

Freedom

Per Jespersen

David lived in a big city. Once a week his grandpa visited him and his family. David always looked forward to his visits, because grandpa often told him a story every week. He sat on his knee although he was only eleven, enjoying the beautiful words, that came out of grandpa's mouth.

«Where have you heard all these stories?» David asked.

«They are in my head. I think, I was born with them.»

«You cannot be born with stories in your head,» David said. «We are born empty. There's nothing in us but our soul.»

«And the ability to feel free,» grandpa said. «The stories come from the freedom we are born to receive from other people.»

«And the stories?»

«They are the tools we are born with. Otherwise we would not be able to feel free or receive the freedom, when it's there.»

«I feel free, because I go to school and learn stuff.»

«You're right. But listen, David - I have a task for you. You are a shoe shine boy - the best in the city.»

«Oh no - we are so many. Yesterday I made two dollars.»

«Good boy. You'll make more in the week to follow. But remember: when you polish the men's shoes, you must think to yourself. Here's a man with his head full of stories. I want to hear one of them, so I might get a new story every day.»

«Why do you want me to hear all these stories?»

«Stories give you freedom - the more you learn the more you feel free, because you'll find yourself in those stories.»

David thought for a while. Had he himself stories in him? Yes, in a way he had. «Once upon a time there was a shoe shine boy named David...»

David was at the beginning of discovering himself, and grandpa always said: You have to know yourself in order to be free and understand other people.

The next night David went to the restaurant where he normally polished peoples' shoes. There were a lot of people, but they all shook their head, and David thought to himself: If I could only make two dollars this night. Oh my mom would kiss and hug me, and that's what I like.

Then all of a sudden he discovered a man waving at him.

«Yes sir.»

The man only pointed at his shoes. «Yes sir, of course. I'll do my very best.»

David really worked hard and made the elderly man's shoes shine like the moon. At the same time he thought about what grandpa had said: that everybody has his head full of stories. I wonder what kind of story this man has. I dare not ask. The man gave David a dollar.

«What's your name?»

«David, sir.»

«Oh David. Once upon a time there was a king with that name. So you might be king as well.»

«Oh no sir. I'm just a shoe shine boy.»

«I name you The King of Childhood.»

«Oh sir!» He felt so proud, but added,

«Children are nothing. You are only something when you have a big business and make a lot of money.»

«I do envy you, David.»

«Envy me?»

«Sure. The freedom you have.»

There it was again: the word freedom!! David really started thinking.

«Do you think,» the man asked, «that adults are more free than children?»

«Of course, sir.»

«You are very much wrong. I could tell you how freedom is and what we do with it. And I could choose to tell you a story.»

Now David was really wondering. How could grandpa know that this would happen?

«Will you really tell me a story,» David asked. «Of course. Do you **see the** ring on my finger?»

«Sure, sir. It's very beautiful.»

«Touch it, David - and the story will be there.»

«I couldn't possibly touch such an expensive ring.»

The man smiled. «I think that you should do it.»

Hesitatingly, David touched the ring, and in the very same moment everything around him disappeared, and he found himself close to a peak, which he recognised as a volcano. The sunshine twinkled in white snow, and he could smell the smoke from the sleeping mountain.

David felt the fear creep into his body. Then a voice came to him: «Don't you be afraid. You have the ring. This is The Ring of Freedom, and you are The King of Childhood.»

Amazed, David saw that he was wearing the ring that the elderly man had on his finger. How could this happen?

«And who are you?» «Don't you know?»
«No. Should I say 'sir' to you?»
«No way. I hate that word. You are my brother.»
«Oh, now I know who you are.»

«See? Nature is talking to you now. So open your mind and close your eyes for a moment.»
David closed his eyes and heard this beautiful music coming from the crater, as if a whole symphony orchestra was down there.

«Open your eyes, David!»

And there: a whole garden full of children playing and having fun.

«That's what Life is, David,» the voice said. «As soon as I think about cheerful children, they are there. Therefore, I am very careful, only to think about good and happy things. That is what freedom is for me: to choose to think happy things.»

«You are the mountain!»

«Yes, and I feel so free. Free to erupt and free not to erupt.»

«I sometimes feel free, too - but I can't erupt,» David said and laughed.

«No, but you can laugh. That's your kind of eruptiveness. You see, inside me there is a sea of fire and magma. That's my soul. Sometimes I feel so free, that my very soul bursts by joy. Don't you know that feeling?»

«Sure,» David said. «But I'm not a volcano.» «No. You are a human being. What's the big deal - what's the difference? We are both sharing the same freedom. I share my freedom with you by erupting, and you share mine by smiling and feeling free. Soul and freedom is the very same.»

«So Life is freedom.»

«Sure. Look at those children. Look how happy they are. They have found it in school, in love, in friendship, in the family.»

«But you are so alone!»

«How do you know? I'm not at all alone. You are my friend, aren't you? And all these children here are. We have a lot to share.»

«So we have to find freedom in ourselves?»

«You are very clever, David. But remember, for our freedom has something to do with learning. I do not have to go to school to learn. I have been here always, you'll only be here for a short while. You have to learn what I know. Never ever get rid of the freedom, you have in your heart and your soul. Without it you'll fall apart. Oh, I feel like erupting now.»

«Oh now,» David shouted.

«Then touch your ring, son. Now!»

David touched his ring, and immediately he sat on the pavement in front of the elderly man, polishing his shoes, although he already had the dollarnote in his hand. And the man had his ring on again!

«Look,» the man said.

«Look at the mountain. It's erupting.»

David smiled. «An eruption of freedom! Thank you so much.»

«Don't worry, David. I'll be here tomorrow night again. We do need to talk, don't we?» Now the city got quiet, until hundreds of people poured to the streets to see the eruption. And David thought, «Freedom is here. We have to grasp it for the case of our souls!!»

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