



Maybe Today Will Be the Day

Ron Hostetler

Tiny brass bells gaily tinkled as the weathered door swung open and let the early morning sunlight splash upon yellow-stained tiles. Scurrying into his small bookstore, old Mr. McFeeters slammed the door to keep the biting November wind from frosting his waiting friends. "Maybe today will be the day, my friends. Maybe, today," whispered the grinning old man as he gazed at the thousands of books in the shop. Returning his greetings with sideways smiles were walls of Shelley and Frost, Brontë and Dickens, and Verne and Bradbury; all were friendless books waiting for that one special day.

After placing his worn homburg upon a wicker chair, Mr. McFeeters cleaned his round, tarnished spectacles and squinted at the tattered pocket-mysteries and pyramids of novels that lined the front window. A small, sun-bleached card welcomed passersby to browse in McFeeters' Bookstore. In front of this tiny shop swarmed the pushing, crowding, rushing people of the city. None appeared to have the time to care about or even notice the person beside him. And yet, all seemed propped up and kept from falling by each other. As he turned smiling from the window, Mr. McFeeters wondered if today would be the day they would slow their pace and care to see a waiting world. Ah, yes. Maybe today.

Beneath a bare, swinging lightbulb, hunched the old man gluing the broken spine of an aging, wrinkled Milton. Stacks of other books covered the small table like cold marble monuments in an orchard of death: monuments to ideas once alive, vital, needed, but now seemingly dead and forgotten.

From an empty shelf two tireless clocks each shouted out the seconds, hours, weeks, and decades that limped past this time-forgotten shop. But inside, time stood motionless, frozen and encased in leather and cardboard coffins. Buried in rows along the walls lay proud Romans, courageous knights, lonely martyrs, adventurous pioneers, and heroic soldiers: buried and forgotten were men of strength and courage and desire, men preserved in towers of words high above the crowded, suffocating city.

The old man remembered how these towers of faded ink, yellowing pages, and dried glue once held out to man a sparkling world of warm summer days when there was time to take a Sunday stroll, time to eat cotton candy beside a merry-go-round and listen to a German band concert while children played. But now these gifts of life lay unopened, unwanted. Maybe man might someday slow his run, stop, and look into a world which was again motionless and clear—a world not blurred and covered by the linking arms of the crowd.

As the hours passed, strangers drifted in and out of the small shop: a businessman spending time before a conference, a shopping housewife wanting a dime mystery to read on the bus, a messenger boy searching for some comics, more shoppers, more businessmen, more people from the crowd. A few would browse along the shelves, curious to touch the stiffening binding of an unfamiliar Frost, to smell the cinnamon aroma of a mellowing novel, or to turn the crumbling pages of a dust-covered Poe. But most were content to rummage through the

shallow boxes of paperbacks upon a long row of sagging tables. Why be bothered with dust-collecting books when paperbacks of mysteries and romances are more convenient?

Leaning back in his wicker chair, Mr. McFeeters watched a young boy scuffle along a wall thumping the friendless books as if he had a stick gaily tapping along a picket fence. If only the boy would stop, spin, grab a book—any book—and explore its pages, open his eyes. But, no. Man's mind seems slammed shut, locked, bolted. The door is too thick with rust for man to see and hear and smell and taste and feel what waits outside.

Above the strawberry, lemon, and blueberry-clothed shoppers, aging books wept tears of dust.

At five o'clock the clocks chimed, one a few seconds after the other. It was time to close, time to leave his friends who still remained in their dusty home. None had left to gladden a heart or strengthen a man or pry open a mind. As he grasped the brass door-knob, Mr. McFeeters turned and smiled at the lonely walls of books. Maybe tomorrow would be the day. Ah, yes. Maybe tomorrow. . . .

Tiny brass bells sadly tinkled as the door slowly closed.

May Snow

Nancy Baxter

May has a time of middle age
When sweetness dies in slanting showers
And drifts the drive.
Pink withering tongues chatter down the road
And lap at pools left by the rain.
The Apple tree waves heavy arms and sighs
Like a man who has lived too long,
And buxom, seedy-faced forsythia
Stand, their dyed and brassy hair all in their eyes.