

Postman

by Matthew Rasnake

My Pop--that's what I call my grandpa--was a mailman. Oh, he'd retired years before I was even born, but from the time I was able to sit up on my own, I'd sit at his feet and listen to him tell stories. It didn't matter what he was saying, of course, I just loved to hear him talk. As I got older, I kept asking him to tell me the same stories. I kept sitting, and he kept talking. It was always summer when we'd visit Pop, and I remember the warm tingly sun on my back as I'd sit there and listen, or lay there, playing with my toys.

About 10 years ago is when it started. I was 14, sitting at Pop's knee, listening to his stories, and Mom came in crying. She could hardly get words out.

"It's just awful!" She'd said, a look on her face like nothing I'd ever seen, like she was stuck, like she was trying to pop her ears at the top of a mountain. That was the day our government had declared martial law in the name of a foreign power. Just like that. No warning. Entire metropolitan police forces either complied and joined up, or were massacred on the spot. 15,000 officers died within 30 minutes on the eastern seaboard alone. Of course there was chaos, but the military and ex-cops detained or executed looters, protesters, and demonstrators by the hundreds, until no one who resisted was left. Or at least, no one who resisted openly.

I think that day was the last time I felt the sun.

My dad was a scientist, apparently a somewhat important one, not that I ever paid much attention. He was hardly around, and when he was, he always had his books or his papers, and a concerned look on his face. But on that day, he yanked me up from Pop's floor, and shuffled me, Mom, Pop, and my sis into our little 4-door, and drove way out in the middle of nowhere to some kind of run-down hunting

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cabin. There were some men inside, and they took us to a tiny little cave, which led to a series of caves, which lead to a great big cave filled to the stalactites with whirring machines blinking and steaming in the tepid air.

That night was the first night of the resistance, though plans had been in place for decades (scientists love to anticipate problems), and for the next five or six years, we lived right there in that cave. I'm not sure where the food came from, or how any of the rest of that place worked, all I know is that I hated it. Maybe that's a little too strong. I certainly liked the IDEA of living in a cave, and I loved being able to go exploring--especially once i got to go alone--but the only books we had were science books, and the only computers we had were dedicated to their specific tasks. The moms tried to setup a classroom, but we could pretty much only study math, science, and stuff they remembered or made up. There were no video games, very little music except what we could make, and not really even any girls. Well, there were three who were infants when they got there, and two who were a bit older than me, but one died of pneumonia our second year, and the other was just too annoying to be near for long. So there we were with nothing to do but schoolwork and make-believe. But Pop was there, so when he wasn't trying to make himself useful as a guinea pig or a button pusher for the scientists, he'd sit and tell me all those old stories over and over again. Sometimes, he'd make up new ones, just to keep it interesting, but I could always tell.

One day, we got word from the resistance, nothing special really, but it was one of those days I was making an effort to show interest in my dad's work, so I asked how exactly we were getting messages back and forth between groups of people who were trying as hard as we were to stay hidden.

That was when he told me about the mailmen.

I was astonished. Pop's mailmen had been gone since before i was born, a casualty of the new global economy, the internet, and the fact that, in the end, the only things being mailed were things that nobody wanted. There were still a couple major consumer-oriented package shippers, but the day of the mailman was long over. Nobody had paid to deliver something as simple as a paper-stuffed envelope in 20 years! But dad assured me that encrypted messages were being carried back and forth from enclave to enclave every night. There was a clandestine resistance postal service.

Pop's been gone now for 4 years, and the cave was apparently raided a couple years ago leaving no survivors. But since that night when I learned of the mailmen, i have been training and moving, carrying the messages of hope and news of the resistance. I know that my Pop was proud of me, 'cause he told me as much in the last letter he would ever write. And when I set out each night, to my next destination, his stories echo in my head, and I know that I will have the strength to go on, no matter the circumstance or weather--as Pop said "in snow, in rain, in heat, or gloom of night"--but never in sunlight. No, I suppose I won't ever feel that warmth again.

