



He sits listening to the morning train as it passes the house, its closest point just beyond the sycamore trees, beyond the field and the shallow creek. The train leaves behind it the sound of its dissonant horns. Their tones hang in the air, refusing to die away. They trouble him. He can't be sure that the sound is gone, hurrying at last to catch up with the train, until the ticking of the clock grows so loud that it finally fills the room again.

You might think he is sad, perhaps because of something lost or some wound to his heart. As you see him sitting here, troubled by these sounds and pondering the cold mug of tea dregs on the table, maybe you see a man in grief. Recently bereaved and forced by some passing storm of solitude to drive home from the graveyard alone.

I can't explain his dour mood, except that the fog has set up so cold and thick that the old hand plow, pitched to the sod in his yard for a decorative obstacle to his mowing, seems to be rusting on the bottom of a lake. He has no reasons for melancholy, except a vague insight that he has hit the best of it, that this by God is all there is for seventy-odd years of waiting for better days to come.

She comes to the door and stands looking over and beyond him at the fog, the plow, the mailbox and the void beyond. "Reckon it will burn off in time for church?"

He and the dog look up at her together, with halfhearted interest. "What's that now?"

"Church. Will it burn off in time for church?"

"Yes. It will, being as church is tomorrow." He reaches for his cup and tilts it toward him, not picking it up. "Could you bring me..."

"Tomorrow?"

"Church is tomorrow, lady. Today is still Saturday. Could you ..."

"See here. Today is Sunday you foolish old..."

He snatches the newspaper from the table and thrusts it toward her, flapping it like a wounded bird. “Look for yourself. Says Saturday right across the top. Besides, I heard the morning train not five minutes ago. There is no train on Sunday.”

The thermostat on the wall, down the hall by the kitchen door, takes note that it is sixty-six degrees, and warm air falls from the vent into the room where she goes to his chair and takes the paper from his hand. The dog watches, lowering his head to rest on his paws.

“Well I’ll be...”

“Don’t say damned, and us still a day away from all hope of forgiveness. None of us has the promise of ...”

“Tomorrow. Church is tomorrow then. I could’ve sworn.” She folds the paper and tucks it under her arm. “I’ll bring you another cup of tea directly.”

She goes to the kitchen and stands before the Cortina Bank and Trust calendar, turned to the month of February and hung by a nail on the wall beside the refrigerator. She compares the dates to make sure he hasn’t just been reading yesterday’s paper again, and today’s Sunday edition maybe still out by the mailbox getting damp.

He was right though, which means another day in the house, just the two of them. Nowhere to go and no one to see or talk to, and share a bit of gossip. At church you can sing, stand and sit and kneel if you’re able. Shake hands and say Peace of Christ. Then lunch at Perkie’s, waffles and coffee. Careful with the syrup and her Sunday clothes.

She takes a mug from the cupboard, not caring that she’ll have two to wash now, and as the tea steeps she wonders a thing about God. She wonders if Jesus, in his years on the earth, ever faced such a thing as this cold tule fog. He was in the desert after all, and in the warm towns and country of the Holy Land.

What a silly thing to think about, that the Son of God might doze in the back seat as Peter, James and John worry for the invisible white line of Highway 99 in the fog, as trucks pass them and rock the car. Then He would wake and say *Oh ye of little faith*. She shakes her head and chuckles to herself.

*My, I wish it was Sunday.* She turns and almost spills tea on the dog, who has come to find her, take her back to him in the family room, which now she sees is washed in pale yellow sunlight. Through the window, she can see the plow and mailbox, the fence and the road beyond it, and across the field the outlines of the threadbare sycamores standing by the creek.

He is standing by his chair and turns from the window to see her in the breaking light. He reaches for his cane that leans against the wall. “Looks like it’s burning off, thanks to God. Half an hour yet and we could drive, if it were Sunday.”

*This is what we have*, she thinks, closing her eyes and seeing the light pale and happy through her eyelids. *The faith of little things, God’s mercy hour by hour, and the hope that nothing goes too bad another day.* She imagines an angel at the end of the room, above the windows that face the morning sun, his wings outstretched from wall to wall, tunic and breastplate battle scarred, and sword unsheathed against their shared despondencies of growing old.

She opens her eyes to see her husband watching her. “What say we go to town?” he says. “I could use some things at the hardware. We could have lunch.”

She remembers a line from Ephesians, and whispers, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” But he doesn’t hear her, and he points with his cane for the dog to lay down on the rug.

“I’ll go get washed up,” he says, passing her and going out of the room. She stands for a while, holding his forgotten cup of tea, thankful for the sun on their house in cold February, and for the battered angel of their short winter days.