down the block and stopped again.

This time, I found myself staring at a wrinkled old lady selling candy. She sat on a low bench, half obstructing the sidewalk, as the thronging crowd moved around her. Her eyes revealed sadness, about what I didn't know. Maybe the simple fact that today would be just like yesterday and the day before, like all the days that had turned into years, a day just like she knew tomorrow would be.

She would sit on that stool from sunrise to sundown. A few people would buy bits of candy, but nobody would notice her. After dropping coins into her callused hand they would hurry off, strangers still. The day would move on with them. The old lady would grow older and not any happier for it.

As I watched, the corners of her mouth fell even more. She stared off into the distance as a glistening drop formed in her eye and ran down her cheek. I had to look away.

A traffic controller was busy at the corner hurrying pedestrians across the intersection. Was he, too, carrying some unseen sorrow? Was he also haunted by thoughts that would have been better left forgotten? If something was bothering him, he couldn't afford to let it show. He had work to do, traffic to move, order to keep.

A twenty-something woman crossed the street at his signal, and I tried to imagine the world through her eyes. What was her story? Where was she going? What was her name? ... Why did I even care?

My mind snapped back to my own situation and I realized that something had struck a chord inside, against my own will it seemed. It was odd that I should be feeling someone else's emotion. Or was it? Was it okay to be calloused to the feelings of others, to go through my days as if all the nameless people in the crowds around me were mere props in *my* world? No. Each stranger was someone's mother, someone's child, someone's husband, someone's brother, someone's someone. And they all mattered.

As I thought back on my own problems, whatever had been bothering me before seemed trivial. I don't have a sad, hard life, living and working on the street, with pollution stinging my eyes and hardening my lungs. I don't have to worry every waking moment about how to make ends meet. Sure, I have problems of my own, but by comparison, life has been good to me. And from all indications, it will continue that way.

The bus eventually picked up speed and I got on with my day. But in those few glimpses out the bus window, God had given me something that I hope I never lose—empathy, a heart for what others are going through and a desire to help make their world a little brighter.

Out of life's window, my view may change every day, but there will always be people in need passing there. What can I do for them? Real compassion doesn't just observe and then turn away. And neither should I.