

Dusk

There are times when you just can't believe what a stranger tells you. Sometimes you're wrong. But sometimes — you may be right.

Norman Gortsby sat on a bench in the park of a busy city. It was 6:30 on an early March evening. The sun had set, the street lights were on, but it was not yet dark. In the half-light of dusk, many lonely people were walking alone in the park, or sitting on benches in the shadows.

This scene¹⁾ fitted Gortsby's mood. Dusk, he thought, was the hour of the defeated. Men and women who had dreamed or fought for something — and lost. They came out at dusk, when their sad eyes and shabby²⁾ clothes would not be so noticeable.

Norman Gortsby was in the mood to put himself among the defeated. He did not have money problems. He had not failed at his work. But he had been hurt and betrayed by someone he had trusted. Right now, he felt defeated. And he enjoyed sitting on a bench watching others like him, who had been disappointed by life.

Next to him on the bench sat an old man. His clothes were not shabby, but he looked as if he had no friends or anyone to care about him. He was the kind of person no one would ever notice or pay attention to. As he got up to leave, Gortsby imagined him going back to a lonely room somewhere.

His place on the bench was taken by a young man. He was well-dressed, but he seemed upset. He muttered³⁾ to himself.

“You don't seem in a very good mood,” said Gortsby.

The young man said, “You wouldn't be in a good mood if you were in the mess⁴⁾ I'm in. I've done the stupidest thing I've ever done in my life.”

“What was that?” asked Gortsby.

“I came to the city this afternoon,” the young man said. “I was planning to stay at the Berkshire Hotel. But when I got there, I found that it had been torn down⁵⁾. They've put a movie theater there. The taxi driver told me about another hotel somewhere else, so I went there.”

Gortsby nodded, just to be polite.

“After I checked into the hotel, I decided to go out and buy some soap. I'd forgotten to pack any. And I hate using those little bars⁶⁾ of hotel soap. So I went out and walked around for a while. I bought some soap, and I had something to eat. When I turned to go back to the hotel, I realized that I couldn't remember its name. I couldn't even remember what street it is on.”

“That's the mess I got myself into. I don't have any friends here. I spent the money I took with me from the hotel. I used it to buy the soap and a snack. Here I am, with a few pennies in my pocket, and no place to stay tonight.”

The young man paused for a moment. Then he said, “I suppose you think that's an unbelievable story.”

“No, not at all,” said Gortsby. “The same thing happened to me in a foreign country. I was with someone, and neither of us could remember where we were

staying. But we did recall the hotel was on a canal⁷⁾. And when we found the canal, we were able to find the hotel. ”

The young man said, “I wouldn't mind so much in a foreign country. At least you have officials from your own country to help you with problems. But what can I do here, in my own country? If I don't find someone who believes my story and gives me some money, I'll have to spend the night in the park. But I'm glad you don't think the story is unbelievable. ”

Gortsby said, “The only weak part of your story is that you don't have the bar of soap with you. ”

The young man jumped and felt quickly in his pockets. “I must have lost it, ” he said angrily.

Gortsby said, “To lose both a hotel and a bar of soap in one afternoon is strange. In fact——”

But the young man did not wait for Gortsby to finish. He walked quickly away into the shadows.

Gortsby thought, “Too bad. Going out to get a bar of soap almost made his story sound true. But he forgot to have the soap with him. Otherwise, he would have gotten money from more than one person. He should have taken a little extra trouble. ”

Gortsby stood up, ready to leave the park. Then he saw a small package next to the bench. It was a bar of soap. It must have fallen out of the young man's pocket when he sat down.

Gortsby hurried after the young man. When he caught up with him, Gortsby said, “The proof⁸⁾ that you were telling the truth has turned up. ” He held out the bar of soap. “It must have fallen from your pocket when you sat down. Excuse me for not believing you. But without the soap, I didn't think you were telling the truth. But now I'm convinced. Please let me lend you some money. ”

Silently, the young man took the money Gortsby offered him. “Here is a card with my address on it, ” Gortsby continued. “You may pay me back any day this week. And here is the soap. Don't lose it again. It's been a good friend to you. ”

“Lucky thing you found it, ” said the young man. “Thanks. ” He shook Gortsby's hand and hurried off.

“Poor boy, ” said Gortsby. “He looked ready to cry from relief. This must be a lesson for me. I shouldn't judge people too quickly. ”

Gortsby walked back the way he had come. When he came to the bench he had been sitting on, he stopped. An old man was looking around and under the bench. Gortsby recognized him. He was the man who had been sitting there before the young man came.

“Have you lost something, sir? ” Gortsby asked.

“Yes, sir, a bar of soap. ”

□by Saki

傍晚时分

傍晚时分有时你简直不能相信陌生人的话。有时你错了，但有时——你又可能是对的。

在一座热闹城市中的公园里，诺曼·戈茨比坐在一张长凳上。那是一个早春3月的傍晚，6点半钟，太阳已经下山了。街灯已亮，但天还不是太黑。在昏暗的暮色中，有许多孤独者在园中独自漫步，有的则坐在暮色笼罩的长凳上。

这情景正合戈茨比的心情。他想，黄昏正是失败者的时刻，是那些梦想未实现、奋斗未成功的男男女女的时刻。他们在暮色中出门，那时，他们悲哀的双眼、破旧的衣衫才不致太显眼。

诺曼·戈茨比此刻就想把自己列入失败者的行列。他并不缺钱，工作也没出差错。但他因被自己所信赖的人背叛而受到了伤害。此刻，他觉得自己是失败了。而此刻他也愿意坐在凳子上看看别人，看看那些像自己一样遭受了生活打击的人。

坐在他旁边的是一位老者。他的衣服不破旧，但他看上去像是那种没有朋友、得不到任何人关心的人；是那种谁也不注意，谁也不会去注意的人。当他站起来离开时，戈茨比想像他一定是回到哪儿一间孤寂的屋子里去。

老者的位置被一个年轻人所取代。他衣着入时，却神情沮丧，嘴里还嘟囔着。

“你好像情绪不高，”戈茨比说。

年轻人说：“你要是像我一样狼狈，情绪也不会高的。我做了这一生中最傻的事。”

“什么事呀？”戈茨比问。

“我今天下午来到这个城市，”年轻人说，“本来打算住在伯克夏旅馆。可是到了那里却发现他们已经把它拆了，在那儿盖了一座电影院。出租车司机告诉我有另一家旅馆，我就去了。”

戈茨比点点头，以示礼貌。

“我在旅馆登记后，决定出去买肥皂。我忘带了，又不喜欢用旅馆里的那种小块块。我出去在周围走了一会儿，买了肥皂，吃了点东西。往回走时却发现不记得旅馆的名字，甚至记不起它在哪条街上了。”

“这就是我所陷入的困境。我在这里没有朋友，从旅馆带出来的钱也花光了，用它买了肥皂和点心。这下可好了，我口袋里只有几分钱，今晚没地儿可呆了。”

年轻人停了一会儿，又说，“我想，你会认为这事不可信吧。”

“不会，一点也不会，”戈茨比说。“我在外国的时候，也有过同样的经历。我和一个人在一起，两人谁也记不起我们住的地方了，但却记得是在一条运河旁。找到运河也就找到了那家旅馆。”

年轻人说：“要是在外国我倒不那么在意了。起码那儿有自己国家的官员帮助解决困难。可这是在自己的国家，我能怎么办呢？我要是找不到一个相信我的人，给我一点钱，今晚就得在公园里过夜了。不过，我很高兴你不认为这不可信。”

戈茨比说，“这事儿惟一缺乏说服力的一点是你没有肥皂。”年轻人跳了起来，立刻把手伸进口袋去摸。“我一定是把它弄丢了，”他生气地说。戈茨比说，“你在一个下午同时丢了旅馆又丢了肥皂是很奇怪的。实际上……”

但年轻人不等戈茨比说完就迅速地消失在黑暗之中了。

戈茨比想：“太糟了。出去买块肥皂就几乎能使他的故事听起来像真的一样。但他忘了把肥皂带着。要不然他会得到不止一个人的钱。他应该多费点心机，想得更周全些。”

戈茨比站起身来，准备离开公园。就在这时他看见长凳旁边有一个小包，是一块肥皂。一定是年轻人坐下时从口袋里掉出来的。

戈茨比去追年轻人，追上以后，他说，“证明你讲了真话的东西找到了。”他把肥皂拿了回来。“一定是你坐下的时候从口袋里掉出来了。对不起，我没有相信你。但若没有肥皂，我就不相信你讲的是真话。现在我确信无疑了。请接受我借给你一些钱吧。”

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

年轻人默不作声，接了戈茨比给他的钱。“这是我的名片，上面有我的地址，”戈茨比接着说。“你可以在本周内的任何一天把钱还给我。肥皂在这儿，别再弄丢了。它可是你的好朋友。”

“幸好你找到它了，”年轻人说。“谢谢。”他握了握戈茨比的手，匆匆离去了。

“可怜的人，”戈茨比说，“如释重负都使他要哭了。这对我应该是个教训，对人下结论不应该太快。”

戈茨比顺原路往回走去。走到他坐过的长凳时，停了下来。一位老人正在张望着长凳的周围和下面。戈茨比认得，他就是在年轻人到来之前坐在那儿的人。

“先生，您是不是丢了什么东西？”戈茨比问。

“是啊，先生，一块肥皂。”

NOTE 注释：

scene [si:n] n. 情景，景色

shabby [ˈʃæbi] adj. 破旧的，褴褛的

mutter [ˈmʌtə] v. 咕哝，嘀咕

mess [mes] n. 混乱

tear down 扯下，拆卸

bar [bɑ:(r)] n. 条，小块

canal [kəˈnæl] n. 运河

proof [pru:f] n. 证据