

Crossing the river

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An old woman, carrying a huge burden on her back was resting on the bank of the river. The river was rushing down the slope and looked dangerous to cross. She sat there, her burden on the floor, looking at the river with desperation. She did not feel able to cross the river with so much weight on her back and such current.

A young man came running. He was tall and strong and looked like he would never get tired. As he saw so violent a flow of the river, he hesitated a few seconds.

"Good morning young man. Are you trying to cross the river"

The young man looked at the old woman, her burden and the signs of exhaustion on her face.

"Good morning old woman. Yes, I have to. I have to cross to the other side to carry on my way."

"I know a ford. Now it is under water but it is safe. If you help me carry my burden, I will show you the way."

"No, thank you really, I prefer to swim, I am used to crossing this river, and there is a part upstream where the river is quieter."

"But I will never manage to carry my load by myself. It's getting heavier every day, and the river is especially dangerous today."

"I am sorry. I have to go. I am getting pretty busy right now so I don't have the time to help you."

"But I'll show you the ford. I walked through that river so often, I know the way by heart."

"Sorry old lady, it has been nice to meet you but I have to continue alone."

"Why are you in such a hurry, young man? You have all the time in the world."

"No I don't. I have important things to do."

The young man was restless, jumping around as if he tried to keep his muscles warm before the crossing of the river

"And you move too much. Spare your energy, you will see when you're old, you won't be able to jump around anymore and you'll wish you had listened to me."

"Maybe old lady, but right now, I have to be on the other side of the river and to go on."

"If you say so..."

The young man run uphill to reach the place where he knew the current would be milder. Reaching his spot, he looked at the eddies in the river.

"The old lady may be right, the river is rather dangerous today."

In a split second of hesitation, he felt like going down, and help the old lady in exchange of the way to the other side. He looked down at the lady, who had just put her burden on her back again. Her face grimaced under the pain of the load. The shape of the package seemed to make holes into her body and drain her energy. Every step she made, her face grew more tired, her wrinkles looked deeper and her body drier.

"She can manage, she has done it before, she told me," said the man to himself, undressing to cross the river.

"Here we go. There is no reason why I couldn't do it. I have done it before, many times, in circumstances that were more dramatic than today."

And he jumped.

Further down, the old woman stood knee deep in the water, going forward one step at a time, drawing all the energy she could to make another step. She was in the middle of the river when she turned her head upstream. She heard a cry from the young man.

Indeed, the young man reached the middle of the river, but the current was so strong that he just managed to call for help once before drowning.

"I have underestimated the power of this river, now I am caught in the middle, I cannot get back," he thought while fighting desperately to get some air. He was irremediably drawn to the bottom. He could not do anything. He lost consciousness.

The face of the old lady was looking at him. His body was still in the water but the old lady had grabbed him by a hand and he had his head safely out of the water. He could breathe.

"Are you going to help me with this burden?" she asked in an authoritative tone.

He answered with difficulty, still catching his breath.

"Do I really have the choice?"

"Oh yes you have." For a brief instant, cunning glowed in the tired eyes of the old lady. "You can choose to help me and reach the other side of the river or to keep refusing to help me and I abandon you and my burden here at the whim of the flows."

"What's so important in this package?"

"You know better young man, this is Humanity!"

"Humanity? But I asked Mother Nature to take care of it long ago! And it was a tiny little box back then when I left it to go my way."

"You don't recognize me, do you?" said the old lady as she pulled with great difficulty the young man out of the water.

"Are you... I can't believe it. You grew so old."

"And you're still young and restless, Civilization."

While they discussed, the burden, half into the water, was pushed by the current and rolled slowly. At the last moment, before the river took it away, both grabbed it and pulled it back to the stone they were standing on. Their eyes met again.

"I am so sorry," Civilization said.

"Don't be, you're young, you're learning."

"When we are on the other side, I'll give you the best treatment and medicine. You'll be young and beautiful again."

"It's too late. I am old and tired now. All I ask is that from now on you help me in taking care of Humanity. I can't do it on my own anymore. It's too hard a task."

Civilization lifted the heavy burden and Mother Nature showed the way.

"The river Progress is getting more and more dangerous," Civilization said. "Maybe we should give up crossing."

"Don't be ridiculous, it's in the order of things. Crossing is not the problem. It's the time we take to cross that matters."

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