

A Book so Lively

Last Friday I went out to have lunch with my friend at a newly opened restaurant located downtown. The room was quite empty since it had passed the lunch time for almost an hour, so we took a seat near the window. While we waited for our food to be served, my friend started looking at his phone, browsing TikTok and news about recent football games. I glanced through the rest of the guests, most of them held a smart phone on their hands, waiting for food, or even when they were having food.

I did not look at my phone, partly because its battery was dying and partly because there were not really a lot of new messages for me to check over. So I looked out of the window, staring at the buildings beside the restaurant, the bushes around the buildings, and the falling leaves from the trees beside the road. Then all of a sudden, a beautiful bird shining in blue color flew over the window and rested on the banister of the building right opposite us. I called my friend immediately to pull him away from Real Madrid's match highlights. We watched the bird silently until it left the banister and disappeared into the blue sky. He then burst out laughing: "Popo (a very bad nickname he took for me), it's so frequent for you to spot something around you that normal people would never even notice!" After seconds he stopped laughing, looking at me earnestly, "It is so lucky for you to have such talent."

Honestly, I do not know if this is a kind of talent, or even simply a useful ability. What I do know is that I do not own this skill out of luck. I did not act like this until my language teacher gave us a daily homework assignment to write a diary when I was in middle school. She believed that we young teenagers can learn to observe the world around us more attentively and have better writing skills at the same time. In general, we were allowed to write anything – either some interesting experiences we had that day or some thoughtful ideas we would like to share – but we were required to write

every day. The assignment bothered me every time I opened my diary book. I could hardly find anything worth writing about since my life everyday seemed to be just copying yesterday: I went to school to have classes, went back home to finish my homework and eventually went to bed to finish the day. The second obstacle was that I did not have any experience about writing other than exam-related works. I forced myself to pay attention to my surroundings and struggled with this homework for months, spending approximately 2 hours every day just to write around 200 words. Sometimes I even asked myself why I should spend so much time on such un-graded work, and every time I ended up with the same answer: because I care. At first, I cared about how my teacher would judge me based on my diary, whether she would see me as a nice and decent student I cared about my language teacher's view of me as well as my classmates': I wish to make my classmates impressed. Then the things I care about gradually changed as I became more used to this habit. I cared about my life, and I tried to make my life colorful. I also started to try writing something that requires deep thoughts, like cognition and opinions.

Thanks to my language teacher, I learned to pay more attention to my daily life. I would stare at something or someone for a very long time, trying to figure out what's unique about them, and I would walk along around my community occasionally, seeking whether there's anything new or that I missed before. Although I stare at people less as I grow up trying to avoid being considered rude or getting into trouble with anyone, these activities still excite me and cheer me up when I am stressed nowadays. But it is not just about real-life experiences and views. The practice of the unique ability also changed my way of reading – I started to think as the characters in the book. What they would consider and why they would do something.

I still remember reading the famous novel *Yes, Prime Minister*. It was a special

book for me because I watched the TV series first before reading the book and it is still the best book-based TV show to me till now. The show had a real impact on me that I could remember every emotion and move the actors have when I read that part in the book. The images of Paul Eddington and Nigel Hawthorne (the main actors of the show) appeared vividly in front of me, the tone they use to speak, the intense atmosphere between them, how they managed to make a compromise, etc. They even appeared when I read the part that was not being filmed. I tried to imagine how these gifted actors would react to this part I just read, how they would perform and how they would act. It turns into a habit every time I read a new book. I started to imagine all the characters in the book right in front of me. I analyzed their personalities from a lot of perspectives, including the details most people would not notice normally. Then, I put myself into their places. Sometimes I was surprised by the decision characters made all of a sudden since it does not match his/her characteristics, while most of the time it comforts me to understand why a character in the book would make such behavior given the surroundings that shaped him/her. I also make predictions occasionally, thinking what I would do if I were them, and how that differs from what I would expect them to do. Then I keep on reading to discover the truth and to see whether I hit the jackpot. I also imagine the author – why did he/she write such words, what is his/her purpose and how he/she wants to express the ideas. Would he/she talk like a teacher who is trying to put the knowledge into my brain? Or whether he/she would discuss the topic with me like we have been friends for a long time? The process always brings me excitement and joy, and which makes me feel less painful when I am forced to read something that I personally do not like.

It took a while before the waitress brought our food to us, which drew us back from the cloud and the sky. I glanced through the restaurant once again. There was not

much change: people had their food, looked at their phone, some chatted with each other. Me and my friend quietly had our meal and made comments on the taste once or twice. Just before we were about to leave, the sun came out from the cloud, warmly and brightly in the sky. I did not call my friend – we both looked out of the window silently, enjoying the precious leisure after the meal.