Dusk

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Abstract

Retreating through the natural elm arch at the west end of Main street, the sun spread its reflecting hand over the uneven brick street...
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RETREATING through the natural elm arch at the west end of Main street, the sun spread its reflecting hand over the uneven brick street. Six blocks in the other direction was the country and Skunk River, where a beaver, still dazzled by the young spring, softly nibbled on winter-killed grass and slid into the water with ponderous grace on the approach of a booming beagle.

Main Street settled in its own shadows. A muffled screen door slammed from the back of Lu’s Cafe. Pigeons cooed on top of the water tower, gutturally uttering news to themselves and to the steel tank which proclaimed “Story City” and in letters not so perfect but distinct, “Beat Ankeny.”

A straight form shuffled stiffly around the corner at Penn and stopped for a minute to stare into the Herald office. Maybe at the daily news sheet, but probably not, because the eyes had never read and could not now see more than twenty feet ahead. Probably seeing old P. A. Olson as he had been thirty years before, when he opened the Herald with verve and a second-hand flat-bed press.

The figure, burnished by receding light, continued jerkily down the street, moved to the curb and spat. A gleaming arch of the juice that relaxed and made a life bearable, and after that, at least kept it going.

Stopping, the figure lifted its head and listened to whistling wings of the town-hall pigeon flock on their way to roost after drinking and picking up grit at the creek. A sparrow chirped sleepily from a broken window at the top of the Pioneer Store.

The duals of a beat ’49 Chevie rapped and reverberated down the brick street. The intermittent squeal of tires on
weathered street bricks. Twisting, the figure bent forward and lurched, peering into the fading light that was darkness. A girl’s laughter shrilled from the car and the noise died. The car was gone.

Stumbling over the curb at the Lafayette-Main intersection, the square figure stopped, stood straight and rigid, and then jolted on.

The siren on top of the town hall wailed for volunteer-fireman’s practice. As the siren gurgled to a stop, the figure stood looking into the basement window of the Tjelmeland Feed Store. Dust-dulled, the window no longer reflected light. The room below was filled with cracked corn and high-protein pig feeds. The figure touched a rectangular wooden sign. Quarter-round trim hung loosely from the sides and the only lettering left was an “e” in the upper corner and a tattered “an” farther down.

Harold Lee, the only Chinese citizen the town had ever had, once ran his hand laundry in this basement. The sun now barely shone over the highway; the figure was black in its own shadow, and the stiff arm seemed joined to the weathered sign.

Harold Lee had been found dead in his room, at the back of his shop, on Easter Sunday in 1937. Samuel Chen had been sent to prison for life for the murder of his friend, even though he had an alibi in Des Moines, his home, at the time. It had been a sad funeral because everyone liked Harold, even if he was a Chink.

The figure jerked past Johnson’s Drug and nodded at an unintelligible greeting from within.

As it reached the fringe of the pool hall’s flickering Budweiser sign, a white stubble illuminated a square face with eyes, dry-looking, set deep in small sockets. A frayed black suit-coat worn over blue denim overalls, shiny with dirt. High shoes, unpolished. A smell of kerosene and sweat and dirty underwear.

Old, dead clay-composition pool balls clicked inside. The old man let himself down on an old orange-crate and sat there, his back rigid.

In a few minutes a bent man shuffled up and plopped on
the other packing crate.

"Heelo, Ole," and the stiff one nodded.

The last sun ray withdrew, and the elm arch at the west edge of Main Street was lost in warm darkness. At the east edge of town on Skunk River, a beaver scraped a willow branch with sharp teeth. Occasionally a great horned owl boomed.

Languid rats scuttled on the floor of the Co-op elevator on Main Street.

— Cole Foster, Sc. Sr.

I Think I Need Another Rib,
But I'm Not Quite Sure

We men will say it curdles
Our juice to think of girdles
Deceiving our perceiving,
Putting rolls under controls.
For the helpfulness of bras
We have minute applause;
Wear a black mascara?
To paint implies a taint!
Why, boys, it's artificial,
Just look at what's implied—
Such tricks are the initial
Of a wench with things to hide!
Trickable!
Despicable!
I'll ask one
Why it's done.
"Why, sir?
My, sir!
We wear—
You stare."

— Larry Syndergaard, Ag. Jr.