

The Pressman's Last Notice

CHAPTER 1

inalterable disdain for life hung about his countenance like the mist that rises above a road before you. His misanthropy did not come without cause (although the world today was justification in and of itself) as he had been trampled, disgruntled and abused; faulted and denied; stabbed and jabbed by any and all personalities to whom he allowed entrance into his being.

And yet reader, he still walked the interminable plain, because the temporal dichotomy that is the human spirit persisted, although on some days it was nearly depleted. His stroll exhibited its toll these days –not in the length or pace- but the increasing intervals of the pauses he would take. The pauses which were evenly placed with the metronome of sighs. Carrying on his path, he was careful not to look at the town from the ridge in the morning. Because while most were still asleep, he was their watchmen. If he would view it at twilight on his way home, he would be overcome by the stillness. No, at this hour the duty of the watchman would not subside his melancholy.

Once up in the morning though, it was nice. But on his way to work as he could see the sleepy houses and cottages breathing smoke plumes, he pictured everyone else snug as a bug in a rug, and he longed for that warmth and comfort. One he trudged with a heaving sigh.

What his way did allow him was air. Air to breathe in. Air to let out a begrudging sigh or a gasp that one takes in to stifle a cry. Air to calm the nerves. Air to smell. Air to hit his face to wake him up, air to cool his brow in the heat; air to roam around and rattle the leaves and sway the corn. Air would not remind him of anything and therefore it was a good companion. It also didn't look like anything either.

On this particular day, autumn emerged. It arrived with only the cool crispness it can demand- that stinging of the nose in the morning to the point one must wipe it. The busyness of the season was a comfort to him, but the change of this quarter of the year always proposed challenges. There would be the harvest and its heavy toil, but that would be juxtaposed with festivals and

reveling. And yet, there would be long nights would start to pervade the atmosphere. Although, his countenance did not suggest it- he was a man of light. Night meant being inside. No amount of light could replicate the day. He dwelled on what he should do until fatigue set in. He dwelled on why he dwelled so much. He dwelled on. He could not stop these mental peregrinations though he set up mental barriers to do so. To avoid such lamentations, he would always bring in something to read.

He would eat and read. This allowed him to forget that he dined alone and allowed him a mental piece to dwell on later. Then, he would choose to whittle by the fire or play his banjo or Jew's harp.

And although these activities lead to busy hands, his mind was apt to wander. These endeavors rarely lasted long, though he would try.

So then it would be the time to bring in the firewood for night. Then, he would take hot water from the fire (which he usually put on at supper) into a basin to wash. After a bath, a warming calmness usually set in and it was the time to read the Scriptures.

Let it be stressed that although he seemed devoid of hope, he considered this aspect of his nature to be sacrilegious. He hated to let his thoughts bring his to the precipice that all was lost and knew his wants were of the flesh. He thus constructed his alternative life to be his; he did not want to be an ingrate or always covet what else could be, nor deride the lot that was to fall upon him. And though he believed that the "light overwhelmed the shadow." It was not unusual for him to forget this.

The composition of his character was fading. The great foundation upon which he stood was becoming loose. The seepage and neglect from many years had unsettled him. But he was not about to fall.

An errant flame seared his dwelling place. Someone had noticed and tried to quench it with the water from the brook.

They stood outside waiting for him to arrive.

He had seen smoke rising over the ridge, but burning and clearing of the brush was need for the season's cleaning. IT was only as he drew near and the air was polluted with smoke did he start to feel puny. He stopped before nearing the top of the ridge- sighed, huffed, and walked to the top.

He would much rather have taken this scene in by himself. Instead there were 4 spectators below, waiting for him and his reaction.

It wasn't that he was stoic- it was just a side-effect of those daily mental preparations. Some days he would prepare himself for different situations, such as falling and having no one to help him, getting bit by a snake or being roughhoused. But today no scenario had occurred to him- at least in his mind.

He came down to his place. There were somber face and oblique glances and of course quiet. The 4 men had felt this was as good a day as any to be sympathetic. This day not any other of the 14,325 days upon this earth, in this valley, in this county, did they even try to befriend him. Now on this day, they felt it their obligation to give him words of encouragement and commiserate at him. They thought this befitted the occasion as a societal rite. He rolled his eyes in disbelief.

Macgrub walked closer to him and spoke up first.

"Nobody thought nothin' of it on account of everybody's burnin' brush today. No wind today. But as the smoke got higher, somebody checked up on it. And it was gone."

"it's a hell of a note," Mumaw added. "You can come on down to my home. We'll go around and see who else will put you up and restore some of your effects."

He sighed. Going into town would lead to more questions, sympathies, contrition, and pretending to accept those delicacies graciously. But with the exception of only a few, he was weary of them all. He knew what they said of him behind open and closed doors. He had learned long ago the only good life you can lead is one in which you go at it alone. People failed. Only few said they were sorry for it. And even less did not do it again.

"I'll sort it out. Sort it out later," he replied and walked back into the woods.

Mumaw looked befuddled and started to follow him.

“No. Leave him,” Clyde Jenkins had returned with more water from the crick and saw the younger man take in his burnt house. Jenkins heaved the water buckets with broad shoulders adding more water to the smoldering ash.

“What’s to be done for him Da?” Clarence, Clyde’s second eldest asked earnestly.

Clyde squared up and looked at the dispossessed man, fading into the background of the tree and hillside. No one could answer.

He would take to the woods as the saints before him. It was not to be a pitiable journey-for was used?- but one in which he was one step away from the world. After all, he had been gradually easing himself away.

He knew not who suited him. It would be much easier had someone appeared out of the woodwork and all but said “Here am I.”

And he would feel it and know. That is where the scene ends in his mind. Who was she? He never had a conversation with a potential mate let alone to say he had someone to pine for, weep for, make regrets for or amends with. Maybe she didn’t exist. And when he dwelled on this- it made him sad and unsure.

To lead a life of solitude takes dedication- especially since it was not the life you had wanted. Albeit, such happenstances called for acceptance. And although he could not fully accept it- he got around this loophole by planning. If it was a life of solitude he was to lead- how could he make the ache go away that was to flare up now and again? Lead a life of substance. The happy bachelor was not the role for him- he never entertained, stayed about town late, nor was he happy. Content- he knew of the sufferings of others. He would be too spoiled to weep and lament for the life that was not to precede him.

Nor would he be a miser. He had nothing to hoard and felt guilty with looking at the entire world in contempt.

To be a part of something means to be susceptible to hurt. To be apart from something allows one to heal and restore.

He needed to be.

However, when one finds one's self in the doldrums of their life- they must create the wind. Heaping and lagging, he made his way up the ridge and settled at the top. There was a large rock formation and a cave. It looked like a good place for shelter. He checked around looking for snakes. A sturdy granite structure- hard, cold, and craggy- but with a relatively comfortable top and high up enough he could sit and let his feet hang. A perfect perch to live and think. Think how he would survive a long winter or worse...summer. Think about he would do when his hermitage was over. Because, although he would love to say up here, he would not last long up here. It would last for now.

I don't know how long I can wait. I see this life envisioned flash before my eyes coming with a burst of ecstasy. This is what I want. But it is so far off . In the meantime, before I get to there, if I get to there. I will work and be unhappy, be tired, give up for a while, fail, fall flat on my face, become violent, be angry, and wait some more. The practiced contentment and mental preparations would soon lose their place and give way to now and impatience. He did not know how long the barricade would hold until one day he could live his life like this any longer and go mad.

Those long days produced epiphanies, sadness, and a potent mixture of all else he had held in his head and heart. Sometimes he would mull and stretch over in his head how exactly he would obtain land and get back to his station in life. Get back to where he was before he had lost his house. He knew there would be no way to get back to where he started from. That was gone. They were gone. There was no chance of inheritance. He couldn't borrow or steal. He knew the only means would be to work, work, and work. But even this did not satisfy him. It would take years- if that, and then it would be compounded with waiting, sighing, and hoping.

He would hunt. He would hunt, and skin, and cook rabbit, grouse, squirrel, deer. But he did not have his usual appetite, so that was not the crux of his being. He didn't even care about preparing for the winter. The day always gave way to thinking and silence. He would yell in vain from his watchtower as he looked onto the valley.

"Be gone" as if he were a wizard vanquishing a foe.

And then he would step back, feeling guilty and impotent. As no one could ever hear him. He would think of something more powerful and piercing tomorrow. And he would return to the

soapbox and lambast the ever-growing population on their usurpance, vanity, and arrogance. After all, it they were partly to blame, he contended. If they would not have lost their ways. Not be... and then he jumped to another thought.

The only thing that struck fear into him were the animals. Possums and raccoons scurry about, paying little heed. He may have left them be if they were not such easy game. The animals and doubt. Doubt that this was not what he was supposed to be doing. He responded to these contradictions by convincing himself this was only temporary. Temporary- for how long? Would be doubt's reply. And to this he did not respond. Instead, he took note that when he doubted whether he should be in the wood alone- his reminded himself, his only other place was in town. With them. Those people who caused his consternations and brooding. No, he would not drink from that source. It would be a lesser pain to die parched than to be with them.

He finally thought about winter one morning when awoke shivering. It was just late September, so he still had time. If he wasn't ready for winter, then he would die. He maintained his vigil that he would not live among them until they righted their wrongs. What was sometimes even more painful was that his old townmates acquiesced to them and even greeted them. And it burned him when he knew they were being hypocritical.

It was a world in which money was coming into popularity. Instead of a focus on home and hearth, it would become a world in where you had to venture out there. It moved from being introverted and insolated in a community of barter; an exchange of yours for mine became this for that. Payment in coin? Why the earth must be in retrograde rotation.

To go down a winding road, that contours to the internal springs; to ebb and flow on land. To be fooled by a hill or mountain's true height because a cloud is hovering above it.

To be able to walk to work, walk home, without your head down, staring in front of you and shoulders stooped. But to get to your destination and then wonder how you were transported so quickly, because you don't remember the labor.

How to solve this dilemma enveloped him. His mind strayed to the matter and since there was not much to do but ruminate on the matter. He formed it as a riddle and tried to make it tangible. You can set a course for life but not have any bearings (this is him before?)

He would logically, quixotically, sentimentally, look at the situation to find the sum or product. Had he had friends, he could call upon them now to form a council or inquiry into the matter. To tell a man who had been waiting for years on a chance and working in the meantime that it was not yet his time could be likened to telling a dying man to walk that way for help. But his solitude has made him lose even further contact from those in the valley. He wasn't a vagabond or nomad but things had change enough. His distance was more than enough to kept him away from them and them away from he. Had he the trees to call on as his soldiers, he could form a the village life he had grow up on and loved.

A bird sang out, he waited for it to call again or be answered. Why didn't someone hear him or call back?

The woods were good, because at the end of the day when no new solutions were presented, he could b content with where he was at. He did not have to get up the next day anticipating being hit int h face with some new oddity or inward groan.

Was it normal to become so irascible with society and its doings?

He never considered himself eccentric, but an everyman. He knew the labors of toil and the reward; but was he different for running away from them rather than smiling and bearing their existence.. Should he just keep going? Go west. Start out as a trader and get some land. He heard there was a lot of fightin' out there with Indians. He pictured the nasty scoundrels out there, too. Nah. That was not in his cards.

"I wanna be home" he said aloud as he looked to the great hawk alighting itself on a branch.

He heard the town and colloquia ruminate on others and speak of another's haughtiness. But he hated how they accepted it; he would have liked to spit in their faces. Ahh.. the audacity of perceived tolerance. What had become of them. A town that used to be so proud of knowing everyone and being almost relationed to everyone; being or soon to be a farmer or a smith of some sort and telling the government no and making a noisy speech at the tavern or corner.

Something had turned their ways- and the bravado turned into spite and their connections made them lazy. Their roots were out of the ground they once belonged to and they were salted.

They too fell upon hard times, but they stepped aside- and with this shift left him on the other side- knowing he would not follow. Change they said. But this was a generalization. The real answer was fatigue. Were they weathered with the fight or had they changed and wanted a new way? And if so why did they –change and he remain an outcast.

He could feel himself swim into lunacy but could not find the tide to bring him to shore. Trying to expel his thoughts out of his mind, he started to speak them aloud and fancy he had an audience. “You are a rock,” he would say to his stone-faced audience.

“You were born of heat and fire long ago- You are chipped at incrementally each day, but if I were to classify you or name you- it would still be rock. Trees have sprouted around you, sometimes their roots shape the soil beneath your surface, but you still answer to the name rock. Rock, it is hard to do that- I commend you for that and do so respectfully.”

“Today, we also have tree. Tree you shot up through the inner workings of terra firma and grew. You sway and your exterior is altered, but you are still a tree. Your leaves came and went-flew all over the world- were beautiful and then left you each year. Yet, you remained in place, even when the shifting temperatures would pass you by. You are still a tree and I call you that.”

“I ask when all is said and done- leaves- what did you do? You fed off the sun and left, scattered with the winds they tossed you on the ground. You left your branch. You eviscerated and were eaten and turned into soil. Now you are dirt and allow yourself to be walked on and contorted. You give life to the tree you abandoned and are contoured to be bear the weight of rock.”

He decided to devote at least one a hour a day to the quandary. More than that would come- but he thought it vain to plot out more time. It started out sometimes as drawing sketches in the dirt, but it could end up with an elaborate web of conjectures, questions and diagrams as if the path which may lead him to his dream.

He knew it had to come to him one day. But perhaps this tomfoolery was his greatest mental conundrum Of all. He had no control or chance of catalyzing an idea than he had of getting

married. This was not an equation or riddle to be solved and unless he struck it rich, it was all fruitless. But what else to do with his time? He should not be idle. He hated laziness.

He knew it equaled farm and hearth, but what made it? How he got to that sum or how to get to it- he lacked direction. What was everyone else “seeing” thought he mistook for vapor? He knew it. How does one search for something they see? How could he retrace his steps?