

The Old Gray Stallion

It snowed last night.

Huge flakes that twirled and scattered and fell lazily onto the softness of their sleeping brothers. I stood in the back yard, bundled in my heavy jacket and rubber boots, and saw the soft glow from our security lamp cast changing light upon the ermine robe that dressed the earth. There was a solitude so pronounced that I felt alone in this vast world of humanity, and a silence so deep I could hear the timid crunch of flake upon flake. There was no barking of dogs because the dogs lay in deep content before their master's fireplace. I was alone in this cold fairyland except that I felt the presence of God. He stood beside me and pointed out the icicles that hung from the eaves of the house in ever-changing colors. He took my hand and showed me the glory of His creative mind, and gave me the warmth of His companionship.

And this morning the world has changed. The winds had blown with violent gusto and piled the drifts in mountainous waves. I stood at the window and my wife joined me. I put my arm around her waist and we watched a tiny bird search vainly for his

Country Philosopher

Amos Arthur Holmes



sustenance. There was serenity outside my window, and purity, and a beauty so deep it blocked the gray shadows of reality.

"Amos, let's build a snowman."

The idea was ridiculous. We were both fifty-five years of age and building a snowman would take young hands and young hearts. But I noticed the animation of my wife's face, I saw her need, and I complied with her suggestion.

We bundled up and went outside. The brisk, cold wind turned our cheeks pink and our noses red. We rolled tiny balls of snow until they became huge and unmovable. We built a torso, and a head, and my wife's laughter echoed across the yard and

through the woods.

And then I felt the pain around my heart. A tiny, dull ache that shot through my chest in violent warning. It could have been, as Charles Dickens once said, the result of an undigested bit of beef, or a crumb of bread that caused discomfort. And yet, at my age, it could be that first warning of a heart attack. I told my wife that I would have to return to the house and I saw the disappointment in her eyes. I didn't mention the pain in my chest and my wife probably thought I was leaving because I found the activity dull or her companionship unrewarding.

If she had only known the happiness I had felt while building

that snowman. If she could have known how desperately I wanted to leap through the snow in great stumbling strides and grab her by the shoulders. To throw her in a great drift and tickle her and make her laugh. To place my hands upon her cheeks and bend to kiss her lips.

For we did those things when we were young.

The small pain in my chest still nagged and I forced my way through the snow until I reached the house. I went inside and removed my wet clothing. I dried myself thoroughly and poured myself a cup of coffee.

I stood at the kitchen window and watched my wife. She was adding two eyes and a nose to our snowman. I knew that she missed my company because her laughter was silenced and the animation had left her face. When she finishes her snowman, and comes inside, I will tell her about the pain around my heart. I will tell her about the happiness I felt while we labored to build that snowman. And I will do something I wouldn't have to do at all.

I will apologize for being old.

Letters