

Smile

by Check Kwan Wai Hayden

“Can you try to put a smile on your face?” My mom always tells me that. But I never bothered to. As Dwight Schrute said in *The Office*, “showing one's teeth is a submission signal in primates. When someone smiles at me, all I see is a chimpanzee begging for its life.” But no, seriously, regardless of that comdial take on smiling, I find the notion of smiling all the time to be simply tiring. Smiling is an act that you do naturally, when you sense happiness. Somehow the world seems to expect you to put a smile on your face all the time. When you are on your way walking to school, when you are commuting to work, when you are shopping at the mall, when you bump into someone you do not like that much, you are supposed to smile.

My mom always tells me that “when you smile, you are spreading positive energy to those around you, and people will like you more.” But I don't have any positive energy within me. And why would I even want those irrelevant people to like me, I am already exhausting handling those that I already know. Do I really want to have some more people around me? I tried to smile. But I just can't seem to find the energy to pull up the cheek on my face with my face muscles in my tiring life. Maybe if I smile hard enough then maybe I can really make myself happier. I turned to the window, I can only see a weird strained face with the corners of the mouth pointing upward. Creepy, I thought. Pretty sure this “smile” is gonna pull more attention on me, but definitely no one in the classroom would find me to be approachable with that smile. Why even bother to force something that is not present.

I tried to get to the root of the problem. I tried to allow myself to find something that would give me a genuine smile. Ah yes, happiness. Maybe if I found happiness, then I can smile from my heart. Maybe. What do people do to get happiness? I tried hanging out with friends, doing sports with friends, whatever it takes. They worked, for a while at least. I was happy when I was with them. However, for some reason, I find my energy to be even more drained. It gets even harder for me to smile.

It was autumn. I was somewhere far away, away from home. It rained and it was freezing cold. I took a detour on my way from the Navy Yard-Ballpark metro station to the Nationals Park just to go to a Starbucks and get myself a cup of hot chocolate. As I continued with my walk to the stadium, a strange feeling took over me. It is a familiar and yet estranged feeling. I stood still, and my cheeks pulled upward automatically. Suddenly the unknown feeling transformed into a liberating feeling. It was satisfying. This has to be joy. If this is not, I don't know what is. Holding a cup of hot chocolate in my hand with chilling rain hitting on my water resistant jacket, just two ordinary incidents that most of us have encountered, somehow have this magical effect on me when they happened together.

It was a moment for myself. Instead of filling my life with things for others, I finally get a moment for myself, and that is when I find joy, pure joy that comes straight from the centre of my heart. In the rare incident that I am not giving in to life, I find happiness. Maybe all it takes is just taking back authority of my life, not to show any sign of submission to the life that I have to live.