

Excerpt from "Change" where a 1963D Quarter is followed for a hundred years.

by Michael K. White

May 1890

Rifle, COLORADO

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Only pressure can change one thing into another. In terms of time, the transformations can seem endless, but because time is just something we all agree on rather than something that is real, you could also make the case that change happens in a blink. It's not the time it takes but the change it makes.

In geological terms it takes billions of years to make a piece of silver ore. The processes involved leave their scars etched on the silver crystal's facets in a language that we are too uneducated to read completely. It was formed deep in the earth by compression and pressure, heat and cold, expansion and contraction, fire and water, and as a piece of silver ore, it rested nestled and senseless in a timeless journey of eons like a tiny seed inside a very large piece of fruit.

There are many pieces of silver ore on planet earth, a tiny fraction of which have already been discovered and transformed but many more still lay waiting for the day of their birth into whatever it is they will become. They are not sentient by any means, merely

mute observers, speaking only to one another in the secret and ancient language of rocks.

The piece of silver ore that would eventually become a 1963d Quarter saw its first rays of sunlight on May 5, 1890 just outside of Cripple Creek, Colorado. It emerged from a shovel full of black mountain dirt dug up by Richard Ostendorf, a novice gold miner from Bag, Ohio.

Richard had been west only a few months, having come by train from St. Louis to make his fortune. Back home in Ohio was a girl waiting for him to return, Missy Snead a plump crack toothed prairie flower who unbeknownst to Richard had died miserably from a small typhoid contagion only weeks after he left for the West.

Richard had never spent springtime in the mountains and his heart was filled with the sights sounds and smells of what was all around him. He was still a relatively young man at 31, but he had been through much. His father had died from a miniball in the face at Cold Harbor, just weeks before the end of the war. Richard had hated his father, who beat him, and was not sorry to know he had been killed.

A bird sang and Richard stopped digging, listening to the unfamiliar melodious call of a bird he had never heard before. A distant *Tatatatatatat* from a woodpecker with a sharp white bill echoed in answer and a small fragrant gust of wind made the budding trees rustle like a giant woman's dress. It blew a delicious brew of scents; pine and dirt and weeds and distant rain. Richard thought of Missy and he stopped digging, lost in the moment where his past and present merged. He smelled in his memory the stale ancient Ohio smells of coal oil and tobacco and sweat and bread baking and fireplace smoke and hay and hemp and horses and Missy, all dim and manufactured next to the fresh easy gusts that pulsed through the high Colorado sky.

He felt his face, the stubble and heavy lines that creased. He had caught sight of himself in a store window last month in Colorado Springs and had been shocked. His hair was turning, what was left of it. His face had become longer, his eyes duller. He looked away from such a mirage and retreated to the mirror in his mind, where he was as he had once been, a strong young man with a full head of thick dark hair, eyes shining like silver coins with dreams of glory right behind them.

It made Richard sad now to think that there would be nothing left of him when he died. Assuming he would have children with Missy and they would go on to do great things, he himself had done nothing but scratch out a living hemp farming in Ohio until his mother finally died and he was free to go west and make his fortune. He never thought he would take to the mountains so. Their majesty and beauty made him reconsider his lack of belief in God. Sometimes when the wind gusted, he could hear God's voice, whispering to him. The words were like the ends of dreams; powerful and unattainable, just on the edge of comprehension.

Richard looked at the ground where he was digging. There were rocks and stones everywhere. He never knew there could be so many different kinds of rocks in the world and here in just one little place there seemed to be so many he could hardly understand it. They were like stars in the sky or drops of water in the ocean. There were just so many that he could see and he knew there was many more right below the surface. Most of them were valueless to him but some held the ability to change a man's life. He couldn't fathom how all these rocks came to be created. Did God craft each and every one? And no two were alike. Just like snowflakes and presidents.

A glint caught Richard's eye.

The bird called again, this time closer.

Tatatatatatat. The white billed-woodpecker answered from farther away.

Another gust of wind. He thought he smelled a fire.

Richard bent over and picked up a little rock about the size and shape of a baby chick's head. The telltale crystals sparkled in the mid morning sun and Richard's heart started beating hard. Everything suddenly seemed sharper to him up high in the mountains and when his heart beat like this and the surge went through him he could almost believe everything would turn out the way he hoped for so long. Now everything would finally change. He rolled the heavy little rock around in his hand.

He knelt close and poured some creek water from his jug over it to clean it. The water felt cool and good. It was the first time in many centuries that the rock had felt the cool embrace of water. It began to radiate and shine in his hand and he could see from all the dull rocks around him that it was special. It reflected light back to him in such a way as to seem to glow from within.

He looked closely at the ground for more. Nothing glinted, but Richard noticed that the surrounding rocks were in a sort of pattern. They were unnaturally white and somehow familiarly shaped. He picked one up and examined it closely. It looked like a bone, but it couldn't be because it was a rock. There were more, tiny little white rocks that for all the world looked just like bones.

Then he found a skull, a skull made from rock. It looked like a fish with sharp jagged teeth and he could even make out the tail, but he knew it was impossible. Because there were what looked like little legs too. He was seeing things. It was because he was up so high in the mountains after all those years in Ohio. His mind wandered with the breeze. He thought about it all and about nothing.

Springtime perfume from the wind.

A bird singing in a voice he was hearing for the first time.

Tatatatatatat. A faint and far away answer.

A giant woman's dress rustling.

Just the hint of a distant fire.

In his hand, silver.

May 1890-December 1962

Denver, COLORADO

For many years the silver rock would remain in its native state, along with other hunks of silver who silently suffered with incessant vanity about the proximity to air and water and the effect it had on their glittering shine.

In 1918, during the First World War all the silver chunks from that region of the Colorado Rockies were melted down, smelted and refined until they were formed into identical small smooth shiny ingots which were carefully stacked cross wise with layers of excelsior between them and shipped in special wooden boxes to the mint in Denver.

For decades the ingots would lie atop each other in the dark gloomy storage vault. Sometimes there were bats. They squeaked and flew crazily around the vaults. Their droppings tarnished many of the ingots. The decades rolled by, much like they did under ground. The vaults were alive with spiders, who constructed entire civilizations and waged organized war against the sugar ants. The sugar ants built monuments to their God and fought the spiders in epic battles all mutely observed by the ingots. There was sometimes light, but mostly it was dark.

It wasn't until the tense and clattering year of 1962 year that the mint's Master of the Ingots, Leon Lesage finally got to the pallet of silver bars which contained the silver made from the rock found by Richard Ostendorf in 1890. From this ingot twenty quarters were struck at the federal mint in Denver on a snowy December day just before Christmas. The lot of coins that contained our special Quarter was included in a shipment to Fort Knox in Louisville Kentucky where it was distributed to a local bank and in turn given in change to a local business, where it entered circulation.

