

The Bathroom Reader

**Six unrelated short stories;
Each of which can be read in one sitting.**

By Ruven Daud

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“Outside of a dog, a book is a man’s best friend. Inside a dog, it’s too dark to read.”

— Groucho Marx

Strange Day in the Morning

“I’m going to the barn Mary,” he said to his wife. She was sitting at the kitchen table sewing the hem on her favorite skirt as he walked past. She didn’t look up concentrating on the task at hand, but he sensed a slight head nod, and then walked out the back door. The skirt was his favorite as well. He purchased it for her from last year’s 1897 Sears Roebuck & Co. Catalogue. It was delivered directly to their farm a year ago by the United States Postal Service. She wore it once a week, every week, since. He said her look in it was, “right handsome.” It was a new design, gathered at the waist and fell naturally over her hips. The blouse she wore with it had tight sleeves with ruffles at the shoulders. He always thought her to be the finest looking woman he’d ever seen and that included Miss Lillie Langtry years ago at her concert in New York City.

Henry James Wallace and Mary Hackett Wallace were married more years than either of them could remember. One thing is for certain though, other than their early childhoods, neither can recall a time when they weren’t part of each other’s lives. They love each other; always have, even during those times when they didn’t particularly like each other.

Henry walked up the hill toward the barn to look in on the animals, count heads and check for any newborns. This was his before breakfast custom that he has enjoyed for the past forty-two years. Every ten paces or so he would stop, turn around and watch the sun rise above the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains. “Nature’s wake up vista,” he called it and marveled at its grandeur. It was the same routine, in the same manner, for over four decades and he wouldn’t trade it for a king’s ransom. Every day was a gift and, in the great scheme of things, Henry James was convinced that it was his destiny to care for and protect the livestock that were his charges.

Today’s barn walk seemed different somehow. When he awoke each morning at sunrise he looked forward to the day’s presentation. It would begin to unfold as he approached the barn. Each day there were new challenges and tasks. Some may even have been unfinished from the day before. He smiled to himself because

today he had no anticipation of any previously unfinished tasks or of any new ones popping up to fill his time. It was as though he had gotten up in the middle of the night and completed all that was required. That having been done he went back to bed and arose at the usual time. He set out to begin his morning ritual with the feeling all had been taken care of in fine order.

How odd Henry James thought and couldn't wait to return to the house and tell Mary as they had breakfast together. He slid open the large barn door and was greeted by his flock of sheep and last week's crop of newborn lambs. They were leaping and carrying on as they ran laps around the wooden creep feeder he made several years ago. He gave the mothers grain then walked out to the corral where several head of Angus cattle were kept. The gate had been left open and they had wandered out to the pasture. Occasionally he would forget to close it in the evening after they came up to the barn for their grain. *Forgot to close the gate again*, he thought. *Well*, he pondered, *strange feeling aside, with the exception of that corral gate the rest of my daily activity is yet to be done.*

Once Henry James returns to the house and he and Mary finished their breakfast, they would walk hand-in-hand back to the barn and turn the sheep and lambs out into the pasture with the cattle.

He rationalized that today's difference was simply because he thought something was different but, in reality, it wasn't. So that, in and of itself, was the variation he sensed in today's routine. That somehow made sense to him and he was satisfied.

Henry walked back to the house and as he topped the small knoll at the back of the farmhouse, anxious to tell Mary, he saw a group of his neighbors gathered off to the side near the garden. They were the same folks who helped raised his barn and he, in turn, helped raised theirs. There weren't many people living in the north end of the county. All were farmers and all helped each other when it was needed.

They were focused on something in front of them with their backs toward Henry as he approached. "Morning all," he said and then asked, "What's so interesting that got y'all here so early?" They were talking amongst themselves and he figured they didn't hear his question.

He saw Mary at the front of the group, crying.

“Mary, what’s wrong?” He shouted.

The gathering stopped their talking and silence prevailed.

One person began to speak.

“Lord, we commit the earthly remains of our friend Henry James Wallace who you have taken this night passed. Please grant solace to his beloved wife Mary.....
.....”

END