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Burning Bridges As We Go

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## Take the Long Way Home

The old man opened the bathroom cabinet and grabbed his brush before quoting Emerson, *“Is it not true that the journey and not the destination determine life’s value?”*

“Maybe,” he answered taking a beat to first comb his thin hair back, “but the destination sure feels pretty important too.”

In the bedroom, the old man donned his favorite Donegal wool cap, wrapped a winter scarf around his neck, and buttoned the top button of his new flannel coat – a recent birthday gift from his daughter, Julie, and his favorite color of blue plaid.

“Plus,” he continued his conversation, “did not Solomon say, *‘Better is the end of a thing than the beginning’* as a means of emphasizing ending a thing well is better than particularly how we start?”

*“I can see your logic,”* Emerson argued back. *“But I must insist the point is not the length of life or necessarily how that life ends, but the depth of life at the end that matters.”*

“Well, I see,” the old man chuckled, “but I doubt Susan would be so easily convinced. She has a fairly compact view of life in which the rules apply at the beginning, during the middle, and till the end in the same manner – her feeling being the more sparse and rigid the life, the more directly it correlates to our post-life abundance. Which, I hate to

tell you, she picked up as much from her Catholic upbringing as much as from Thoreau. Who, if I recall reading, was a friend of yours. My apologies.”

The old man laughed heading off to the kitchen where his wife of forty-six years, Susan, would already be up and working for the day. Striding to the Frigidaire, he reached inside for the Byrne’s chocolate milk, which Susan thoughtfully kept in stock for him, grabbed the bottle and popped the cork. Downing a swig, the old man finished to the bottom before wiping the milk mustache away with his sleeve. Mostly because it never failed to amuse him how he once did the same in his own mother’s kitchen as a little *lapochka*.

“Do you always have to drink from the bottle when I’ve asked you a million times not to?” Susan scolded, but not very harshly. She was intent on shedding the skin from a crop of potatoes and carrots at the kitchen sink and already feeling pressed for time. Thanksgiving was tomorrow with friends and family due to arrive early. “For heaven’s sake, the Egyptians went to all the trouble to invent the glass and cup, which your wife has taken added pains to purchase and stock, and *still* you drink from the bottle. You’d think a seemingly intelligent man like yourself would’ve figure that out by now. But apparently not.”

Without a word, the old man closed the refrigerator door, dropped the empty bottle in the recycle bin and walked over to his wife, giving her shoulders an affectionate squeeze.

“Don’t try to butter me up,” she replied not entirely displeased. “It’s a bad habit and you’re a grown man. You should behave like one. Now be on your way. I’ve got lots of work to do and I don’t want you in my way begging for something to eat when you get hungry later.”

He ignored her comments, as he often did, and headed for the door. He'd heard her of course. He *always* heard her. But if he'd developed any superpower during their long marriage, it was knowing when Susan was speaking rhetorically and when she really meant to dialogue with him.

"Be home by four, please," she spoke after him. "No later! We're expecting Betty and Earl for dinner at six and then bridge after, so you'll need to rest before. Your shirt will be dirty when you get home so you'll also have to wash up and change before they arrive." And then more to herself, "though God knows how you get so dirty. It's not like you do anything strenuous. But still, grime and dirt all over you like a kid playing out in the barn -- leaving me to clean your laundry. Again."

He was almost to the front door when he heard her call out, "Bill?"

"Yes, my little *pelchka*?"

"Can you stop by Julie's on your way back and pick up her large roasting pan? I'll need it to cook the turkey tonight."

"Can do."

"Thank you."

"Your welcome. Glad to be of service."

Leaving their Turtle Bay apartment, the old man recalled a book he'd read titled The Princess Bride. By S. Morgenstern. It'd actually been written by a fella named William Goldman, but Goldman kept referring to Morgenstern as the author, so the old man figured he was the real writer. Sure it was a clever literary device, but only Goldman seemed to appreciate the concept.

In the book, Goldman described the parents of the beautiful *princess bride* as common folk who'd been waging a pitched battle of wills against each other for the entirety of

their lengthy marriage -- counting coo every time one or the other landed an insult during the day's progression.

*You have to really understand marriage, the old man'd chuckled, to know such things.*

The old man believed he knew a thing or two about marriage – how intimacy derived from tension could become conflict – and conflict, for some, easier to sustain than feeling vulnerable to the person you held affinity with. He'd never had much interest in conflict himself, but Susan held endless reserves along with a much sharper tongue. She seemed to need the outlet being it was the only kind of intimacy she truly understood – her parents having pitched a much worse version during her youth. Instead of fighting, the old man simply learned to fall silent. Like the submarines he once listened for manning his corner radar station aboard the USS Endeavor while serving with the US Navy during the Cold War. He'd hoped his silence would encourage Susan to find a better way, but she'd yet to tire in all their years together.

*Ahh, well, patience is a conquering virtue too, he thought. Did Our Lord not say patience is better than pride?*

The old man continued down three flights of stairs humming Duke Ellington's *Take the A Train* to himself. He could've used the elevator like everyone else in the building, but he liked how peaceful the stairwell was and enjoyed the oddly symmetrical view of the open staircase winding down like a carousel to the lobby. It reminded him of the Guggenheim and the first time he'd come across a Degas painting. Amazing man. Amazing talent. The old man'd actually teared up staring at *L'Absinthe* and marveling how sad the people in the painting were. He felt so...lonely for them. And completely awed by the fact that a painter could evoke this feeling from his audience with just a few brush strokes of colored paint on canvas. Miraculous.

Outside, on L Street, the old man turned left heading toward 14th Ave. Most days, he turned right walking the two blocks over to Lincoln park where he'd spend the morning playing chess with his friends and welcoming any newcomers to the "Old Man Park Brigade." *Stale breadcrumbs and opinions offered freely*, he laughed knowing how metaphorically similar those two things were. Then he'd walk over to Katz deli for lunch, stroll around the park post-meal to digest, and home for a leisurely afternoon of reading. Or a movie with the missus when she was in the mood.

But not today. Today was "bank day."

Bank day was the day each month when he travelled the five long city blocks to the Republic Bank to deposit his retirement check. He could've arranged for direct deposit some time ago, as his daughter Julie wanted him to do to, but he felt no need to "catch up with the times." He actually liked walking into the downtown corridor each month – it was like a metronome marking the passage of time in a meaningful way, letting him assess his life's progression in relation to the world around him one month at a time.

"Plus," he told his daughter, "Seeing the world change in monthly increments keeps all those old memories alive. I see how things are and I remember how things were. I even see you. Or the you growing up at different ages, when you used to walk with me each month and we had our little 'adventures' exploring the city. It's very comforting, you know."

"If you say so, Daddy. I just don't understand why you can't take the same walk but do so without a five thousand dollar check in your pocket. I'm worried someone will try to rob you. It can still be dangerous out there."

"Whose gonna rob some old schlemiel like me? I look like I'm worth anything?"

"Well," Julie sighed smiling, "You're worth the world to me."

“Ahh, you’re so sweet. Apparently I didn’t beat you enough as a kid.”

“Daddy!” she laughed.

When the old man turned toward the downtown corridor, he immediately shifted closer to the buildings because he’d learned, in order to avoid the people rushing by on their way to this or that, he had to stay as close to the walls as possible where it was safest. At this time of morning, pedestrians could be dangerous on the open sidewalk – like the rushing undertow of unseen currents that could sweep you further and further away down city blocks if you weren’t strong enough to swim against the current.

*Which, let’s face it, the old man thought, you haven’t been for some time. You’ve grown old,* he chuckled. Which made him remember his own father’s take on aging.

*“There is no cure for the common birthday,” his father would recite over his birthday cake, and no solution to aging for the faint of heart. Bravery is called for! The fates must be answered whether you’re ready or not.”* Then he’d blow out the candles, counting one more each year till his last at 55.

*You were so right, Daddy,* the old man thought, *there is no cure. And it does takes courage to grow old gracefully. I understand now. God rest your brave soul.*

If pedestrians could be unpredictable on the open sidewalk, they were doubly so at any of the three dozen storefronts the old man had to cross by the time he reached the bank. At each entryway, he’d stop to check for pedestrian traffic before crossing – not unlike a kid checking for cars before crossing the street. Because pedestrians nowadays were quick and often distracted coming and going from the stores. Especially at those Starbucks coffee places -- which seemed to have multiplied exponentially on just about every city block between his apartment building and the bank he frequented. People truly flew in and out of those places, caffeinated like supersonic jets, barreling in and out, always staring down at their cellphones or talking into the thin air like pilots

calling in air strikes. They were oblivious to everything else too, wrapped up in their own preoccupation like they were.

*You must lead such very, very interesting lives to be so busy,* he chuckled knowingly. *I know what my mother would say. She'd say, 'One should never be so busy as to not think of others.'*

It was a quote from Mother Teresa his mother oft repeated as mantra throughout his youth. And would come back to him when, as an adult, he occasionally wanted to skip his weekly visits to her Bowery apartment because he'd worked a busy week, or had family demands, or was just too plain exhausted to trudge out there. But he did anyway, week in and week out, because that's what a good son did for his mother after her husband passed away too soon.

*I actually miss those Friday afternoons now, Mom. Especially the times I took Julie with me. She got such a big kick out of playing dress up with you. She swore you were an exiled princess with your thick accent and penchant for beaded dresses, matryoshka dolls, and exotic Persian rugs cluttering your apartment. God rest your loving soul.*

But these busy modern pedestrians running here and there carried little mercy for an old man trespassing in their way. Whenever he tried to cross entrances, the worst being anyone one of three dozen Starbucks between his home and the bank, someone nearly always strafed him, coming close enough to challenge his balance. Or worse, ran right into him. "Sorry," they might sometimes offer. But most acted offended because he'd been insensitive enough to get in *their* way.

*You can truly chart the decline of western civilization,* the old man thought, *by how increasingly discourteous people were toward each other in front of a Starbucks coffee shop. Wouldn't you say, Jacque?* "Jacque" being Jacques Barzun. A professor at Columbia who once impressed the old man greatly bantering ideas at each other across a library table when they were young men. Barzun went on for the next several decades, to write and

edit more than forty books touching on just such influences – both pre and post-Age of Enlightenment – leading up to his opus exploring man’s inhumanity to man in From Dawn to Decadence. The old man continued reading in the same library.

*You could’ve done all the research you’d ever needed sitting on a bench in front of a Starbucks watching the people come and go, Jacque. And you wouldn’t have had to travel so far to do so. You were so lonely there at the end there, weren’t you.*

Last year, the old man *had* fallen trying to avoid a woman in high heels leaving a Starbuck’s on 12<sup>th</sup> Ave. She was carrying two full cardboard take out trays of coffee and tea and simultaneously talking on her cellphone, with one of those white earbud flowers growing from her ear, zeroed in on plowing through the crowd to reach a posh Cadillac town car waiting for her at the curb. She didn’t slow her trajectory in the least to avoid him, but ran right over him -- if he’d not pulled back at the last second. Her large shoulder bag caught him on the side of his head and shoulder, spinning him off balance and forcing him to stumble and sit down hard. Momentarily stunned, he was about to be trampled had not a very nice teenager with a skateboard rushed over to help.

“Hey lady,” he yelled after the already departing car, “*be respectful!*” Then to the old man, “Whoa, *brah*, that looked like a gnarly drop. Like you back kicked your deck out from under you and crashed,” the teenager commiserated. “Don’t worry, *dude*, I’ve totally bombed like that dozens of times. You just gotta get back on your feet without thinking about it, you know? Here let me help you stand.”

“Ahh, thank you so very much, young sir.”

“No problem, *brah*. God bless.”

The old man was still a little shaken or he would’ve thanked the boy proper. But he disappeared back into the sea of pedestrians before the old man could.



*Just when you think you've got people figured out, he thought, someone comes along to defy expectations. God bless you, my boy. Be safe on your journeys. May your, what'd you call it, 'deck?' May your 'deck' always stay under your feet.*

Despite the boy's help, the old man realized he'd twisted his ankle. After limping home, he told Susan, and later his doctor, he'd tripped getting into the elevator. He didn't want them to worry or forbid his daily walks, as Susan was sure to do if she knew how difficult it had become for him to walk to the bank. The doctor suggested he use a cane to walk for a while, which Susan ensured he immediately had on hand, and so he did. Surprisingly the cane did make his hike easier because it had ancillary benefits. He discovered, if he tapped the end of the cane down hard down on the sidewalk, it created a sonar effect. Not unlike pinging a submarine. Which in turn seemed to interrupt people's attention, stop their rush, and alert them to his presence. It made crossing the entrances much safer to navigate so he kept the cane much longer than he needed.

When the old man arrived at the Republic Bank on 14<sup>th</sup> Ave, the doorman, Eddie, saw him coming and held open the door just at the right time, making sure to block any pedestrians trying to enter or leave from interfering. "Good morning Mr. Antonelli. How was your walk?"

"Eddie, I don't know how you do it," the old man replied. "But you make me proud to know there are still men like you out here that are honorable and good at their jobs! Thank you for your courtesy. I only come here once a month, but yet you always remember."

"It's my honor, Mr. Antonelli. It's my way of contributing, you know?"

"I do. Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Inside, the old man had the opposite experience when he approached the young female teller he had to queue up in front of.

*“How may I help you today, sir?”*

She'd said the right words, but the way she did, the whole time looking distractedly at her computer screen, gave off a very “who gives a shit” vibe. He didn't know if it was intentional or not, or whether she even cared, but it made him sad. Like the Degas painting. It had long been his experience that such a temperament was generally uncorrectable without intervention. Nor would any brief amount of politeness in return be helpful. Rude people expected rudeness. He did wish he could sit with her for a few hours, listen to her tales of woe, and offer her an empathetic ear and heartfelt sincerity. He believed such a thing helped. But he had no medium by which to entice her to do so.

*“Hello, Miss. Thank you for asking,”* the old man replied, *“I hope you are doing well today.”*

She didn't register his question. Nor cared. *“What can I DO for you today, sir?”*

*Do you not realize, young miss, he thought, it is not that which goes into your mouth that defiles you, but that which comes out?* He didn't fault the young teller if her heart were troubled. But he did if she refused to do anything about it.

*“I'd like to deposit this check into my account please,”* the old man replied, sliding his pre-signed retirement check across the counter along with his bank card and ID. Unlike several of the fellas he'd known aboard the USS Endeavor, he'd successfully turned his naval experience with radars into a civilian job. He worked for Leonardo Electronics after his service ended and spent the next thirty five years developing better Lidar detection systems for national defense contracts. It wasn't playing second base for the New York Mets or winning the Nobel Prize in literature, but it was interesting,

sufficiently altruistic, and profitable enough a job to satisfy him till retirement. Not to mention put food on the table and keep a roof over his family's head for thirty five plus years, so he felt no need to complain.

"Do you have an *account* with us, sir?"

"Wouldn't that be implied by the fact that I'm here?" he replied, growing a little exasperated with her.

"Excuse me, sir. I'm not sure I understand. Do you have an account with us or not?"

Sighing, he said, "Yes, I do. Here is my bank card and my ID card right in front of you. And here is my check to deposit in my account. Thank you for your efforts."

"If you say so, sir."

He kept a smile on his face as he watched her pull up his account, process the check, and hand him back a deposit receipt. But the whole time he was thinking, *Poor dear, I wish you could just enjoy life, and enjoy your youth. Both will rush by faster than you realize.*

"Thank you for using Republic Bank," she recited in monotone, "We value your patronage. NEXT!"

On the walk home, he said a thank you to God for his good fortunes. Because he was more blessed than discouraged by life. Had received more than given. And had been allowed to contribute a verse *to the powerful play that goes on*. So said *Walt Whitman, God bless his soul*. The old man also spoke a prayer for the teller and a blessing for Eddie. He believed God listened best when His children were appreciative.

On the way home, he stopped by K St. where his daughter, Julie, and her husband, Joel, lived in their newly purchased brownstone a block from him and Susan. Julie wouldn't be home yet from the university – she always had undergrad essays to read and grade before the holidays. But her husband, Joel would be. Joel was a staff writer for the

Times on sabbatical hoping to finish his first novel by the end of the year and see it published the following. The boy was quite talented actually.

“Hi, Pops,” Joel greeted at the front door. “Susan called a bit ago to say you’d be stopping by and I should keep an eye out for you. That was pretty considerate of her. Come on in.”

The old man entered the foyer, shedding his hat, scarf, and coat before handing everything over.

“I put the kettle on and have Oolong tea bags at the ready. Julie’s been making me drink more tea lately cause she thinks I drink too much coffee. Says the caffeine makes me jumpy and I stay up too late writing when I should be going to bed with her on time. She insists tea is the healthier option.”

“Do you still have any coffee left in the house?”

“Well...”

“I would love a cup of coffee if you do,” the old man smiled. “And I certainly won’t tell if you don’t.”

Joel smiled back. He liked his father-in-law immensely. Not just for his insightful nature. But because he was truly a nice man. “Oh, you know, I might have saved a little mountain roast for special occasions. Seems like you visiting is grounds to declare this a special occasion. No pun intended.”

“None taken.”

“And I certainly couldn’t let you drink coffee alone. As your host, that would be inconsiderate. I don’t think Julie would forgive me for being rude to her father.”

“You’re a smart lad. I quite agree. I’ll be in the Barca lounge in the living room when you’re ready. My dogs are a bit tired today.”

"I'll make the coffee and join you there shortly."

"I see you finished the new porch railing out back," the old man called out taking his seat, "It looks good. Professional even."

"Thanks. It wasn't as hard as I thought," Joel replied walking in with two cups of coffee. "Especially with those tools you let me borrow. Makes the job so much easier. And now Julie thinks I'm a virtual Tarzan handyman with the ability to build porches and fix plumbing and do all those manly things around the house. I'm a little embarrassed to say she's been a bit more, umm, *affectionate* of late because of it."

"Good. I'm glad you're getting good use out of them. The tools I mean. Not my daughter. Though I am happy you two are enjoying each other."

"You know if she keeps this up, we may be giving you and Susan a grandchild earlier than we planned."

"Mazel Tov."

"From your mouth to God's ears. Amen."

"How's the book coming along?"

"Oh, a little rough. I hit a dry patch there for a while. It was frustrating because I couldn't figure out how to get my protagonist out of the second act trap I'd boxed him in. That's why I started working on the outside deck and picking up little projects around the house. Funnily, the answer just popped into my head the other morning when we were having brunch at Brunello's with some friends and Julie was telling us about some wild vacation you all had in Scotland. Which helped me figure out a solution."

"I take no responsibility there."

*“Well, it was there for the hearer to hear if one can be quiet enough to listen, as my grandmother used to say. When Julie told us how the three of you wedged yourselves into that child’s bed, which gave both you and Susan muscle cramps, she was laughing fit to be tied remembering how your massaging Susan’s cramps out didn’t stop you from jumping up and down cause of your own muscle cramps. And how that caused the bed to break and the owner to come rushing up. That’s when I knew I’d found my solution.”*

*“Oh yes, of course. I remember that adventure. We went to England when Julie was twelve, I believe. It was the one big vacations we’d saved years to afford. And while we were driving to visit this castle in Carlisle, I got turned around and overshot the mark. All that driving on the other side of the street, you know.”*

*“Of course.”*

*“Before I knew it, we were in some little town in Scotland called Gretna going on nearly midnight and Susan fit to be tied. We ended up stopping at what we thought was a tiny inn that night, but really was only just a little local pub with an apartment above. We woke up the owner looking for a room thinking, at the time, he was the innkeeper. He was very nice and gracious about the whole thing. Took us right in, fed us, and gave us his daughter’s room for the night. He was quite taken with Julie too. Said she reminded him of his own daughter when she was a wee little lass.”*

*“Sounds lovely.”*

*“Oh, what was the name of that place? Oh, for Pete’s sake, I can’t remember anymore. But the owner was quite a character too. He made us flapjacks that night and entertained us with claims that the real Sherlock Holmes had once lived there and that his place was the actual site of the real Hound of Baskervilles mystery. He frightened Susan pretty bad, but Julie and I loved it. I remember Susan even insisted both Julie*

and I sleep with her in that little bed all night with the lights on even though the bed was too small for even one adult person. Thus the cramping incident.”

“Julie said it was one of her fondest adventures from her childhood. She still talks about those ‘midnight pancakes’ you all dined on that night.”

“Well, it was certainly an adventure. I’m glad she remembers it fondly.”

“It sounded wonderful to tell the truth. I wish I could’ve been there.”

“Well, my dear boy, you should take her back. She’d love it. But that’s not why I stopped by this afternoon. I’m afraid I have alternative motives for visiting you today.”

“Oh, yes, the roasting pan. I have it ready to go.”

“No, not just that. How are you feeling about hosting your first Thanksgiving for the family tomorrow?”

“Honestly, pretty nervous. We’ve ordered most of the sides from Dom’s Deli on the corner to cut down on prep time. And Susan was gracious enough to cook the turkey for us because neither Julie nor I really cook. We tend to microwave everything. Which, I know, Susan hates.”

“That’s certainly true. Course, Susan is a wonderful cook and a bit old school about it.”

“I don’t know if you do, but Susan has been coming over lately trying to teach me to cook. Said she’s given up hope on Julie and might as well teach me.”

“Yes, she’s mentioned it.”

“Course, I seem to antagonize her with my poor baking skills. The other day, she pulled a pot roast out of the oven I’d burnt while I grabbed the ladder to turn off the smoke detector. And she growled at me. Actually growled. Then she suggested, going forward, I should look for a smoke detector that knows to shut itself off after I yell, ‘I’m

just cooking!' I started laughing so hard, I think I actually offended her. But she caught me off guard. She certainly has a way with insults."

"That she does. It's been her way for a long while. Best to just smile."

"Oddly enough, I liked it. She's never mean spirited about it and I get the impression it's how she says she cares."

"You may be on to something there. You know, my dear boy, speaking of burnt offerings, it's long been the duty of the Thanksgiving host to carve the turkey and say the blessing before the meal. That tradition now passes to you."

"No, no, no. I wouldn't do that. I couldn't. You're the head of the family. It should still be you."

"Ah, sorry my boy, but that's not how it works. Whoever hosts has the honor. It's a rite of passage. The same happened to me when Susan and I began hosting the family. I thought I was going to die standing in front of everyone. But my father paid me a visit the day before and gave me this."

The old man picked up a carefully wrapped bundle of cloth he'd been carrying for just this moment and unwrapped it to reveal a silver carving knife. "And now I'm proud to say this will be yours."

"Oh no, Pops. That's your family carving knife. I couldn't possibly."

"Son, of course you can and you will. Or you'll hurt my feelings and offend your family. Now hush and take it please. It's yours. One you will, God willing, be able to pass down to your future son or daughter."

"Thank you, Pops. Really. You and Susan have been so great to me. Much better than my own family, I'm sad to say. How can I ever say thank you?"



“No need. We’re happy to have you and you’ve made Julie more so. I assume you know how to carve a turkey.”

“Well, no. Not really. I guess I could Google it or watch a YouTube video or something.”

“Well, if you don’t mind, I can give you a few pointers.”

“Please.”

“Well, the main thing you need to do is, once the turkey is ready to carve, you bring it out and use the knife to cut a few slices off the right breast in a diagonal cut along the muscle grain.”

“Okay. I think I can do that.”

“Then, once the ceremonial slicing of say three slices has been completed, you take the entire bird back into the kitchen and use this.” The old man giggled as he pulled out the electric powered carving knife he’d been holding in reserve just for this joke.

Joel started laughing. “You’re kidding! Really?”

“No sir. On my honor. That’s the way my father showed me and that’s the way I’ve been doing it ever since. And now I’m giving you the secret.”

“I never knew. You sneaky bastard. I remember being so impressed by your carving skills last year. I even told Julie I wish I could be like you.”

“Well now you know my secret and you’ll have your chance tomorrow. In the meantime, I’ve done my mitzvah for the day and we’ll be seeing you and Julie tomorrow for dinner. In the meantime, I’m tired and gonna see myself home with your good roasting pan before Susan starts to worry.”

“Of course. If you like, I can drive you. It’s no trouble.”

“No, my boy. It’s only a block more and I still need the exercise. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Okay, Pops. Thank you again. For the knife. And the secret. I mean it!”

“You’re very welcome. Goodbye.”

The old man gathered himself together, put on his hat, coat, and scarf, and headed out the door. Once outside, he buttoned the last button of his coat, took the few steps down to the sidewalk, and turned right toward home.

Despite being November, the day was sunny. Cold and sunny. His favorite. With a nice, crisp wind carrying the fresh smell of fall on the air. It wasn’t till he’d almost reached the end of the block that he noticed how cold he felt, how sharp the pain in his left arm was and the terrible feeling he was very short of breath and couldn’t catch it.

*I must’ve pushed myself harder than I realized, he thought. Though today’s walk never wore me out this much before.*

The old man sat on a nearby bench waiting for the pain to pass and his breath to return. But some part of him knew. And so he accepted. He sat there looking up into the clear blue sky, feeling at peace. And then down the block toward the third floor of his building where he knew Susan was still in the kitchen working away.

*She’s gonna be pretty upset when I don’t make it home on time, he thought. And my shirt will probably be dirty. I’m sorry, my dear, for the first time in a long time, I’m not gonna make it home for dinner. I’ll miss you and I’ve loved all our days and nights together. It’s been an adventure. Tell Julie and Joel I hope I didn’t ruin their Thanksgiving. I’ll be saying my goodbyes. I’ve been blessed by the long road of life and believe God is calling me home now.*

The old man didn't think or say anything more. He just sat, his eyes staring up to the sky. He was discovered three hours later by the local police after his wife called to report a missing person.

Still, the world turned somehow and people went on living. The old man's body was laid to rest, and he was mourned and missed by a few family and friends. He didn't mind.

*Because that's the way of most things, the old man would've thought, one life touches another, and in turn, touches another till who knows how far your life will be felt. What else could there be?*

The End.