

The Old Man and the Cigarette

by Thomas Shaggy

Bald and bow-legged the man walks down the street. His old steel-toed boots dragged across the ground. He had little hair, long and scraggly on the side, and the top of his head was completely bald. Two sweaty pieces of hair attempt to cover his baldness.

The man stops and waits a moment and turns towards the river. He takes one last drag off of his cigarette. His cracked, yellow stained fingers grip the cigarette around the barrel of the filter. He pulls the wasted cigarette from his long, knotty, gray beard. Flicking the cigarette into the river the man's face becomes soft, as if waving goodbye to the only real attachment that he has felt in decades. He continues walking up the hill with his rainbow color bag.

Upon reaching the top of the street the man stops, looks left, then right, then left again. Lowering his head, his face droops a little more. He reaches into his tattered blue jean pocket and pulls up a crumpled soft pack of Marlboro Reds. Pulling the last last cigarette from the pack he takes his last breath of clean air, cups his hands around the end of the butt, blocking the nearby breeze, and lights up. Deeply he breathes in a lung full of smoke. He looks up, points to the left, nods, and continues on down the road.

The road is an all to familiar a sight. It is lined with garbage and old businesses fronts that were once the hustle and bustle of the town, but are now boarded up and covered with graffiti. He grew up on one these streets with his friends, playing stickball in the road on Sunday evenings. Holding his hand against the wall as he walked, he remembers the days of his youth. The walks he would

take with her every Monday morning. Times hit hard in his neighborhood and now he lives in the shadows of a life that was once filled with so much sunlight.

On this particular day his walk took him to a near by cemetery. He always knew better than to smoke when entering. He dropped the cigarette to the ground and crushed it with the hard rubber heel of his boot. He let out a quick cough as he stepped over the chain and into the cemetery. It was only a minute's walk to the head stone.

There he stood every Monday morning. He pulled the large bouquet of flowers from the bag and placed them on the ground. His eyes watered as he began to speak.

"I'm sure you know, but I figured since I'm here I'll let you know. I miss you everyday. My Monday morning walks are the only things I look forward to anymore. I loved you so much while you were here. When the Lord took you away from me, I never forgave him. You know I will be here until the day he takes me away as well. I may not have much left in my life, but I have our memories, and I have you here to visit still."

A few raindrops begin to fall. The man flinches.

"Not even the rain will stop me from being here with you. We dedicated our lives to each other and death does not stop that. Marriage is an art. Our love has withstood the test of time and has kept its meaning through, good times and in bad, and sickness and health."

It begins to rain harder. The man's clothes are soaked and he begins to cry a bit harder.

"You are loved and missed so much." The man knees down and kisses the top of the headstone. The rain is at it's heaviest now. He

stands up, "I will see you next week. I love you." He can't help but hesitate as he walks to the exit of the cemetery. As he steps back over the chain he reaches into his pocket and grabs his one last cigarette. He begins to shiver as the breeze begins to pick up. He finds shelter under a near by tree and begins to struggle with his lighter to light his cigarette. The flint finally strikes the wick enough to catch a flame and he is able to light up.

He breathes deep and end of the cigarette lights up like Rudolph's nose on a foggy night. He is alone again, without direction.

