

*Book from the Ground* - Prose Translation by Samantha Jensen

Somewhere on the planet Earth, far past the skylines of the city, nestled in the suburbs and wrapped in the branches of a tree, a bird tried out a cautious few notes. Satisfied with its tone, it paused, then began to sing.

Its song spread across the lawn on which the tree stood, and passed through the bedroom window of the house nearby. Inside the room, an alarm clock went off, ringing its own tone into the morning air. The bird ruffled its feathers and chirped louder in contest. This went on for a few minutes, until the clock won out and the bird left in a huff to find a quieter stage for its music. Dave Kessler, sprawled in his bed, had no such easy escape from the noise as it pulled him out of his sleep. He pushed the snooze button, opened his eyes, and squinted out the window to see the start of a rainstorm coming over the town. He groaned and turned over. Five more minutes on a day like this seemed like paradise...

At this moment, Lantern the cat slinked into the room, called by the sound of the breakfast bell. He stared up at Dave, tangled up in blanket, and made his calculations, shifting his hindquarters and leaping up onto his servant's face. Dave startled out of the beginning of a new dream and sat up to shove the cat off of him. Lantern, now sure food was on the way, hopped off the bed and made his way to the kitchen.

Dave sighed. He was awake *now*. Resigned to this, he got out of bed and made his way to the bathroom where he spent a few uncomfortable minutes there, regretting the two burritos he'd eaten yesterday, and checked his phone before showering, shaving, and brushing his teeth. He left the bathroom and opened his closet to find something to wear.

At first, he opted for a white button down and admired himself in the mirror – crisp, clean, *snazzy* – but after a moment the specter of red sauce came over him and he took it off in a hurry, trading it out for a green one. That one made him look like a stuffy librarian, so he took it off and put on a blue one, which clashed with his shoes. He reached into the back of his closet and fished out the adventurous purple one, but found it brought out the bags under his eyes. He pinched the bridge of his nose and considered. The white had looked good, and lately he'd really been trying to get the ladies to notice him... With caution, he slipped it back on, buttoned it up, and looked himself over again.

*Sharp.*

White would do then. Flashing a smile at himself, he grabbed a tie and put it on before sauntering out of the bedroom and into the kitchen to make himself some breakfast. He threw some eggs and toast into a pan and turned on the coffee maker. A steaming cup soon in his hand, he settled down and turned on the radio to catch the news.

"Forecast is a ninety-percent chance of rain in the morning, with sun in the mid afternoon before more showers and a drop in temperature as the afternoon goes on..."

"Great," he muttered into his mug, and glanced around for his umbrella. While he was mid sip, a knock came from the door. Who that could be this early in the day, he had no idea, but he stood and opened it.

A young man in a yellow uniform stood there, soaked to the skin with a rain-spattered package in his arms from Amazon.

"Delivery!" he said with more cheer than Dave thought was warranted. He took the package.

“Neat, thanks.”

The young man nodded, and Dave gave a friendly wave as he shut the door. He set the package on the table and went about opening it. Inside, he found an exciting novel he'd ordered a few days ago and he sat down with it immediately, perusing it as he finished his coffee.

Dave became so engrossed in reading that he didn't realize his eggs and toast were still in the pan until a sharp, noxious smell wafted over. He gave a start as he saw plumes of smoke rising up from his stove and flames licking around the edge of the pan. He jumped out of his chair, and by instinct threw his coffee on the flames. They went out with a hiss.

Dave lifted the pan and stared at the dismal wet charcoal that was once his breakfast with growing dismay. There was nothing for it – he dumped it into the trash and set the pan in the sink. His stomach growled.

“Arright,” he said to himself, “What else have we got in here?”

He padded over to the fridge and took a look inside – beer, coke, wine, some old coffee... Didn't he have *any* food? Then his eyes landed on a box in the back.

Milk. Head swimming with hunger, Dave pulled it out, opened it, and drank it straight from the carton. It tasted great and soothed some of the hunger pangs, but when he put it down he found he was still hungry.

A yellow box of popcorn on the shelf caught his eye. It would do. He fished out a bag and threw it in the microwave, then watched and listened. Slowly it began to steam, then *pop, pop, pop*, it expanded. Dave pulled it out after the popping slowed, and then opened it. A rush of warm, buttery-scented air came out into his face, and he just took it in for a moment, mouth watering like crazy. He scooped out a handful and shoved it into his face. It was like heaven in food form, soft, crisp, salty and sweet all at once. This was a brilliant idea. He went for another handful, then another, then the last.

“Ow!”

The shell of a kernel wedged itself between his teeth. Dave set down the bag and went to the bathroom, grabbed some floss, and eased it between his molars. He watched the yellow case work its way out, and he pulled it from his mouth, pain relieved. He regarded himself in the mirror for a second with a smile – the white shirt really was working out for him – then he grabbed a multivitamin and made his way back to the kitchen.

Lantern now stood before Dave's chair, a cold stare at the ready. It took Dave a moment to realize the cat's food dish was empty, and Lantern trotted alongside him as he retrieved the bag of dry food in the cabinet. He dumped some into the bowl and Lantern went for it, crunching it down like only a cat could.

Awake, dressed, and not too hungry anymore, Dave now turned his attention to his work briefcase. He tucked his wallet and work ID into it, and then, thinking of the rain, grabbed his umbrella and hat from the shelf by the door and stuck them into the case as well. He picked it up, and started for the door, but then his hand strayed to his pocket and he stopped short.

*His keys.* Where were his keys? Dave spun around and patted all his pockets. Then he saw them sitting on the counter where he'd left them last night. He scooped them up, then walked out the door, locking it behind him as he set out for a day at work.