

The Chill

by David W Brown on August 15, 2023. © All rights reserved

The old man appeared in the little seaside village one spring day like a sudden drop in humidity; bringing with him a palpable chill that made dogs long for a place by the fire and their masters yearn for the solace of faiths long forsaken.

He looked ordinary enough, save for a long white beard and the chill in the air that seemingly followed his otherwise unremarkable footsteps.

"I think he's the ghost of our village founder", said one of the old men playing crib on the picnic tables he passed in the beachside park.

"I think he's the devil himself", said still another. "Maybe he's death", hypothesized the eldest of these elders.

They pulled their sweaters and jackets tighter about their bony, shivering shoulders and fruitlessly sought to thwart the increasing chill with the false courage of hearty banter.

A group of young women watching their children play on the nearby swings and teeter-totters remarked on the old men huddled over their cards at the tables.

"Look at them, giving that strange old fellow the evil eye", said a young mother as she struggled with her infant child.

"Well, he is an odd duck, sitting all by himself over there when he could be gossiping with that bunch of other old geezers", said another as she scrolled on her iPhone.

“Brrr, it’s gotten really cool suddenly, hasn’t it?”, said yet another, “I swear it feels like snow in the air”.

The old man sat alone on the park bench, a bag of seeds in one hand and a book in the other; the one opened for birds who ventured near and the other, for his soul. He looked across the park at the groups of old men and younger women shivering and shaking as though sitting on blocks of ice.

He felt sad for them as he tilted his weathered face up to feel the warmth of the sun, then turned back to his birds and his book, quietly rejoicing in the simplicity of life in a little seaside village.