



## A SHADOW I CAN'T SHAKE FROM MY HEART

One of the first Prize essays of the 2006(11th) "Read to Discover" Essay Contest

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It happened on a weekend afternoon in the depth of winter. Eyes tired from reading, I decided to take a walk. There were few people on the street. All doors and windows were closed shut. I hurried on.

Around the corner of the street was a small eatery. I thought it would be a good idea to pick up two pieces of solid hard bread for tomorrow. I headed over. When I was almost there, I stopped short at the sight of a figure in tatters crawling toward me from across the street. He was on all fours, gray strands of cotton filling from his jacket showing through the frayed sleeves at his wrists, his knees padded with thick plastic sheets. He inched his hands forward, dragging along his body, leaving behind him a deep track in the snow. When he was at the entrance of the eatery, he lifted his head, took a peek, and crawled a few more steps, then reached out with his shivering, frozen purple hands. Suddenly, I heard a yell, "Get out of here! Get out!" He raised a hand up, murmuring something. Just then, a louder and meaner "Get the hell out of here!" made him retract his hand. He turned around, and with his bushy head popping up and down, he began to crawl back. At this instant, I saw despair all over his face. He curled up under a window, huffing and puffing, trying to warm up his dirty hands.

At this moment, a woman walked out from the entrance, unwrapping a bun. Before she could take a bite, the bun fell and dropped to the ground. She did not bother to pick it up even though it was still in the plastic wrapper. "What a pity!" she said and walked away. The beggar hurried over, grabbed the bun, tore apart the wrapper, and took a quick bite. Yet he stopped abruptly before taking a second bite. I followed his gaze to find a second beggar staring at him. The first beggar took a look at the bun in his hand, and then at the second beggar. He handed over half of the bun to the second beggar... I simply could not believe what I saw.

The two of them finished the bun in a couple of bites. The first beggar carefully picked up the crumbs from the wrapper and savored them. He then crumpled the wrapper into his hand. He crouched down to crawl forward. "Is he going to beg for more?" I

wondered. Suddenly he stopped in front of a garbage can. Kneeling on his knees, he lifted up the lid, and pitched the wrapper in. I was smitten with emotion, began to perspire on my forehead, and felt a heavy blow in my heart. I was moved in spite of myself and my eyes welled up. Why was he doing this? Why could a person as severely handicapped as this beggar bring himself to do something that most able bodied persons, including myself, would not be bothered with? Wouldn't he rather give his frozen hands and knees a break? Didn't he have all the reasons to leave the wrapper anywhere on the snow? It must be that he cared very much about keeping his surroundings clean and neat. I became so ashamed of myself and my schoolmates, who used to chat boisterously and snacked on the street, littering the wrappers around us, because we thought it was cool to be carefree.

I did not feel like watching anymore, did not bother to pick up the solid hard breads and just turned around to walk straight home.

Snowflakes kept falling on my face and into my collar. I did not feel the least bit cold at all. I kept on seeing the figure in tatters with a bush like head crawling in the snow. I picked up my speed!

**Comment:** A beggar is considered at the lowest bottom of the social structure. Here, the author nevertheless saw a noble quality in this one. He finally got hold of a bun after despair and humiliation, and yet he shared half of it with another beggar. Furthermore, he was dirty due to a homeless way of life, yet he tried very hard to keep his surroundings clean in spite of his disability. This essay also brings up the issue of the need to care for the handicapped, who are often overlooked by us.