

Mere Memory

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Often, I come back to visit this place. Today, it is not as striking as it once was. Presently, it is overgrown with unsightly foliage wrapping around lifeless trees, and sinking in decrepit mud.

At one time it was a gorgeous meadow. With trees, that stood majestic silhouettes over an orange-cream sunset, and the grass thick and green.

Near the center of the field was a tree, larger than all others in the field. On it's most outstretched branch hung, only years ago, two swings of simple wooden boards and twined rope. Now, the tree is shambled and only a single rope hangs from the noble branch. Long have those swings been in my memory.

It was the year 1942, I, a young man, was a student of law. My associate Davis and I were walking through the meadow on a matter of which I cannot recall. We happened by those swings. And there, swaying in the breeze was Carrie.

I had had acquaintance with her in the past, but only as friends, which is to say most adamant friends. Strangely, though, we had not shared great conversation for some time. I would often question her as to why, but she would never explain, as though she expected me to recognize the reason.

As I watched her enjoy her stay at the park, Davis commented on my stares. I explained to him of my past friendship with her, and that I had feelings for her beyond amity. He suggested that I speak to her. I rejected the notion several times, knowing I feared to speak with her, though not admitting to it.

He saw the apprehension within my eyes, and made insult. I laughed at his remarks, un-offended. All seriousness returned to him, and he recommended again that I speak to her. Through much effort he convinced me to make a motion.

And so I sat upon the swing subsequent to her. She had made note of my approach and her swaying slowed. When she had stopped completely she turned toward me.

I was then more terrified than I had been at any other moment within my life. I looked to Davis. He made gesture in the direction of her. I had little alternative but to look to her.

Her eyes were as lovely as a summer morning, though they did not receive me with much grace. I saw unshed tears within her lids, and I knew they would never fall. I dwelt on the concept that I might have been the foundation of her sadness.

She opened her mouth, as to speak. There were no words. I, nonetheless, understood her soundless connotation.

Though the battle of communicating the first word was a complicated one, I asked of her unhappiness.

She took a long instant, and countless breaths, before her reply. When she did she spoke of her child, an infant born out of matrimony. The town had always treated her as a stranger for her illegitimate conduct. I, conversely, had befriended her, in opposition to other's advice, following the disappearance of the father of her own son.

Shortly prior to the time our friendship had ceased, her only son had fallen ill and departed life. I had suspected that the ruin of our friendship was related to the child's death. Though, I couldn't understand why, for I had tried to comfort her in all her isolation.

I queried further as to why she had avoided contact with me.

She looked to me with the same misunderstanding I had seen so many times in the past. She inquired whether I truly did understand or not.

I made clear that I did not understand the meaning of her avoidance.

Disbelief flowed through her face, but she glanced into my heart and saw that I spoke the truth. Her breathing subsided.

She took thought, and bearing all she had within her heart explained the reason our association had expired. It had been in the past, our great friendship meant to her the same as devotion, and her expectations were of matrimony. She had taken note, however, that my prospects were not shared with her, for reasons that had been kept my own. Her affection, on noting this, had gone to an acquaintance belonging to her brother, and soon she found herself carrying child. We did remain well conversed one to another, though she explained her intention to carry the infant in secret. I had, at that time, agreed with her, for I knew the social implications of such activities.

I replied that I had remembered all this, and that I did not comprehend how this had damaged our relationship. She expounded that it would be made clear her disconnection from

me, but that this background was necessary for my understanding. I begged her to continue her explanation.

She then confessed to me her hope that I would have taken her to wife at that time, and that her child would be our child. Shocked, was I, to hear this, for at no time had I considered the concept of marriage. Though dear to me, our bondage of friendship, as I concerned myself was of great import and adoration, but not of romance.

She bore the child, as the expectant often do and her shun soon came from the community. Gossip had chattered that she was a prostitute, and the prospect of finding labors and wages to rear the child were found only with complication. A pauper, she found herself living as a vagabond, doing unmentionable acts only for purposes of survival. Due to these poor conditions her child took ill, and the doctor neglected her as a working girl and the babe with her. With no compassion to be found, the child soon found himself buried in the ground, with many tears shed over the soil where he lay.

I explained that I had not known of these happenings, that as I had departed for university I had neglected my duty to correspond by way of letter. Only had my knowledge been, that tragedy had come to her child, but for the circumstances, I was unaware. I confessed that I knew then why our friendship had gone the way of all the earth, and that perhaps I could have shown more compassion and responsibility. I said that I would much like to call on her at some later time. With hesitation she agreed, and I left the seat by her side and returned to Davis.

Davis inquired as to the production of my talk. I portrayed the sad tale that had conversed between I and Carrie. He showed clemency, and said perhaps there would be optimism to be found. I replied that I was not certain of such things. He queried my intentions to call on her. I mentioned in the affirmative that I would, and thus we departed from the meadow.

Alas, reader, I did call upon her at her place of residence, and we found ourselves walking among the pavement and trees, with the sun's gleam on our faces. Her sadness, though ever-present, seemed somehow to depart in those moments, and I thought perhaps that Davis was correct that perhaps some optimism could be found.

These walks continued for some time, sometimes daily, sometimes weekly, and my former acquaintanceship with Carrie came full bloom. It was at this time, that she gave me the understanding that her approach to me was unchanged, and that her thoughts of matrimony were still present. I was not so stunned to hear this from her, as I had been when we spoke in the

meadow, but I was uncertain as to how my response should be embellished. For, it is true, that my thoughts concerning marriage were unchanged, and indeed it was not my intention to engage in such at any time in my life.

Though I did not reply in a direct manner, disappointment struck her as she realized my lack of intention concerning her, and I found myself standing alone. The sun, though unclouded, did not seem so bright at this moment. My reason for my lack of intent was of such that I could not bear to make anyone privy to those details. In honesty, though friendly and adoring with her, I could never give affection to Carrie in the manner that she most desired.

On the sunrise of the morrow I had been awoken suddenly by a sharp rapping upon the door of my residence. Struggling to find a light I stepped to the door frame and to my surprise Davis stepped in from the storm that I now saw was present. Offering to boil tea, I inquired as to his seeming rush, as he lacked coat and umbrella. He suggested that I sit down. Rather, I demanded he share the news that he came to bear. With some hesitation and trembling he recounted that an errand had taken him by the police house, where he had heard rumor or some tragedy. There he had inquired as to the nature of the tragedy, the explanation being that of a young woman that had sought the conclusion of her years. On further inquiry, he discovered that this young woman and my acquaintance Carrie were the same.

I found anger and sadness mixed in my mind, and my natural reactions out of my self-management. Davis grasped me in my shock and led me to seat, and there I sat with only a whim of comprehension of the explanation given me. Naturally, I felt at some fault, for as much as I had claimed that I would have compassion, I had none. And, though I knew that I could not offer those expressions of fondness that Carrie was in such need of, perhaps I could have shown her the love that I had for her as a companion. And now as I have come back to visit this place, my stares are at the single rope which remains of the swings on which I had once sat, and conversed, with Carrie.