

# Yestermorn

Wings of countless birds fluttered the air when the first shot pealed through the valley calm. Away, out of sight they did fly, to pastures safer. What would become of their songs had they perched to witness the mortal plowing at hand? Dare a sparrow sing a song of sorrow?

Ancient discord shoved a hungry enemy into aggression to satisfy their lusty appetite. They had arrived brazen, rabid, bent on annihilating the amiable villagers.

“Assail every man, woman, and child till the heart of not one beats lest in turn they conquer us,” decreed the commander.

“Not one will remain to tell the tale!” averred the fawners.

A fountainhead of hot lead balls sprayed the fellowship and deluged the morning quietude like carillon knelling prestissimo furioso.

Bleeding, fathers and brothers fell. Shouting, mothers and sisters ran. Crying, children hid.

Cries for preservation the villagers raised in their collective voice. No one came. Pleas for intervention the villagers raised in their collective prayer. No god came.

In the street of the village, the men lay dying. In their homes, the women lay dying. In the schoolyard, the children lay dying.

Peace will be loath to return, soaked red with disgust.

I, a stranger lost in this land, saw the horror from the side. Unwittingly I was thrust into witnessing the massacre of an entire village, a people whole. I knew not the reason for such hatred spewing from those reveling in the murder of defenseless men, women and children, and I wept for the loss of innocent lives.

Panning the scene with brow set heavy over my eyes, I beheld up on a walk a young woman of the village standing, alone. All the glory of a strong oak

to behold was she. Understanding not why she stood so still, it chanced within my heart and mind and soul a rescue should be hers and I should be her champion.

Enemy marksmen, to kill all that breathed, took their aim and then again and again. With portending explosions, balls whished from barrels of steel blue. “Stop the beating heart!” they chanted, but not one enemy took aim at her stand up on the walk.

I feared her full beauty, bright with verve, would entice them to capture her as spoils for the victory of the kill. Alone, unarmed, what could I think to do?

The bright life behind her eyes pitched dark when the blood and death of her people swirled at her roots. Her branches toward the ground lilted and her ripened fruit soured.

Once lacking within these cowardly walls of skin, courage was emboldened with fire I could not identify. Within shadows and among the dust I moved to the young woman, out of their sight.

The hand of the young woman I took in mine, tugged lightly. She moved not, her gaze downcast to the deadliness creeping up to drown her.

“Child, we must depart forthwith,” I whispered close.

Hearts still beating strong, village men appeared from a passage. Triggers pulled, their gun barrels fired exclamations to stop the slaughter. Violence begetting violence now proven, the retort would fail. Focused through sights of hatred and vile, the enemy eagerly volleyed the fire and the lead with seasoned accuracy.

The villagers fell to the ground.

More blood ran atop the saturated dirt.

Anguish withered her heart.

An opportunity was at hand.

From the shadow of my hiding I moved and into my arms removed the young woman. Upon a wispy cloud in the blue sky of her fragile mind, broken,

she gazed. With tenderness I bore her away from torrents of evil. Up on to the heights I trekked; she, sailing in a breeze of beforeness, light and simple.

Across a border onto quieter pasture, I set her down beside a stream. The sun shined warmly on our faces, the field grass bowed with a touch of grace in the gentle wind. Behind her eyes at long last life returned, dim.

“You are who?”

“I am but a sojourner, here to help.”

“I am where? I am safe?”

“We are in the valley peaceful, and you are safe.”

Suspecting weaponry of harm hiding upon me, reassurance was checked until she had spied me completely. Instruments of harm had I none and when I showed my hands, free of blood, she heaved a sigh and fell fast asleep.

Morning chill was warded off by the glowing coals of the eve’s wood fire. Laughing in a dream, she woke herself as I admired the glow returning about her face. A halo would be as bright, I considered.

Alas, when the yestermorn came screaming back to her mind, soberness dimmed the radiance and darkened her eyes. Toward the heights we traversed she stared.

“Real it was?”

“Yes, child; real it was.”

“But I am here, safe?”

“Yes, you are here, safe.”

Looking back to me, she wondered, “What of my friends, my neighbors, the farmers, and the merchants?”

Casting down my eyes to the timber coals, I shook my head.

Quivering of voice asked she, “What of my father and my mother, my sister and my brother, all?”

“Their hearts beat their last, yestermorn.”

“Pray tell, who among my people yet breathe this day?”

“You alone.”

Toward the heights from which we passed over she returned her gaze and began to weep. Shadows began to lengthen in the afternoon sun before she wiped her eyes and turned to me once again.

“Why me?”

“What of you?” I asked, unsure of the mindful question.

“You saved me. Why me? Why not others? Why not all of us?”

“My child, I am but one man, unarmed and unskilled in the trade of battle. Against those predators I would have died with you had I made a stand. You were but the one I could remove to safety while they looked another way.”

“How was it you, a stranger, came to save me, a weed in the midst of a field?”

“My child, what I can tell is this: I was wayward in your valley yestermorn when the air crackled and burned and the morning dew was stained with the red blood of your people. You alone were up on the walk, numb for the sight of death besieging you. Within my reach and within the abundance of providence but for a moment, I stole you from the scene and carried you away.”

“Would it not have been better for me to have died?”

“Perish the very words! My dear child, it is not a fluke that you are breathing yet.”

“What then, my purpose?”

“If it is mine to say, it is yours to be a light above the dark. It is yours to live above the death. It is yours to forgive above the insanity. It is yours to love above the hate.”

“To whom would it be mine to share?”

“To each one touched by your presence, child.”

“By my presence have you I touched?”

“Oh yes! Yestermorn, strength or courage I had not but to flee for my own skin. But I saw within your eyes the profound sadness of one who sees tragedy in humanity as a loss of all that is good — as though I beheld the eyes of a

child beholding the destruction of all that was created for her. I could not bear to see the compassion lost to calamity, and was emboldened to save you from certain death. In you, my child, I saw life in the midst of death, and could not let it go.”

“Will I touch others?”

“With my whole heart, I believe it. The compassion within your heart can do nothing if not create within the hearts of others more of the same, like the flame of a candle lighting the wick of another and again.”

“And what of you?”

“To think you cared to ask will be to encourage me to begin my journey anew, to find valor and joy where it is least expected.”

“I am sad for such loss.”

“I am sure of it, but behind your sadness is the compassion that will serve you to work to prevent tragedy befalling others. Tragedy can curse a man's soul to perpetual darkness or light an eternal flame to see the incalculable value of each man, woman, and child. Go forth! Your solemn love for humanity will be bright-shining as the morning sun.”

**The End**