

The Way And The Wayfarer

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The air in the confessional was dry and unsatisfying with the mustiness associated with old wood, heavy drapes and dull black cossack cloth. In the dim light which shed its mellowness into the narrow corners and over the grills to right and to left, the aging priest studied the scriptbook of prayer that he held in open hands.

A rustle proceeding the parting of the heavy drapes which were meant to shield the confessor from the curious attracted his attention causing him to lay aside the black leather breviary he had been reading, switch off the reading light and lean in the still darkness toward the right grill.

"Bless me, father, for I have sinned."

The voice was that of a boy—a small boy. The voice was hesitant and just a bit inquiring in inflection.

"What was your sin, my son?"

"Well, uh, father, I'm not real sure it's a sin, but I made somebody cry and it seemed like I'd done something wrong, so that I guess maybe it's a sin."

"What did you do to make this person cry?"

"I—uh—well, father, I told him there wasn't any angels."

"Why did you tell him that?"

"Well, because there isn't any. Not any real angels."

The priest, secure in his darkness, nevertheless covered the grin which threatened the decorum of his priestly state. Then he paused to recoup his mental resources which had fled momentarily before the last aggressive declaration. Quickly he formulated a plan of action which could be understood by a child's simple logic.

"You know there aren't angels and knowing it doesn't make you sad, does it?"

"No, father, it doesn't make me sad. I just don't believe in 'em."

"But your friend did?"

"Yes, father."

"I wonder why he cried?"

"I don't know. I s'pose because he didn't want to know there isn't any."

"Do you know why he wanted to believe there were angels?"

"No, father."

"Do you think it could be that the angels he believed in were good things that he thought would help him sometimes?"

"I guess so, father."

"Then you took his angels away from him—and the help he hoped to get."

"Yes, father."

The lad's voice was humble with the slow and somewhat sorrowful admission of youthful realization.

"Do you think that was a sin?"

"Yes, father—I—I guess so."

"Why?"

"'Cause I took somethin' away from him he wanted."

"What kind of a sin would it be?"

"I guess maybe it'd be stealing."

"Did you steal?"

"Yes, father. I guess I did. What'll I do, father?"

"You will have to decide that, my son."

"Well, how can I give 'em back?"

"You will find the way."

"Yes, father, I guess so."

Father Flynn settled back in his chair inside the dim confessional booth. Today's two hours of confession-hearing had been tiring; so many people came to confession the day before the first Friday of the month.

And so many people had so many problems that it made the priest's head bow before the onslaught of the wrongs people committed upon themselves.

Once more, however, he heard the drapes swishing and the accompanying screech of the floor boards as another penitent knelt.

"Bless me, father, for I have sinned."

"What was your sin, my boy?"

"I stole the angels from my friend."

"Oh, yes. And is it all straightened out?"

"I think so, father."

"Is he happy again?"

"Yes, father."

"What did you do about it?"

"Well, father, I couldn't give 'im back the angels, but I gave 'im somethin' else."

"Well, now, and what did you give him?"

"His mother and dad."

That remark struck into the priest's integrated logic and caused him to exclaim in surprise.

"What's that! I'm not sure I understand what you mean."

"Well, father," the lad's voice adopted

a confidential tone, "I told 'im there wasn't any angels—spirit angels, that is. I told 'im his mother and dad were the helps God gave 'im to get along with and they were real people that were s'posed to watch out for 'im and help 'im and they were responsible for 'im."

"Oh, I see now. And did that make him happy again?"

"Yes, father. He said he never thought of that and they did take care of 'im."

"Well, then, my son, it seems to me that you have made up for the angels by replacing them in a more tangible form."

"Is it all right, then, father?"

"I don't know for certain. How do you feel about it?"

"He doesn't miss the angels any more."

"That's right. He's happy. Are you?"

"Yes, father. I guess I am."

"Then you have done your penance, my son, and all is forgiven."

"Thank you, father."

The boards squeaked again, the drapes swished and the priest sat alone once more with his musing thoughts. No doubt the lad had found his own angels again as well as his friends.

REMEMBRANCE

Remembrance puts celestial tints
on the black and white
of every day
And makes lyric the flat prose
past.
It sets to throbbing the
guilt of old wrongs
And the pain of old slights
And the peace of memoried joy.
Part gall, part honey, Remembrance,
you only
endure.

ANNE McDONNELL