

Spiders in the Fields

The early gray light of dawn slowly advanced as I sat hunkered down among the broom straw and chicory. The white flower of the Multiflora Rose scattered about in the field became more prominent as the seconds slowly ticked by, and the faint flutter of sparrows could be heard as they made visits to and fro, eating the pulp for an early morning breakfast. Every few minutes I scanned the expanse of field, which lay before me, then, returned to watching a spider as it engineered it's web between a tall pigweed and some prickly lettuce. It was that brief span of time when darkness lingers unrelentingly until retreating reluctantly before the coming radiance. Objects seem without form and blur into what seems to be shadows without breaks or definition. It was the lull between night and day.

I longingly yearned to close my eyes and succumb to the desire to sleep. It seemed as though I had been without enough of it for so long I could scarcely recall the last time I had managed a full night without being awakened for some reason or other. As I attempted to fight the urge, my thoughts drifted off to when I had last been home.

The day, as I recall, had been warm and sunny, with not a cloud to be seen in the crystal clear blue sky. As I busied myself with such chores as feeding the chickens and giving the cows some fresh hay, I tried to keep my mind occupied with thoughts of when this ordeal might come to an end. Though it had yet begun for me, I could not help but entertain myself with when it might be over. Sarah, my wife of three years, was busy in the kitchen, making a frustrated effort to refrain from dwelling on the imminence. Her frustration was apparent as I watched her through the window. Every move she made as she prepared breakfast exhibited her dread of what was to come. Knowing this would be the last day we would spend together for a long time to come was heart wrenching for her. I knew there was nothing I could do or say that would comfort her in such a way as to give her piece of mind concerning my well-being. Her altruism was one of the most endearing qualities I found in her when we first met.

That day I felt so alive and so much aware of my life. The recollection of it lifts my spirits even to this day. I marveled at the creation that was around me, the trees in their splendid wonder, and the grassy hills of the pasture as they sloped soulfully away over the ridge, and the sky filled with white puffy clouds. It was a wonder to behold and I recall thanking God for the opportunity to experience it all at that very moment. Memories blinked through my mind now as I looked out over the fields and recall times spent tilling the land and sowing seeds. The recollection of harvest time, when the mid day heat would be so unbearable it would cause difficulty breathing. The sun bearing down would burn the exposed flesh and cause the skin to sweat and the sweat to run into ones eyes and burn. Yet, for some untold reason, I enjoyed the pain of it all. To experience life while working the land brought about an enjoyment that was indescribable. Many times I long to be back there again, to experience what I had experienced until that day.

As I marveled at the world around me, I saw Sarah at the kitchen window calling to me. She sounded frantic and panicky. Her voice was extremely shrill and high pitched. I fought to move and found myself frozen where I stood. My thoughts began to race as I watched her from the barnyard. As I struggled to break free of the invisible bond, I was suddenly transported back to the present and awakened to find myself sitting in the field.

Unknowingly, I had drifted off to sleep in my hide-a-way among the chicory. The need for sleep had overcome me and I, unwillingly, had allowed my eyes to close. The high pitch shrill I heard was not my Sarah, but instead, a panicky sparrow that had been startled from its feeding. My heart was racing as I breathed deeply to settle my nerves and regain my composure. Yet, I must have dozed for only a few brief seconds, for the advancing light of day was still several minutes away. My focus returned to the spider.

As I studied the way in which the spider concocted its web with intricate detail, I suddenly became aware of a presence in the far corner of the field. Some dubious object was there that had not been just moments before. I was quiet sure from my earlier observation of the field that the form, now motionless before me, was not there a moment ago. Yet the hazy darkness still lingered enough to give doubt to my judgment as my heart began the quicken beat from the surge of adrenaline now rushing through my veins. I focused my attention squarely on the object before me and became oblivious to any other ambience when I detected the faintest of movement. It was nothing more than the slightest turn of some part of the body. The head I presumed, but still the darkness lingered just enough to prevent a clear detection.

My anxiety mounted as I waited for the seconds to pass and bring with them the increasing light from millions of miles away that would enable me to discern what lay before me. Alas, there it was again, a frail, faint movement at the far end of the field. This time I was sure of its existence, as it moved with the dexterity and skill exemplified by the spider I had been studying only moments earlier.

I strained my eyes to separate the vegetation in order to form the outline of the figure I was now certain prowled before me. The distance I judged to be the span of approximately one hundred yards more or less. If any, it was a little more, I determined, upon a second estimate. Painfully, I became aware of the muscle aches in my legs as I sat motionless. I longed to move them and stretch them out a bit, but fear of detection prevented me from doing so. Then it occurred to me that I might have displayed some movement during my brief period of unconsciousness, but quickly arrested the thought, for the object before me was clearly focused on another area of the field. This uncomfortable predicament distracted me for only a moment till my acumen returned to the far realm of this faintly visible world I was living in for the moment. Waiting, as I must, for the dreaded opportunity that was to come.

Within the blink of an eye, this shapeless form was facing me, looking squarely at my position. Any movement on my part would undoubtedly reveal my presents. My ability to remain motionless was imperative to my well-being, alas, my very existence. My desire to live, to continue living, was of such great force my body began to shake inside and it was my redundant fortitude only that enabled me to remain constant. I prayed my form was as shapeless as his and hoped he was lacking in perspicacity. Apparently so, for the head turned, directing his focus elsewhere.

With great alacrity I positioned the barrel of my gun in the direction of the shadowing figure. Experience of training had taught me over the years to recognize acute opportunity and use it to my advantage. The fluidity of my movement was precise and calculating as I leveled the gun and the sights came into alignment. The report of the rifle was unmistakable and as quickly as it came, it went. Now removed from view, the object I prayed would be found at the far end of the field. I hesitated briefly and waited for any sign of commotion. The field and surrounding woods remained silent.

Quickly, I moved across the expanse of broom straw and chicory which had only moments prior been my concealment. The distance was closed and as I neared the realm of weeds, I could make out the unmistakable outline of what lay on the ground. My aim, once again, had been true. There, among the browns of the straw and whites of the Rose, glowed the crimson sparkle of blood that confirmed my supremacy. The object was no longer an object, but a man. A man with shape and form that was no longer veiled in the semi-darkness of a shadow less world waiting for the impending light of the morning. A living, breathing, nay striving to live human, that until just moments ago was my foe. An enemy made so by declaration. For it was of no feat of either his nor mine that we chose to chance upon each other here in this field. He strove to live just as I strive and, by my good fortune, will continue to strive until what came of him, comes to me. Then I too will cease to be.

With melancholy necessity I confirmed his death with the end of my barrel. It was then I noticed his dress, very much similar to mine. Apparently from the same station in life, but on differing sides. The uniform, ragged and torn, displayed the same wear as the one I wore, only of another color. Indicating his time of service to be about the same as mine. It was evident there was no longer life in the body which lay before me, yet for some untold reason I lingered by it, as if drawn to it for some explicable reason. Fear of detection should have been foremost upon my list of concerns, however, I still lingered. The light of day had finally arrived.

It was then, as if drawn, that I knelt down beside the body to expurgate what might be hidden among the garments. This action I knew to be futile and contrary to my welfare for it impressed upon me knowledge of my enemy that could possibly render me at a disadvantage when next I lie wait among the spiders of the fields. Yet, my hand moved without thought to the inner most pocket of the coat and there I extracted some papers of sort and, succumbing to desire, began to read what was printed on them. It was a letter from a woman judging by the style of writing and the curve of form. Though the content of which was short and vague and contained much the same palaver as my own letters from home; it was unclear whether it was from a wife or mother and was signed only "Love." No name, only the word, and it had an air that implied time had diminished the expression of feelings and the need to recite mundane thing in life. This too I could attest to, for time had rendered me at a loss for words when writing to my on beloved Sarah. For the war had dragged on much too long.

The other letters were much the same with very little expression of life other than the trivial this or that. Things a man at war did not care to hear when unable to be a part of them. They only tend to remind one of what was left behind, where he wished he could be, until there, and then he wished to be where there was fighting. It was a desolate dissent from the normalcy of life so familiar to most and unexplainable to most. As we often do, we long to live the part of life from which we are separated. Then, once

united, we long for what was left behind. This circular veracity has endured generation upon generation and will cease to be when human kind ceases to exist.

The other pocket held much the same dribbling details of life. A morose epitaph left behind for the life of a man who struggled through life in much the same fashion as I have struggled. And now, these pictures I lay open upon his chest among the stain of blood and bullet hole, display a life of mirthful times with family and friends who not yet know his fate. They think he's still alive. Perhaps, even, writing another letter expressing the passing events of their day as uneventful as they will be when word of his demise finally reaches them. Yet, ever so memorable when reflected back upon after the passage of years has waxed over the other events of their life and they are left to recollect the place and time in which they received the ill-fated news. How retched, the things they will say of me. How retched I must be, to put them through such an ordeal, and to put my cherished Sarah through the same. She, also, must wonder day after day about my continued existence. And yet, what I do, I do for her and for her continued freedom. There were others who made the decisions that put us here. Though it isn't thought of that way. It is not by my design that I was interpolated into this field on this very day. But some day this conflict will end.

To ease the brutality of the news I replaced the things from where they came and placed the hands upon the chest. Then the feet I placed together, in order to give appearance of a more restful state. Once accomplished, I stood to examine my deed. Hardly fitting for the man I envisioned my self to be. Then, on second thought, I placed his hat upon his face. Then knelt again on one knee and closed my eyes in prayer.

I wondered if he would have given this much thought to me had the tables been turned. We could have been brothers, friends at the least. And who is to say that we may not be of like kind, with common blood coursing through our veins. But that is neither here nor there for what I have to do, and do I must for the life that is in me drives me. And to sustain life I must take the life of others while this retched war persists. Thus so, I live to go and see another day.

The sun is just now rising and can be seen between the trees. The field is quiet and peaceful now; befitting a place where I would chose to die if and when that time comes before I chance to return from where I came. So, on I go into the shelter of the trees and await my next foray amongst the spiders of the fields.

Words: 2496

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March 26, 2003