

Late winter tears at one's mind more than it chills the exposed skin/bone. The sun avoids you and grayness pervades your atmosphere. It camouflages depth and even the outside offers no relief as it becomes a four walled which grows smaller and smaller the fog flanking you on the side and those puffy stratocumulus sinking down to earth. Amongst this, a boy of eight such winters marks his way to the pressman's place. Once a small barn, now the quarters for Jacob Maddox print shop and the bimonthly Schaffersville Trumpeter.

"Mr. Stine, you got a paper here," the little Hermes proclaimed as he stepped inside. Not going to name the kid.

"Stay there," the pressman answered keeping his eyes on the black metal letters between his forefinger and thumb, nimbly arranging them in box.

"Whatcha got boy?" Elias asked. The ending word sounded more like the twang from a Jew's harp than a word.

"This." The boy extended his right hand horizontally and presented the letter to the pressman.

Elias opened the seal, a beige candle wax seal with no formal imprint or Phoenician letter and took out the piece of paper.

"Can I make ink?" the messenger asked looking around the shop for the ingredients he knew well.

Elias' eyes were transfixed on the missive in his hands looked up and hoarsely spoke, "Get out of my sight."

The dejected boy looked away and turned his body with his head and burst out the door.

Elias lifted his head up, oblivious to the departure that had just occurred, eyes searching on the wall before him. His mind repeating the words on the paper, "*Reginald Stine,*"

*Formerly of Schaffer Mills.*"

He re-read the next line- "came to rest the twelfth of March"

It continued, "served well in the Revolution in the Flying Corps under ?" the words trailed off and Elias recollected suddenly became twelve years old using that old rifle which Papa used to shoot at lobsterbacks- to kill white-tail bucks.

Elias' wonderment wore off he realized his hands were cold. The door had been left open, so he went and shut it firmly. He turned back to the stone cold words in his hand and continued his flagellation- "member of church"? would it list family

The letter continued- "Mr. Stine had resided in Kentucky for the past seven years."

*"Kentucky?" my Uncle Carl has repeated when Papa had revealed his plans at Sunday dinner. Everyone else said, "It's too hard out there- why do you think they gave away that land. No one's out there but speculators and Indians. That's not your home or place. "*

It did not become Elias' either as he was standing in a workshop nine miles from his homestead reading.

*Funerary services will be held and internment will be at the Brower Family cemetery."*

Later that night, Papa had come into our front room at home. To make sure there was no question, he looked around at me, Mama, Laviginia, and decided he would move south to have a larger farm. "The family is," he emphasized, "moving," our patriarch announced.

“Not the whole family,” Elias had contradicted as he rose from his seat at the table, “ We got no kin out there neither. Pap, Gran, no uncles or cousins are comin. Nor I,” he finished definitively waving his hand in front of his self in chopped motion as he expounded the latter part. He wiped his ink-smearred hands on his front smock. Lye could get it out but man alive did it sting.

Now, I am printing the notice of death. Just fallen into my hands, not by letter from a family member, but by a boy being paid to bring it to me thinking I was just someone to relay the news.

Would I have ever found out he had died had I not been here tonight? What if I did not read the paper. What if the missive had been dropped in a cold wet puddle or its carrier had turned back on this furtive? Night. Would my papa’s ghost have visited upon me or came in a dream? I did not receive a premonition; the inherent connection clearly lost. I was severed from the patriarchal vessel completely to receive such news in this broken way.

Elias could not be contained inside any longer- the hurt needed room to expand, so he went out to walk. He went and walked. He had no lantern as he left the shop and realizing this foolish mistake, he turned his body abruptly and headed back. The snow had masked the large oak root, but his foot found it. His body lurched forward his arms outstretched, and he lay above the white ground with a strong ache in his ankle.

Morning came to a holler in a young state. Reginald Elias Stine was digesting his early breakfast sitting on an old stump outside his cabin.

His neighbor Ephraim rode up fervently, looked at him, looked away, and looked to the rider beside him. They stopped ten feet away from Reginald.

“Morning Ephraim.”

“Morning Reg,” Ephraim quietly replied looking at the reins in his hands the entire time.

“Uncle Reginald- you might not remember me- Zeke- Carl’s boy,” his nephew started to explain.

“Zeke. What brought ‘cha down here?” Reginald’s voice changing inflections as the notion seemed interesting. Did he want to work for him or was he just passing through? But his thoughts were lead away as Zeke asked if Aunt Poly was around.

“Margaret!” Reg yelled- his tired blue eyes fixed beyond the riders who still had not dismounted.

“Margaret- Now!” he called loudly again, rising from the stump, his hands alighting his heavy load on the outside frame of the timber structure.

“Reginald.” Margaret said tremulously as she stood at the door wiping her hands in her dress apron and looking at her husband, Ephraim, and a young boy with apprehension.

*“Please don’t let it be about money,”* she thought.

Zeke’s job was to deliver the news. Although he pleaded earlier with Ephraim to do so as he had not seen Uncle Reg or Aunt Poly for seven years. And it would be harder now that Jere was back in town, cooped up because he was sick with a fever.

*“It’s your place to do it,”* Ephraim had told him. More than two weeks riding and investigating had led to spot where the Lomonds resided now.

The silence nibbled at their queasy stomachs and was disrupted by sharp breaths.

“Have you heard from Elias at all? Recently- past 2 weeks?” Zeke asked, staying on his stead in case the mention of the younger son would set Reginald into an apoplectic state.

The absence of a reply allowed Zeke and Ephraim to dismount, remove their hats, and explain the notice found in the workshop and how Elias had not returned home in over two weeks. He was not here.

Reginald had been in town for three days with Zeke and the recently recovered Jere, talking, spreading the news, and searching for other news or signs of Elias. He decided to move on to x which was about 10 miles up the river, a much larger town with more people and more hopes of hearing something.

He found his way to Painter's Tavern which he had frequented before. Reginald sat down at a table too small for his large frame, his knees lifting it upward. He moved the table forward from him and noticed a small pamphlet on the floor. He saw "Virginia" flashed in the headline and wanted to know more. He was literate but not now in the frantic condition that swept over him.

"Sir!" he said as he grabbed at the clean-bearded man diagonally behind him.

"What is your ailment?" the man asked as he looked at Reginald's face whose ghastly pallor seemed to be the reflection of the Grim Reaper himself.

"Read-this," Reginald said catatonically.

The man took the paper from his right fist. He looked at it. Looked back at Reginald and holding the paper as if it were a proclamation started in a serious tone- "Young Man dead at border line of Virginia."

*Virginny, back home.* Reginald thought as his mind wondered through the wheat and alfalfa which so easily grew and had been watched over by that large stone I structure since 1767.

The reader went on- “found dead within five miles inside the Virginia state line, a young man, tall working man with chestnut hair,”

Reg could see that chestnut hair that he too possessed, but it curled more on his son’s head than his. Elias had blue eyes which always looked at you dead- on. So unwavering they were when he told his father that he would not leave Schaffersville come hell or high water. Reginald had been angry that his authority and manhood were challenged by this boy. This boy who was not even the eldest carrying about such an air.

“Do you wish for me to continue?” the reader asked.

Reginald kept his gaze downward and gave a bob of the head.

“the man wore a brown coat and his hands were stained black.”

The puzzled reader looked up at Reginald knowing something should be said but said nothing and exited the tavern.

Reginald Eugene Stine, a ferrier and who served in the Flying Corps, formerly of Schaffersville in the commonwealth of Virginia was laid to rest on the fourteenth of March. All debts on his estate are to be settled with Davey Boyer, his next of kin.

And Elias Stinewas laid to rest a week later.

Reginald sat at the tavern - a dull ache forming in his throat and lungs.

Ezekiel and Jeremiah brought confirmation that the deceased was in fact. Reg had started back to his wife and remaining children to tell them and make other arrangements.

A team of oxen and horses descended the hill to x town where they loaded up wagons. They went onto to x where another wagon pulled by Zeke and Jere held the coffin. When they all crossed that border back into Virginia, Reg dismounted the wagon he was in with Poly. He looked around and knelt by a tree. He moved towards another wagon and said to Jere “I’ll take this one now.”

He sat on the benchseat and looked at the others and with a shrug said loudly, “Go on.”

Reginald took his place as last in the formation.