

AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

THE ANSWER IS NO



A SHORT STORY

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

FREDRIK BACKMAN

TRANSLATED BY ELIZABETH DENOMA

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Chapter 1

It's a frying pan that ruins Lucas's life.
We'll get to that.

Chapter 2

Lucas is happy. This is a very provoking thing to the world. Because people aren't supposed to be happy, they're only supposed to *want* to be happy, because how otherwise are you supposed to be able to sell things to them? More than anything people are supposed to pretend to be happy on the internet so that other people are reminded of how unhappy they themselves are by comparison. Humanity has a system. But Lucas? He's just happy. It wasn't even particularly difficult. All he did was to remove the one thing that makes almost all people unhappy: other people. Whatever they want, the answer is no.

Now, there's probably some poor reader out there who's going to protest with some nonsense along the lines of "Um, well actually, humans are herd animals!" And that may be true. But more than anything else, humans have historically proved to be in-need-of-therapy animals. And do you, dear reader, happen to know what the reason for all this therapy is?

That we have company.

Absolutely zero people go to therapy because yesterday they were sitting in a comfortable chair, eating a perfect pizza, drinking a good glass of red wine, watching a really funny movie. So that's how Lucas lives, all the time.

If you imagine how you would spend a free evening, not an evening where you've planned things out but an evening in which all your plans have suddenly been canceled, and now you find yourself in your comfiest pants in a warm, cozy apartment, thinking: So . . . I can do whatever I *want* all night?

That's Lucas's entire life.

Lucas doesn't have a single thing in his fridge that he doesn't think is good. Lucas likes all of his shoes. Every morning he wakes up in his bed with the entire blanket on him. Because Lucas doesn't have relationships. No loved ones, no unloved ones, no one at all. He works from home, it's something having to do with computers, if he had friends he might have been forced to explain exactly what that means but now he doesn't. Lucas is a man with no strings attached, he has never taken part or joined in or been a member of anything. He doesn't want you to call or email and he most certainly doesn't want you to ever circle back. He would rather be hit by a truck than be in your group chat. He doesn't want exclusive opportunities or once-in-a-lifetime experiences of any kind. How about a none-in-a-lifetime? For everything else: No. Just no. Because happiness for Lucas is very easy, it's everything he already has minus humans. He is in his thirties, he is not young, but also not old. He is a perfect combination of nothing. If he had a partner he might have had to answer questions all day, like "What are you thinking about?" and "Are you annoyed?" But now? No. Lucas is a person who has no idea whether he loads the dishwasher in the correct way or not. Lucas has the exact number of pillows he needs and his remote control is always right where he left it. He has never once asked anyone "What would you like to eat tonight?" and gotten the answer "I can eat anything!" which just happen to be words that never ever in the history

of humankind have been uttered by someone who will actually eat any of the FIFTEEN things then suggested to them. This never happens to Lucas. He is satisfied with all of his meal choices. He plays just the right amount of video games and drinks a perfect amount of alcohol. Not once tonight will Lucas have to pause a movie to explain that he's seen precisely as much of this movie and has the exact same amount of information as the person who just asked: "Who's that guy?"

The number of times Lucas will have to tell someone "Yes, I understand that it might have *felt* like I *sounded* annoyed, but I'm really not" today is zero. And of course, dear reader, you might now blurt out: But what about love then, Lucas? Falling head over heels? That feeling that before love your world was black and white, but this person is all of your color?

To that Lucas would answer, if he absolutely had to, which thank goodness he doesn't: How well has all this worked out for you, dear reader, so far? Instead of falling in love, have you tried to not do that? It really saves a lot of time.

Because Lucas's research into human relationships on TV has led him to conclude that love is between two people: One just wants to sit down, and the other one gets stressed out by that. One person is looking for a chair and the other one is looking for a project. Then they get married. By observing these married couples through his window on Sundays, Lucas has noticed that they often consist of a monkey and a bird, and they have decided to go for a nice stroll together. But the monkey can't fly, so the bird has to walk. And after a while the monkey gets very annoyed with the bird, because the bird walks so very slowly. So then the bird suggests that maybe it can fly above the monkey instead? And then the

monkey gets very, very hurt and says: "Oh! Excuse me then for wanting us to do something *together!*"

So love is surely great, dear reader. But have you ever tried not having to share a pint of ice cream? Or being able to buy any furniture you want without having to instruct an ogre from a swamp how to sit on it without making weird creases in the fabric? Have you tried not having to explain to an adult individual how to clean a sink?

Above all, have you tried being really content with your life and *not* immediately thinking: Wow, now everything is really perfect, maybe we should have a baby? Because do you know what children are? Another human being.

You know that feeling you get when someone's listening to really crappy music, and you put on a pair of headphones, and all that crappy stuff just vanishes? Imagine if there was a way you could live exactly like that but without headphones.

So: Lucas is happy.

It's a frying pan that ruins his life.