“That’ll be $7.81,” muttered the apathetic store clerk, as he shoved the cigarette package at his elderly customer. Martin, a seventy-four year old Vietnam veteran, pulled out his tattered leather wallet and looked through it. He was in a rush; he had a doctor’s appointment in half-an-hour and a bus to catch in ten minutes. Forty years of military service, three children and seven grand children, and all he had to speak for it were lung problems and a crumbling house, full of old memories. This was enough to make an old man bitter. In this cynical, fallen glory, Martin had begun to stop noticing things – like the tattered novel that dropped from his hand as he searched for change. “Hurry up sir,” mumbled the clerk as he uneasily glanced at the line forming behind the old man.

The book lay on the grocery store counter as the old man shuffled out of the small convenience store. The clerk, who was too busy with flustered customers, did not notice the small well-used paperback. A large burly man placed a large box of cereal on the counter, and the book was gruffly pushed off the table. It lay on the sleek tile floor of the stuffy convenience store, shuffled over by busy urban-dwellers, all too preoccupied to worry about an insignificant object like a book.

Morning turned to noon and eventually someone picked up the novel. In the mid-day heat, a mother had just picked up her young child from school and stopped at the corner store on her way home. As the mother patiently guided her daughter to the counter, she had much on her mind. This month’s slew of bills had arrived, and her paycheck would surely not be enough to pay those. To add to her stress, she still
had to buy groceries for the coming week. The sweltering heat of the day, coupled with her daughter’s restlessness, had given her a ceaseless migraine.

As they turned and reached the counter, she felt a tug on her hand and her daughter leaped forward to pick something up off the ground. “Look mommy! It’s a book!” the little girl squeaked. The mother smiled at her child as the girl picked the book up and excitedly looked at it, the title read, ‘The Magic of Reading.’

“That’s great darling, but it probably belongs to the store,” her mother responded, secretly envious of the purity and enthusiasm her daughter displayed. The young girl held the precious book in her hands, and while her mother purchased the goods, she asked the store clerk if the book belonged to him. The clerk shrugged apathetically, the little girl squealed with delight.

The mother and daughter left the small store and the little girl began flipping though the pages of the small book – excited with every word and picture in this new magical world. She attempted to read some of the words as her mother guided her through the crowded sidewalks – asking her mother every time she reached a word that was too complex for her young mind. Amongst her mother’s worried thoughts, this little girl’s delight was contagious and her mother felt better. When they neared their small house, she spotted an elderly woman with a little dog walking towards them. The child tugged her hand away from her mother and ran to pet the dog. Her mother smiled wearily at the little girl’s enthusiasm. What she didn’t notice was the little book, which was quickly forgotten and fell to the ground in the shuffle. This time the book tipped off the curb and lay at the edge of the road.

Noon turned to evening and the book lay there – witnessing the vehicles drive by, as if they were in some never-ending competition. Another passer-by finally picked the lonesome novel up. It’s third interchange came in the form of Caleb Paten, a 19-year-old university student, who had moved to the big city from a small town located in the rhetorical middle-of-nowhere. He had just sat through a three-hour lecture on quantum mechanics – but quantum mechanics was the least of what was on his mind right then. Caleb’s week had been rough – rough nights, even rougher mornings and classes that were as long as the Iliad.
While his parents thought that being a student was the easiest part of life – his two jobs, constant girlfriend drama, and behemoth piles of homework spoke for themselves. He had stopped at the curb, to have a sip of water and spotted the little novel at the mercy of the elements. Though Caleb, like any other typical college student, hardly ever seemed to have anytime for books, he always had a passion for a good read. This obsession had existed since he was a child, when he would read under the covers with his flashlight after bedtime. He grasped the book, stuffed it in his messenger bag and hopped on the bike again. Finally, Caleb reached the Spartan condo he shared with two lethargic, barbarian roommates. He gruffly pulled out his keys from his bag, but Caleb didn't realise that the book went flying down the staircase and onto the empty sidewalk.

Evening turned to night, and a stocky, elderly gentleman walked towards his house. Seventy-four year old Martin Esposito had had a tough day. He ended up being late for his doctor's appointment and had to wait at the office for an extra two hours. The news he received there was no better – lung cancer, stage three, not much time left. How quickly Martin's pessimistic, embittered life had turned into a desperate need to grasp at his last few moments of existence and to taste every little bit of life. He slowly progressed down the street, then he paused at the ragged book at his feet. He bent to pick it up and upon looking at the paperback, was shocked to see that this was the book he had lost that morning in another part of town. The Magic of Reading, he thought, magic is exactly what I need right now. He sighed incredulously and tucked the book under his arm, carefully ensuring it didn't fall out, and walked along the sidewalk. In the bright moonlight he whispered his favourite quote to himself, “Let books be your dining table, and you shall be full of delights. Let them be your mattress and you shall sleep restful nights.”

Story submitted by Canadian Global Campaign for Education

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