

As far as I could tell he was a loner. He appeared to have no one related to him by blood or by circumstance. I saw him often riding a rusty red bike at a fast clip on the sidewalk, his long hair and greying beard swept back by the wind he created. He appeared to be oblivious to traffic lights, ignorant of the rules of the road, a menace to vehicles and to the pedestrians to whom he shouted, "Beep, beep" when approaching them from behind.

He was not always causing havoc on the sidewalk. During bad weather he took refuge in public places. I had seen him in the mall downtown, but one of his favourite places was the laundromat where I took my dirty clothes every Wednesday evening. This was a recently renovated business with freshly painted walls and new machines, something I appreciated, having tangled previously with broken washers that refused to fill up with water, or dryers that tumbled the clothes around in cold air, not drying it. He may have lived nearby: my neighborhood was an older one with houses that reflected a past when large families were the norm. Many of these houses had now been sectioned off into apartments or rooming houses and I suspected he lived in one of these.

While he was in the laundromat he often ate from a large bag of potato chips and drank from a giant-sized bottle of cola. He wiped his hands clean on his baggy brown pants and cleaned his beard of potato chip dust with the sleeves of his torn shirt. He spent an inordinate amount of time rifling through the local newspapers that people had discarded. He seemed not so much interested in the news, but instead he preferred the section covering local events. Occasionally, he tore out a piece and put it in his pocket. Folding my clothes, I found myself bored and a little curious. He noticed me watching him.

"Studio 52 is offering a free makeover," he said. "I'm entering the contest."

I tried to keep my mocking smile to myself. Studio 52 was a high-class beauty salon and spa. I could not afford to use their services. It was ludicrous of him to believe that he could win such a contest. But then, I thought about myself and my neighbours and friends and how we lined up every

Friday to buy our lottery tickets for the million-dollar draw. His dream was not much more ridiculous than ours.

After he won, I did not recognize him. He had on a stylish cream suit with pants fitted with a leather belt. His hair had been cut and layered. The beard was gone. His hands showed the talents of a manicurist. I expected his feet had been subjected to a pedicure. His shoes were new and polished, and his socks had been chosen to match the suit.

It was his old habits that made me wonder if it was him. He arrived at the laundromat on his bike. At first, I refused to believe it was him. I thought it impossible that someone could go through such a transformation. He sat at a table and began pressing a pen across an entry form in a magazine.

A young man pushed coins into a dryer and then sat across from the older man. He looked at his phone and barely glanced in the gentleman's direction.

"I'm going to win a trip to see the Rockies," said the old man, tapping the entry form.

"Oh really," said the young man, using a skeptical yet pitying note, a tone young people reserved for old people whom they thought senile or crazy. (At this young man's age, I had also refused to acknowledge that I was irrevocably on my way to old age.)

"I'm a lucky guy," the old man said, boasting. He sprang from his chair, startling the young man. "Look at this here suit. I won it." He spread open the jacket. "And this shirt." Suddenly his left foot was on top of the sorting table. "I won these shoes and these socks too. My haircut and shave. I won them all in a contest.

"Is that a fact," said the young man.

“Oh yeh. They had a makeover contest at Studio 52, and I won.” He lifted his chin proudly. He took out two pictures and flashed them in front of the young man. Having offered proof, he seemed rather self-satisfied. He smiled at me as he passed me on his way out the door.

The young man shook his head. “Wow, that was unreal. What a big waste of Studio 52’s time and money.”

I can’t deny that the same thought had crossed my mind. The old man did not have the money or the wherewithal to keep the look created by Studio 52. The prize would have been better won by someone like myself who would have at least have tried to manage to keep the look intact.

Over time, I have come to see things in a different light. I believe that the old man enjoyed the makeover thoroughly. I, on the other hand, would have appreciated it initially, but in a short time I would have taken the hair and the clothes for granted, in the same way that I was excited by a new appliance when I first bought it, and then over time, I forgot to be grateful for its presence in my house.

The old man, on the other hand, will never forget his makeover. Just the other day I saw him again showing off the pictures Studio 52 had taken of him before and after the makeover.