

Hemingway On Trash Day

by Doug Shiloh

The morning sun rose up over the flat prairie, and the powdery snow crunched as you walked on it, and the air was so crisp it hurt as you took a breath. That is good, I thought. That is how you knew you were alive, and I was truly very alive, and there was not much to do so you put one foot in front of another and headed down the driveway to where it was you had to go.

In our town that year the streets were filled with dead trees waiting for the final departure, stacked like bodies in the Argonne, their brown limbs once bright-lit, now tinsel and stray bulbs and all that ever was as gone as the darkness as it faded. I had already carried four bags down the drive, slung over my shoulders like rucksacks, and I thought of the Alpine and the days of avalanches and how it was bad, and so we did not carry out the trash in those days and instead buried it by the hut and waited for the spring thaw where we would burn them. I saw a tire track and thought of the three-day bicycle races, the whores of Wyoming who were no nuns, and I looked across at the sad dead trees cast out to the curb. Somewhere in the distance I heard the whine of an express truck riding in the pre-dawn as it did once along the Serengeti and you were alone as everyone slept in their beds.

I hobbled down the driveway in the ruts made by the tire tracks. It felt like I was going to break my ankles. The empty bottles made a pleasing clinking sound in the recycling bin. I set it on the curb.

I stood on the rim of the cul-de-sac and could see my breath now in the rising daylight. Inside the kitchen and cafes all across the scarred earth where snow machines carved paths was the smell of Mr. Coffee machines percolating, as the denizens battled Morpheus and Bacchus. Inside she baked things in the oven as she only baked and your heart sank every time you thought of the fresh, warm buttery smell of and croissants, with good, thick slices of Bermuda onion, and you washed it down with glasses of sangria. The natives around Key West swore onion staved off infection and so you took it

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just as the Ojibway up in Michigan did the echinacea as a treatment for many things back when I was a boy. I took all of it, too, but not did not take any of it as I would a 50-year-old brandy, which anyone who knew Wikipedia would know that brandy was brandewijn in the Dutch and meant burnt wine, but I had none as evidenced by all of the empties and I was hollow and sad inside, but I knew inside there was more and in the end it was alright. The effect was nada. As I heard the howl of a hawk circling overhead I thought of my father and his eyes. I wished that I was inside where it was warm and where I needed to go but could not but knew I would be soon. All in a day's wait, I thought. Then I thought of Paris. One always thought of Paris. The time Bumby was given the rocking horse from the Fitzgeralds and he rocked over the tail of Mr. Feather Puss. Poor Fitz. Hollywood and Zelda and drink got him. A man must be able to carry the recycling bin he creates, or he should not create it. I was strong and could carry the bin, which was brimming with glass that shined like gold in the faint starlight. Drink takes the very best and it takes those who are not. The best one could do is to write about it.

I looked back once more and counted all of the trash bins and garbage bags and remembered all of the ones I ever put out that would be put into the maw of eternity eventually there on the rough, side south edge of town. I smelled the wood smoke from early morning fires and began to feel much better.

She would be waiting. Maybe now she would wonder where I was after so long but there was no worry but worry was a thing women did and I could not change it nor would I try to change it and change was a good thing and I knew change was something one could even vote on. She would be waiting in the sleeping bag where we would create our own memory, and destroy each other in that good way of destruction, and the memory between a man and a woman would be one that no one could ever take away nor would we let them.

"Do you think?" she asked in the night.

"Yes."

"Truly?" she asked.

I said so.

"Will you, Papa?"

"As Ezra Pound is my witness."

"Good old Ezra."

I said Ezra and many others were good friends, especially in the early days. Some were not.

"Yes, rather."

"One should know many people," I said. "I'd like to know you."

"You already have," she smiled. "It's good."

"Isn't it?"

All people could do is watch the backs of our legs as we, afterward, bundled up and skied down the hills and into another country where we would make a good, clean start.

I was almost back to the fine wooded cabin and then I heard the deep rumbling of the truck and felt the strong vindication that I was not defeated and would not be on this morning, but I had beaten him. I looked at the trash out on the curb.

It felt good.

I suddenly knew there was no place I would rather be, except where my heart is and always will be but you could not say that, no.

I walked back to the curb. The garbage truck rumbled closer and I knew it was just across the street and beyond the trees. I unzipped and wrote HEM in the snow where it would stay for a very long time. Take that, I thought. Take that, you old son of a bitch. I walked back up through the ruts of the driveway and knew I needed to get back inside before the cold became too much. The garbage truck rounded the corner. There was nothing else I could do. The brakes made a whooshing sound as he stopped and then I heard the hard thunk of the cans and bins. But there was always next week.

THE END

