

“Resilience”

As I was driving along the stony road, I realized that the trip to Newton would not be so easy. The heat was suffocating and I was tired and drowsy.

I had been looking forward to visiting Father Jones for a long time. My marriage had succumbed and I was an orphan, with nobody in the world to take care about or to be taken care of. Just myself and those huge plains, as huge as loneliness, as empty as my soul.

Four years had passed. It was a long time. Half idly, I wondered about Father Jones, my old friend. Would he be the same? People change in four years. Part of Father Jones` job had always been to remove those hidden, invisible scars that had been engraved in people`s souls. I wondered how God would erase Father Jones` own scars, What kind of mysterious communication might they have?

As the sun went down lazily, I approached the small village of Newton. From the distance, I could see the high steeple of San Antonio and hear the bells ringing for the 8 o`clock Mass. I reached the small village inn. I parked my dusted, tired car and booked.

Mr. Forsinger had worked at the inn for more than thirty years. Very kind and friendly, his face was white and there were beads of sweat standing across his forehead.

“Room 205, Miss Arlington”, he said smilingly. I felt that there was something good waiting for me at Newton. I was sure that a long chat with Father Jones (like in the old times), would heal my wounds. Maybe I was “in the good innings”.

I really appreciated Mr. Forsinger`s hospitality for offering me some soup. It was hot and thick, with just the right touch of garlic. I smacked my lips and ate a small piece of bread. It tasted good. The Mass would be over in some minutes.

I walked to the church at about 9. On my arrival, there was a long queue waiting to greet Father Jones. I joined the queue and when he finally saw me, I could notice a blue glitter in his eyes.

He embraced me saying that he had been waiting for me. We agreed to meet on the following day as my trip has been tiresome.

The following morning, I felt in paradise. The fresh morning air and the singing of birds made me wonder about a hidden message in such a beautiful scenery.

As I entered Father Jones` office, he was writing peacefully as if he were beyond any misfortunes typical of the intricacies of this ridiculous world. He seemed to be particularly protected and I couldn`t help feeling a pinch of envy for that superior secret shield that he seemed to have and that I so much lacked. We talked and talked like in the old times. He promised to pray for me, for my sins, my weaknesses and miseries.

“I know that the Lord will always protect you. You will be relieved. Go in peace!”

A strange feeling of tranquility seemed to flood my body and soul. I believed in his words: “He will protect you, you will be relieved, go in peace!” That stammered my mind all the time and I was really grateful for his unwavering support.

It was already Sunday night. I had to go back to Atlanta as I had to work early in the morning.

When I started my car, I realized that the lights were not working properly. I turned on the radio and heard that there would be a big storm -----.

I found myself in front of a dilemma.....

I had two options: 1- to stay in Newton for another night which would imply Mr. Earnshaw's furious face at the office on Tuesday

2- to leave anyway.

I chose the latter.

"I will try" I said to myself.

I started driving very slowly, with calm and apprehension. After some minutes, something bizarre occurred: a white van pulled ahead. I braked but the van began moving slowly enlightening my way with its powerful lights.

I could not see the driver as the glasses were dark.

Under the heavy rain, I followed the white van all the way. He (who was it?) lead the way and I was glad to follow.

Father Jones' words echoed in my mind again. I felt confident and already knew that I would "pass the exam"

The larks heralded the first lights of the morning. The rain had stopped and I could measure a rare beauty in the countryside. There was a sweet smell of lavenders which rapidly perfumed my car. I gave a deep breath.

I was thinking of saying "Thank you" to my mysterious guide when suddenly the van jerked abruptly to the right. In a second it got out of sight, disappearing speedily among the trees and bushes. It ran away like a fugitive would have. There was not a road or even a path, nothing. I got out of the car and shouted: "Thank you"

The answer was a tremendously deep silence. The silence of the fresh morning .

The silence. The mysterious silence.

Father Jones had spoken to me with words of wisdom. He knew that HE would protect me. I can tell my dear reader, he was right.

Thought-provokers

- 1) What is the meaning of the word "resilience" and why is it the title to this short story?
- 2) What feelings are expressed by the writer?
- 3) Why was she travelling to see Father Jones?
- 4) Can you imagine the village of Newton? Describe it. Would you like to live in a place like that?
- 5) Why did the writer feel "relieved" after having spoken with Father Jones?
- 6) Something bizarre happened on the trip back. What was it?
- 7) How was the writer "protected" ?
- 8) Who do you think drove the white van? Write a dialogue they might have had
- 9) What did Father Jones and the writer talk about?
- 10) Suppose you are the writer. Write an e-mail to a friend telling her or him about the strange experience you lived

The Bugs of Wrath

A bug is comfortably seated on a pillow, while poor David Montoto is fast asleep, dreaming. Visions come and go in the young man's mind: there are floods, fires perhaps, a girl's dark eyes are twinkling as if they were stars, a pastor's hands pound the air, a car swings off the highway and races towards the ravine...David awakes up with a start from his dream limbo. The bug eyes him steadily, dauntlessly and in wait. Perhaps it also is dreaming, perhaps of sucking blood, of flapping its wings, of rolling its eyes gently and basking in the sun.

Now David turns and groans. He moves about under the sheets between slumber and wakefulness. Sometimes he slaps the air instinctively with his hands. An observer might think he is a puppet. But who is dangling the strings?

A beam of sweat rolls from his forehead and his lips move as if he were going to speak, although only meaningless sounds are pronounced. Dreams last but a fraction of a second, they say. Then when we wake up we put the flashes together into a story sequence. But sometimes the dividing line between dream and reality is not clear. At times we linger between the covers, hoping to prolong the illusion. Maybe David just does not want to wake up. Oh! Maybe he is kissing a beautiful girl, or flying over a silver colored mountain lake!

It is difficult to imagine what the bug might be dreaming. Anyway, we'll never know. Bugs can't talk. But who knows? How hard it is to know what goes on in the mind of a bug!

It is almost dawn. From outside there are streaks of sunlight that dash and dance into the room. City life is rushing about as usual. It is not easy to be a loafer in the midst of traffic jams, bodies dashing here and there, policemen blowing their whistles, carpenters nailing and banging sludge hammers into cement walls, a school bell sounding, men arguing about this and that, a door slamming shut, calls for help....

The bug has opened its beady eyes and is staring straight at the man, while flapping its wings in the sunlight that strikes the pillow. An attentive observer might conclude that it is doing its warm up exercises. David's lips are trembling, as if vibrating, but all you can hear is a dull mumble. Too bad, people mumble in their sleep.

The man is waking up but seems to be unaware of the danger. There is a soft tender spot right under his left ear, near his neck. It knows by instinct that the flesh is soft on the neck, filled with succulent capillaries.

In an instant the insect launches its attack, digging into the man's flesh, eager to suck his warm blood, maybe even licking its tiny tongue with pleasure. As far as the bug is concerned, the action combines pleasure and need. For the bug the red liquid is the stuff of life. If it were not David Montoto it would be someone else, or any nearby blood bearing beast.

David's sleeping hand moves with shocking speed. Whack! The sound breaks like a tidal wave. It takes him out of dreamland and back to reality. The blood of the squished body of the insect is mixed with David's. The bug is dead.

Now the sun is happily shining. Dreams must be left behind. It is time for a shower, coffee; time to kiss the lady, flag a taxi, greet the boss. Who was it who said dreams are the stuff life is made of? Maybe the man will carry one of last night's dreams to work with him. Maybe he will be haunted by a dream all day. Maybe he will come home with a high fever. Maybe the bug was in alliance with some other hidden enemies, an army of virus, parasites.

Men think they are so powerful, with their flying machines, their technological revolution, internet, atomic bombs. But they still have not unwound the secret of a simple virus. There is no reason to

exaggerate. It is very likely that David will show up in his office in an hour or so with a slight smarting there under his left ear.

It was 9:15 a.m. when he poked his sleepy head into Key Master Plastics, Inc. Fifteen minutes late. Nine hundred seconds of the company's valuable time lost because of his late arrival.

"You're late!" growled Michael Grondona, the General Manager. His voice sounded crisp and clear, as if it had come from the lips of General McArthur. David appeared not to hear, so Grondona furrowed his brow and repeated:

"You're late, I said. Late!"

David reacted with unexpected tranquility. He tightened his grip on his briefcase, gazed directly at his boss, placed his face half a meter from his boss's nose and looked him squarely in the eye as if he were an equal and declared:

"You miss the point."

"What do you mean? How dare you!"

"Just what I said: 'you missed the point.'"

"And what, may I ask, is the point?" Grondona tried to put sarcasm into his voice but he actually felt the situation was switching to the wrong track.

"I'm late because this is my last day at this miserable God forsaken profit gauging company. I'm sick and tired of being treated like a modern day slave, a mere cog, an insect, a wretched bug!"

By that time a compact group of diligent employees, secretaries, accountants, book keepers, lawyers and office boys had silently formed a semi-circle around David and his boss.

"Leaving without notice, just like that?"

"You heard me."

"Look David, you have been with us for 15 years and you say you are leaving, just like that. Are you alright? Is something bugging you?"

"Yea. You! The company! Everything! I've had enough. Too much. I want to be free. I want to make decisions for myself, not for other people. I'm tired of being a blood sucker, a bug, I want to live my own life."

Michael Grondona, the General Manager, and the whole staff stared after David Montoto had left them dumbfounded. David marched past his boss, past the employees, past the lawyers, past the secretaries, past the office boys, past the book keepers and past the accountants and was never heard from again.

Thought Provokers

1. Who is David Montoto? Can you imagine him physically? How old is he?
2. Why is he nervous and upset?
3. What does he decide to do?
4. Describe the street outside.
5. Who is Grondona?
6. Why is he angry?
7. Why do David and Grondona fight?
8. Why do you think David took the decision to leave so suddenly?

9. How do you think David's life will continue?

10. Why has the author chosen the title of the story?

