A Penny for Your Thoughts

Lisa Ballinger
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by Lisa Ballinger

It was a hot day in August. It was so sultry that you just sat and smothered. But there was one man; he could sit in jeans and a long-sleeved shirt.

He sat in his rocking chair. It was an old wood chair that creaked when he rocked. The creaks were quietly rhythmic and soothing.

The chair was on the flat, plain, concrete porch. The porch rose about four feet off the ground, that was with the added railing. The porch was stuck to a plain house in the middle of a city. People walked by his house all the time in a hustle and bustle to get to their destinations. The old man sat in his rocker all day just watching the people. He sat with a plastic cup of pennies in his hand. And when he saw a person pass, he picked one out and threw it at him and shouted, "A penny for your thoughts."

Many people looked at him perturbed, some ran away, and others shouted profanities, but then there were a couple of exceptions now and then.

Along came a young woman of about twenty or so. He threw the penny, and it landed by her open-toed sandals. She stopped, looked down at it, and picked it up. "A penny for your thoughts," shouted the old man. She turned her head with her long brown hair whipping around her face and peered at him. She was in heavy thought--there was something bothering her, but she didn’t know if she should speak up.

Finally she replied, "O.K." She strolled up to the porch and set the penny on the railing. "I have so much on my mind," she said, exhaling.

"Well, tell me. Maybe I can help."

"I don’t think you could. My career is going down the drain, my relationship is crumbling at every touch, and my family life stinks. Life sucks!"

"Why don’t you call your family? They might be able to help," replied the old man.
"I don’t think so. If I told my mother or father, they would have a fit. All they would say is, ‘I told you so, I told you so.’" She collapsed on the porch and buried her face in her hands. She started to weep uncontrollably.

"Please don’t cry. You seem pretty successful to me. You have a pretty face and some really nice clothes." The old man said this hoping to cheer her up.

"Oh, please," she snapped and sat up abruptly. She wiped a tear from her cheek. "This is all just an act. I seem to have a nice job. I seem to be all together, but it’s just my appearance. It is all an illusion. I feel as if I’m falling apart at the seams. I don’t know what to do." The old man sat there astonished. His mouth was hanging open, he knew what she was thinking. He knew what needed to be said to her, but he just sat there, mute.

"I knew this was a waste of time," she declared getting up and wiping her face. "I’m just going to leave now."

"No, wait!" yelled the old man.

"Don’t stop me. I have my mind made up." She got up and hurried down the steps.

"Stop. Suicide isn’t for you," he said. She stopped, turned around, and raised her eyebrows at him. "Young lady, just don’t throw your life away. I know how you feel, and, believe me, it isn’t worth it," he pleaded. But she just turned and walked away. Under his breath, "Well, there goes another chance." He was so disgusted that he just sat in his rocker. He didn’t even care about the rest of the people passing.

He stared at the neighbor’s trees across the street. The leaves overlapped one another. He noticed all the greens in them. He saw the tiny blades of grass rising up to the sunlight and grasping for water. The kaleidoscope of colors released his troubled mind. Then a voice whispered from above, "Stanley, Stanley." The angel poked her head down from the overhang.

"A penny for your thoughts," said the old man, and threw the penny at her. It didn’t hurt her, instead it flew through her and landed on the ground.

"Now Stanley, that is not the way to act to your angel."

"I’m sorry, I’m just confused over what happened with that young woman. How am I supposed to save her when she just walks away?"

"She’ll be back."
"Sure," said Stanley sarcastically, and he looked away.

"Don't lose hope. You'll be in heaven soon enough. Take care." Then she left as abruptly as she came. Even his angel couldn't get his hopes up. He was afraid she was really going to do it. So he just sat there throwing pennies.

It was getting late and Stanley rocked through the sunset and was sitting in the glow of the porch light. He was getting ready to go in for the night when he heard, "Am I disturbing you?" He turned around and saw the young lady from earlier in the day. "I thought maybe I could talk to you again."

"Sure, I'll listen any time." He turned around and sat back in his rocker. "What's on your mind?"

"You were right. You knew exactly what I was thinking. I didn't see what the point of life was, anymore," she said sadly.

"I know death is not the answer."

"How do you know, Mr. Smarty?"

"Because I did it," he said bluntly.

"Excuse me?" she questioned with widened eyes.

"I took my own life. I felt I was a puppet in the hands of society. I would bend to whatever anyone asked me. I decided to escape."

"Why aren't you in heaven, or whatever?"

"Taking your own life is against God's rules. So now I have to spend time in purgatory, which is right here."

"What? This is all blowing my mind."

"My angel keeps coming down and helping me out. She said the only way to get off the rocker is to convince someone not to commit the same act I did."

"This is proof enough for me. I won't do it."

"No, it's not. You must know in your heart it isn't right."

"I do."

"No, you're still confused. You need some rest. Go home and sleep on it. Then if you come back tomorrow and I'm still here, you'll have to settle it."

"But...," she began.

"No buts, just think about it," Stanley said solemnly. She looked at him, turned and left. When she got to the end of the sidewalk, she raised her hand slowly and gently waved goodbye and departed for home.
Stanley went inside and stretched out on his bed. He tried to fall asleep, but he had insomnia. Suddenly he felt something. It made his heart drop. He thought the unbearable. She did it. He could feel the walls starting to collapse. His eyes were wide open, trying to see something in the pitch black.

"Stanley!" yelled his angel.

"Oh my!" he shouted and sat up abruptly. "Why are you here? What happened?"

"No, no, how could she kill herself? How long do I have to stay here?"

"Stanley, calm down. She decided not to do it. She's alive. In fact, she's sleeping right now. I came here to get you, to take you to heaven."

"You mean she's alive? Yeah!" Stanley quickly rose out of bed and started galloping around the room.

"Come, Stanley, don't keep the people upstairs waiting," she said, chuckling.

"But I want to say goodbye. Wait, I don't even know her name."

"It doesn't matter. Eventually you two will meet up there."

"You're right. Let's go." Suddenly, they were floating through the ceiling to the diamond-covered, midnight sky.