

A Tale of two old dogs
The Literary Club
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Once upon a time, the man thought, everything was perfect - well almost perfect, actually, not really perfect, but orderly, comfortable. The man's name was Thomas George Brown, although everybody called him George because his father had been Tom. As he reflected on his life George could pinpoint the three recent sea changes that brought him to his current state.

First let's get to know George. His family lived in Michigan, outside Detroit. He was a good student, but entering his senior year, the best he could do when asked by inquisitive adults about his future was, "I am going to college." It made sense, his father had graduated from University of Michigan and his mother had spent two years at a 'women's college' before wedding. That was the family tradition, but George didn't know what he wanted to do and wasn't very excited. His father just assumed that George would follow in his footsteps. As the pick-a-college pressure grew, George made a trip with his father to Ann Arbor. It was impressive, it was pretty and it was BIG. George promised his father he would apply.

Their next door neighbor had a string of local auto parts stores. George had worked there the previous summer and expected to return in June. Talking with his neighbor one afternoon, George mentioned his apprehension about a Big Blue future. His neighbor asked why didn't George consider an east coast option? Say Williams? Just happened to be his alma mater and the admissions officer was a fraternity brother. George was intrigued. He told his parents he would like to visit and one late autumn weekend they toured Williamstown, Massachusetts and the college. He felt he had found his place and his parents agreed. His father did point out that Michigan would have been, "... a hell of a lot cheaper." The neighbor connection and George's grades and test scores all worked and off George went.

The first three years flew by. In the fall of 1970 two momentous things happened at Williams. The first women were admitted to the College, and George met Margaret Clifton. It was at a mixer for the incoming freshman class. The logistical difficulties of getting a girl to the remote northwest corner of Massachusetts meant that while alumni might moan about the loss of tradition, the males on site were damn glad to see the ladies. Before the evening was over George had Margaret's phone number and a date was arranged for the

following weekend. Now George had never been particularly clever with the girls, and he wondered later how he had been so fortunate.

They dated throughout the year. The summer included a visit to her hometown to meet her parents. Cincinnati seemed like a nice place, but George had more plans. Off he went to Philadelphia for business school. They stayed in touch. After graduate school George and two friends postponed the real world for six months in Europe. It was great fun. Margaret showed up in Paris at one point, which George thought was very nice. Naturally some of the high jinx of the three friends occasionally bordered on the improper, they were never actually arrested - although there was a night spent in a municipal jail on Majorca.

Upon his return, George got a call from a business school classmate who was working on Wall Street. With the inside introduction, George soon was also. The big city was fun, but exhausting. Long hours and late weekend nights were wearing George down. Then came a call from a former Williams classmate - Would George care to come back to the Midwest? The classmate was working for a midsize insurance company outside Cincinnati. They were looking for somebody with George's experience. So off he went to be interviewed. George had the foresight to call Margaret and tell her of his plans. She insisted that George stay with her and her parents. It wasn't until after the wedding that George learned that his Williams classmate was a cousin of Margaret's and he, and George had gotten their jobs after Margaret's father had called in a favor with an old golfing buddy.

Mr. and Mrs. Brown quickly settled into domestic bliss. The boys came along in short order and their Kenwood starter home became too small and they joined the pioneers moving north to West Chester Township in Butler County. It was a good move for the family and then George's company was bought out by a local behemoth that was headquartered in nearby Fairfield. George did well and prospered. By his 50th birthday he was second vice president of investments, specializing in mortgages.

About that time George received two calls from former Wall Street colleagues. Both were starting hedge funds and wanted George to bring his mortgage expertise to the Big Apple. The salary offers were outrageous, as were their plans. George quizzed them about how they could offer bundled mortgages 10 times larger than any George had ever looked at. They both explained that investors would buy portions of the bundle because they would be receiving returns 3-6% higher than anybody else could offer. They brushed aside George's questions about tracking, servicing, clear identification of assets

and subprime loans. All they asked of George was that he certify the bundle would yield the returns they were promising. After talking it over with his spouse, George declined both offers. A few years later George saw in the Wall Street Journal that one of his callers was a billionaire, the other was serving 3-5 at the Leavenworth minimum security federal prison camp.

The first disruption in George's orderly life was Leroy's arrival - George's 55th birthday was approaching. Maggie had been acting very secretive and was walking about with a funny grin on her face. He had told the boys it was no big deal and not to bother. When the day was over he discovered that they had taken him at his word. "Couldn't they at least gone together on a card?" he whined to his wife.

But before he recognized his sons' dereliction, the surprise arrived. He had been harboring vague hopes that Maggie was going to get him a vintage Mustang like he had when they got married. Alas, that was not the present. Instead, he was ordered to the kitchen and told to close his eyes. He heard the door to the basement open and sensed something different. He opened his eyes without waiting for permission. And there by the door he saw his wife and children and a dog! "What's that?" he choked out. "It's a dog silly", his wife said. "You always are talking about how you loved your neighbor's dog and your parents wouldn't let you have one."

He looked again, the dog was black and white with some brown on his legs. He looked thin and although freshly bathed, somewhat raggedy. He had one brown eye and one blue." What is he?"

"A husky, maybe with a bit of something else." she answered.

"He looks scrawny." George continued.

"Nonsense, she responded, he weighs 57 pounds, he is three years old and he was rescued from a kill shelter in Hazard, Kentucky."

The dog was trying to take it all in. It had been a busy time, and he had not had anywhere near as much sleep as he wanted - and he certainly missed a meal or two. First he was pulled out of the cage, then a long trip in a van with some other dogs. Then another cage, then the vet, then the boys in their car, and now this scene. What he really wanted was food and sleep.

"Does he have a name?" She wanted to name him 'Le Roi', the king, which she spelled for everybody's benefit. George had forgotten that Maggie had majored in French and anyway he didn't think that the dog looked very majestic. "He looks more like a Leroy." And just like that he had a dog. The boys immediately began to sing, 'bad, bad, Leroy Brown...'

One morning as the man got ready for work, his wife said, "Dear, please take Leroy for his morning walk." "What's this the man replied - we have a fenced in back yard, why does he need a walk?" His wife explained that it was just something she had been doing for a few months. "He so enjoys it, new smells and everything," she explained. "Why can't you", he protested.

But the fact was he had been going in later and later in recent months. First in the executive parking lot before 7:30 had vanished years ago, now he realized that 8:30 and even 9 had become unnecessary. With flex time, his secretary, whoops, his administrative assistant, didn't appear until after 9:30, so why should he. Plus the meetings he had to attend never started until 10. At any rate here he was out on the street on a beautiful morning, with Leroy.

As he walked down the road, he forgot why she said she couldn't do it, but there he was, in a subdivision with no sidewalks, no front porches and a large dog pulling him down the road. He wished he had a dog sled on wheels. *Now the dog on the other hand was thinking that this was a good thing. He was out earlier than usual, he had already hauled the man past the point where the woman usually turned around and he never tried to pull the woman the way he was dragging the man.*

A few days later the walk took a decided turn for the worse. What happened was a matter of perspective: *Leroy was certain there was a cat just a few doors further down the street. He pulled the man past their usual turn around house, and sure enough, there was the cat! He was momentarily distracted by the need to take a crap. When he finished, the man bent over to pick it up. WHY DO PEOPLE DO THAT? And there was the cat cleaning under his front leg and sticking his tongue out at Leroy. He reacted to the cat's taunt. He had about fifteen feet of free run on the reel style leash George favored. With that head of steam, there was only a slight catch as the leash came free and he was within inches of the startled cat when the leash got caught under the tire of the car where the cat had retreated.*

George however had a different perspective. He was bent over on the slight uphill grade of the lawn, a poop bag in one hand and the leash in the other. Just as he grabbed the poop, it happened. Suddenly the leash tightened across the back of his legs as Leroy pursued the cat. Then as the leash was jerked out of his hand, he went nose first into the lawn, knocking his sunglasses off. As he laid there dazed, a lady came running from across the street

screaming. “Are you all right sir?” When she saw he was bleeding where his nose, the ground and sunglasses had connected, she wanted to call the life squad. He assured her he was fine. Leroy sat proudly, wagging his tail and grinning broadly.

Despite this inauspicious beginning, the walks became a regular morning and evening affair. One winter night, Leroy was talking to George in that way that huskies have, asking to go out. It was cold, there was fresh snow on the ground, and Maggie had gone to bed, so he thought, why not?

Leroy was thinking - why is he so thick? I really need to go out, unless he wants to explain the mess on the rug to her in the morning. I should have known better than to take that old pizza out of the garbage can, but it did taste good at the time.

Out they went and George immediately understood why Leroy wanted out. That was one load that was not going to get picked up! He kicked some snow over the mostly liquid deposit in their neighbor’s yard and they moved on. He rationalized his dereliction that it would disappear when the snow melted. He noticed that the dog was staying close by his side. He recalled one of the boys asking him recently if he had ever walked LeRoy off leash. Before he could respond, his wife cut in and said he would never do anything that irresponsible. So he bent over and unhooked the leash! It was the beginning of a new freedom for both of them. George was proud that his dog would stay with him, and come when he called.

As for Leroy, he had come to realize that he had a pretty nice deal. The food was good and arrived on time most every day. Not that he could tell time, but his stomach was a very reliable indicator of when food was due. The walks were great and Maggie was quick to offer a treat. George did a fine job of scratching his ears. Fun to run a bit, but he was not about to risk the good life he was leading. He knew that there were much worse situations.

George’s 60th birthday rolled around and still no classic Mustang. Before he knew it his 62nd was approaching, bringing with it major change #2. Work had become increasingly routine. He had capable young assistants, a loyal gatekeeper and a younger boss. George had been elevated to vice president only to watch silently as a young guy, eight and a half years George’s junior was hired as Senior Vice President over all investments.

The week of George’s birthday, Ralph, that was the Senior Vice President’s name, called to him as George walked past his office. “Come on in” he said. “Well, he said, I guess you are looking forward to playing more golf and

traveling with your lovely wife.” George had a bewildered look. He really didn’ t enjoy golf that much, and he and Maggie hadn’ t traveled outside their usual holiday/vacation cycle of Michigan and Virginia in years. Ralph went on to congratulate George on his boys completing college -and wasn’ t the elder one, Tom getting married in the fall?

Now Ralph had never been one for small talk and family matters never crossed his lips. As George was trying to compute this strange behavior, the bomb hit. “Knowing how important your family is to you, I’ ve taken the liberty of asking HR to generate some options for early retirement” . “For me?” George asked.” ” Well of course for you, who else? “ George had his own nominee, but kept silent. George picked up the papers that Ralph had put on the desk and left - the office and the building. The next thing George knew he was sitting in the Fields Ertel Frisch’ s sucking on a vanilla milkshake. What was he going to do, what would he tell Maggie?

It turned out to be easier than he expected. Maggie had seen the signs he ignored. She suggested they go out for a nice dinner and look at it piece by piece. Years of reviewing mortgage documents had made George an expert on fine print and details. By the time he and Maggie were finished they had covered income, pension and health insurance. With a few additions, everything was going to be fine. The bigger question became what would George do every day?

On their walks, George talked to Leroy about the problem. Frequently he would return and inform Maggie that Leroy thought it would be a good idea to start a project like putting a fire pit on the patio. She would smile and off to Home Depot George and Leroy would go.

For Leroy’ s part, he couldn’ t be happier. Longer walks, more walks, walks along the river and rides in the car. .

Actually, it became clear that the real void was in Maggie’ s daily routine. Maggie had always been busy. She was a social person and excelled in getting things done, particularly when a task required other people to agree and help and sometimes think they owned the idea. These skills had served George well. George’ s vice presidency was largely the result of Maggie’ s friendship with the wives of a few influential executives and board members. She knew George deserved the promotion, but he just didn’ t know how to put himself forward. Not everyone saw in George what she felt at that fateful mixer in 1970. And now, she had nothing to do! The wedding was her last triumph. The birth mother of the bride-to-be had disappeared long ago and the stepmother was a thousand

miles away and only too happy to cede mother of the bride duties to Maggie, particularly since the wedding was to be in Cincinnati. Everything had been perfect. Last week she and her daughter-in-law had finished all the thank you notes which went so well because of Maggie's gift identification and categorization system.

Now she was just bored. She had never liked house cleaning, although of course she was very good at it. She resented the empty house with two large floors and a basement they had finished for the boys and their friends. Even with only two people, rooms they never entered somehow got dirty.

Leroy noticed the difference. When George was out she didn't talk to him, or give him treats. She would turn the TV on, then turn it off shortly thereafter. She listened to the all music station and never wanted to go for a walk. Sometimes he had to stand at the back door forever and start to whine and talk to her before she would realize he needed to go out back. Then one day there was talking on the music station and she clapped her hands together and said, "I've got it." Then she was excitedly talking on the phone.

When George got back that afternoon, she told him she was going into town tomorrow to meet a Walnut Hills classmate and have lunch. George mumbled OK and wondered not for the first time what bound together the 'Nut Hills' kids, as they called themselves. What kind of public high school has an alumni association as rabid as his colleges' ?

THE PITCH - It was after her third or fourth excursion to 'town' that it began. "George, wouldn't it be nice to live in town."

What! "How do you mean," he ventured.

"Just that" she replied we'd get a place in town" You mean like Hyde Park where you grew up?"

No, that's too far out."

You don't mean Over the Rhine where our number 2 son is?"

"No, that would be too much for you." Too much what he wondered, but was wise enough not to ask. "You want to get an apartment downtown? What would we do with our house?"

"Sell it. Just think about it." she said.

Leroy who had been at George's feet throughout this, thought - I wonder if they have squirrels in this downtown place? Because George may not recognize it but Leroy knew that tone in her voice. Usually it was when she asked, "Would you like a bath? Well NO, but shortly he was all wet.

A few days later, Maggie reopened the subject. " I think I am going to try to set a regular schedule volunteering as a docent at the Art Museum. I could go in two days a week, say Tuesday and Thursday."

What about my lunch? George asked. "And isn't that going to put a lot of miles on your car - more than 60 miles a day. And didn't you tell me you have to be selected and trained to be a docent?" George was out of breath.

Maggie's response was swift and thorough. "The head of the docent selection committee is a classmate from Walnut Hills. I volunteered to be secretary for our class reunion planning and she has me set to begin docent training next week. You are exactly right about all the driving, that's why I think we should consider a place in town. She didn't bother to mention George's lunch.

George's head was swimming.

Leroy, hearing the tone in Maggie's voice that George was somehow missing thought, I wonder if there are cats in this downtown place?

A week later came the final bombshell. Maggie was just glowing. She had spent the day at the Taft Museum and she was going to volunteer there also. She might be able to do some things beyond watching over visitors. There was some discussion about reviewing and organizing old records to get them ready for digitizing. And then she explained that the head of the volunteers lived just next door and invited Maggie over for tea. It was such a lovely place and there was a unit which was going to be available in the next month or so and her new friend called the owners and Maggie got to see it and it was marvelous. "Isn't that wonderful?" What did George think?"

In fact, George was still trying to figure out how Maggie and 'digitizing' went together. He also recognized that he had missed something very important. It came to him. "You want us to buy a condominium downtown?"

"Yes" his glowing bride of almost 40 years responded.

There followed a terse exchange as George tried to muster compelling arguments to scuttle this craziness.

He - "How much"

She - "\$685,000, there is another unit available for \$925,000."

He - "Too much, that's unbelievable."

She - "When we sell our house we will have more than enough."

He - "We can't get that for this house, we only paid \$240,000"

She - "It was \$268,000 thirty years ago, and we put \$100,000 in a new kitchen and finishing the basement for the boys only 12 years ago. What did the Carmichels get for their house across the street just last month?" [Maggie was almost out of breath]

He - "\$690,000"

She - "And you always said our house was worth much more than theirs, he did the basement himself with paneling."

He - "The taxes and condo fee will cost too much" [George was faltering]

Maggie - "the taxes are abated for another 12 years and combined with the condo fee are less than our current taxes and there are no maintenance requirements."

George went with his final shot, "What about Leroy?"

She finished with a flourish, "... pets are allowed."

Leroy had slept with one eye open. When the quiet descended he looked at George and thought, I tried to tell you this was coming.

And there they were, urban pioneers. She loved it, he was at 6s & 7s. For forty years his wife's name was 'Maggie', a modification of Margaret. He had dubbed her that when they first met at that fateful mixer. She had taken the sobriquet with a twinkle in her eye, and he thought she was happy as 'Maggie'. Now when they were out in public at events he was at first confused when people referred to her as, "... that wonderful Margaret" or "Margaret just said the funniest thing". He wasn't sure at first who they were talking about. Then he realized he was resentful. When he finally asked her about it she said people had just picked it up. Anyway she said, "I'll always be your Maggie." Later he noticed her new set of checks read "Margaret Clifton Brown" - had they always been that way?

One morning George announced that he and LeRoy were going to investigate the dog park somebody in the building had told him about. He felt guilty now that they were downtown because he couldn't walk Leroy off leash. He was planning on checking out Sawyer Point once winter came to see if that might work. In the meantime the dog park seemed like a good idea. "How are you going to get there?" she asked. It seemed obvious; they had a car - only one because the building only allocated one parking space per unit.

She continued, "I have a committee meeting at lunch with the Art Museum docents." She had recently assumed the post of secretary. "Oh wait, you will have Leroy, that's OK, I'll use Uber." With that she whipped out her phone and with a few finger movements, nodded and said, "That's fine." He understood what Uber was, but how did she do that? She had the app on her smart phone she explained. That was how she was able to look at her phone the other evening and give him driving directions to an event they were to attend. He thought about his flip phone and said, "Maybe I should get a Blackberry like I had at work." She laughed. At him?

Off the two old dogs went to Otto Armleder Park. LeRoy walked the entire perimeter of the fenced in area for big dogs. George walked a ways away from him for a while, and then turned to sit down when Leroy approached a small pack of big dogs. There was a shepherd, a Rottweiler, and a couple of what looked like pit bull mixes. Now in fairness, LeRoy was not the svelte 57 pound young dog that had arrived at the Browns seven years earlier. He was taller than all but the shepherd and at 96lbs, heavier than even the Rottweiler. In fact George dreaded the visits to the vet, where he was regularly scolded about Leroy' s weight.

George moved quickly towards them, looking for the owners of the other dogs. Only one very young woman seemed to be watching the scene.

LeRoy was thinking that it had been a while since he had been up close with strangers his size. This could be fun. He altered his stride to spread out a bit and get better balance. He looked first at the shepherd – he was young and after a second turned his head and backed away. The pit bulls were next. Before they could get beyond a growl, Leroy issued one low bark. They stopped and moved off. That left the Rottweiler. As they faced off, George arrived and yelled out LEROY BROWN. The Rottweiler snarled in frustration. Next time!

After the excitement, George thought maybe it was time for lunch. He turned the wrong way leaving the park. He followed the road until he came to a stop light. There across the road he saw the Frisch' s Big Boy statute -what a find. He had always liked Frisch' s and here he was at the mother ship - the Mainliner! A long wait in line – they had the slowest drive thru in town. Now with the odors of a Big Boy on a rye bun, a plain hamburger and onion rings filling the car, George retraced their route back to the park and a bench.

Leroy finished his burger, bun and all before George got his Big Boy unwrapped. Then off a short distance to relieve himself on top of the Rottweiler' s earlier deposit and back to lie down next to George
Leroy didn' t beg for more, he knew his mid-day snack was finished. He just thought it was a good thing to be close to George.

In addition to Maggie' s museums, there were season tickets to the symphony, the Playhouse in the park, the ballet and the opera. George did pretty well on the first two and discovered the Ensemble Theater Company on his own, he thought. However on their first visit he noticed that George and Margaret Brown were listed in the program as sponsors! He was not as keen on the opera and ballet and didn' t remember Maggie/Margaret ever expressing any interest, but now.... Had she not enjoyed Neil Diamond at Voice of America Park?

However the other real passion Maggie discovered was her love of singing and the nearby downtown church. They had done the standard church thing when the boys were growing up, and Maggie had been in the choir. Once the boys were done, so was George. His idea of a good Sunday service was a cup of hot coffee and the New York Times. Maggie however continued in the choir in their West Chester church.

Hence, he wasn't totally surprised when she began going to the nearby big church. One Sunday she returned and announced that she had been invited to try out for the choir! That necessitated two quick music lessons which drove George and Leroy into the park which was just out the front door. This, George explained to Leroy, was the only reason he had gone along with Maggie's move as he referred to it. She auditioned and was accepted. The twice weekly rehearsals became a major focus of her week.

It turned out the Mondays were shorter rehearsals since they just reviewed the previous Sunday's performance and handed the music for next Sunday and did one quick run through. That provided an opportunity to stop for a few drinks at the nearby hotels. Meeting Maggie became a Thursday only task, Mondays belonged to the choristers. While they waited, George and Leroy drifted into the church's library. It was well stocked with fiction and some current religious and social welfare books.

George and Leroy extended their connection to the library from Thursday nights to a regular stop on their walks. The church was generally dog friendly, many of the clergy and staff had dogs, but of course there were some parishioners who were not quite as enthusiastic. They became close friends with the library ladies who advised them on times to avoid. But generally it was a welcome refuge. One day George asked for a suggestion and the librarian handed him a paperback entitled Born on third base by Chuck Collins. She explained that Collins was coming to the church shortly for a lecture.

Leroy liked the church also. It seemed these days that he didn't mind taking a break in their walks. Probably this was because of the concrete which got very hot in the summer and held more sharp objects he had to watch out for. It couldn't possibly have anything to do with the fact that he was almost 11. He also appreciated the outside water fountain at the church. George got them a collapsible water dish. Good idea!

George found something else at the church. He stopped by late one Tuesday afternoon and asked the librarian about the line of people he saw in the

hallway. She told him that those were members of the Fishes and Loaves Club. She said, "You know the Bible story. There is a free meal for anyone who wants to come every Tuesday". George thought that since Leroy wasn't with him and Maggie had said she was dining with docents this evening, he'd go catch a free meal. It didn't work out quite as he had expected. He was met by a slightly frantic person who immediately drafted him and set him to work setting the tables. Two hours later George sat down with the rest of the crew and ate - minus the excellent smelling rolls they had run out of. He asked about the diners. Most were homeless he learned although many had started out in that state and with help from a local agency and the church they now had a place of their own but still wanted the fellowship of the community they had entered. And of course there is the Anna Louise Inn table. Next week George, we'll promote you to the serving line. George didn't think that was going to happen. He went home, looked up fishes and loaves in Wikipedia and told Maggie about his experience. She seemed genuinely pleased and proud of him.

He had seen her before. She was a fellow [was that the right word?] dog walker with a brown poodle. LeRoy seemed embarrassingly interested in the poodle. Their eyes would meet as he tried to pull LeRoy along past the poodle. Sometimes he would get LeRoy into the grass to allow the woman and her dog to pass. She always nodded her appreciation.

One lovely spring afternoon, the two old dogs [that's what Maggie called them sometimes] headed for the elevator and into the park. After a couple of circuits around the small park, he sat down on a bench across from the Phelps. He noticed with a surprising sense of pleasure that the brown poodle and her mistress was approaching. When she did sit down she usually sat on the middle bench. Today however, the other benches were occupied by two somewhat scruffy men who were fast asleep. She came to his bench and asked, "Do you mind if we join you?"

"Please do", he answered as he struggled to his feet, somewhat tangled in LeRoy's leash.

Well now, this brightens up the afternoon, she is one sweet poodle, LeRoy thought as he whipped around George's legs to begin sniffing.

She complimented him on his handsome dog. He returned the praise and was introduced to Grace. "Hello Gracie" he said. Grace, she corrected him. She explained that Grace was a pure breed standard poodle who was too small to show or breed. "Oh, a substandard poodle," George quipped. She ignored his remark and asked how Leroy came into his family. He gave her the abbreviated version, ending with the fact that Leroy was a son of the Commonwealth,

specifically Hazard. "So am I." she said. Rain began to fall, and off they went in separate directions. As he crossed the street, George looked back, expecting to see her entering the other residential building on the park, but there was no sign of her.

Tuesday came and George said goodbye to Leroy and Maggie and headed for church. After set up, George was entrusted with placing rolls on plates as folks came down the line. After the prayer and before the line began, volunteers came through and filled about a dozen plates. These are for the Anna Louise Inn ladies he was told. As the crew sat talking he asked about the Anna Louise ladies. It was explained that the church had a very long time connection with the Inn and accorded the ladies a special table and extra service. They were mostly participants in the 'Off the Streets' program helping ex-prostitutes to shake the life and find new paths. This explained an elevator conversation George had overheard in his building about the 'hookers' on the other side of the park.

Later in the week, George and Leroy encountered Grace and her mistress again. They walked around the park together and sat by mutual unspoken agreement at their bench. After 30 seconds on the weather - hope it doesn't start raining again, oh I agree- George spoke, "We know our dogs' names but not ours. I'm George," "Joy" she answered. That made George very happy for some reason he didn't try to identify. He asked about Hazard and she told him some of her story. She had been born and raised in the small Southeastern Kentucky coal town about 200 miles from Cincinnati. The population had peaked in 1940 at 7,400, but by the time she graduated from high school in 1971 it had dropped to about 5,400. There were 74 in her senior class of the Hazard Bulldogs. She was salutatorian.

Leroy thoroughly approved of this new friendship. It just very pleasant to share nuzzles and sniffs with Grace. He was on his best behavior.

Another Tuesday came and George was back on the food line. He liked the camaraderie among servers and guests. He recognized some of the people from his walks and they shared the nods of acquaintances traveling similar paths. The line leader asked George if he would carry a plate over to the Anna Louise Inn table then hustle right back so they could open the line. Which he did. As he put the plate down, he looked and saw Joy - his Joy as he immediately thought of her, sitting with the Inn ladies! He was distracted the rest of the evening. A couple of folks got two biscuits, and more than one had to ask twice for theirs. When the rush was over and cleanup began, Joy was gone.

The rest of the week George kept watch out the windows looking for Joy and Grace. Thursday, just after Maggie left for choir rehearsal, he saw them. Grabbing Leroy's leash they headed for the elevator. She saw them cross the street and nodded her head towards their bench. After she sat down, George released Leroy so he and Grace could talk also. "About Tuesday night, she began. I didn't realize you were a part of the church crew. That's very nice." And here was her story: when she graduated in 1971 there was no money for college. She had decided years earlier that she would join the out migration from Hazard. She had been to Cincinnati twice and that seemed a good spot to start her explorations. She had taken typing one semester and the teacher became a friend. Along with the English teacher - her favorite subject- they put together an escape plan. A former student had gone to the big city and worked for an attorney. A small firm down the hall in the 4th St. bank building had asked if she knew of anyone. The English teacher knew about a place called the Anna Louise Inn which was designed to offer safe, proper housing for single young ladies. The pieces came together and she had been there ever since. She was the last of the traditional residents. Actually she had moved across the park to the Phelps for a number of years. She had been evicted when the Big insurance company converted it to a hotel. She had looked at other places but the Inn was so convenient and inexpensive and they welcomed her back. Now she was like a den mother to the women struggling to regain their self-worth. And the Big insurance company was coming after her again. Before George could question her, she excused herself and departed.

George accepted the church librarian's recommendation and read the Chuck Collins book. Born on Third Base is more than the story of Collins transferring his inheritance to charitable foundations. It contains his efforts and rationale for keeping the estate tax. He explores his work with the very rich [the 1 percenters] to seek a new rationale for contributing to the greater community. It spends a lot of time discussing white privilege and the ways in which the game is stacked against those who do not have contacts and connections. George had never thought about most of the things Collins seemed to understand and explain so well.

He mentioned to Maggie that he thought they might enjoy the Collins lecture. She agreed, after all it was at the church. The church was full and Collins was extremely good. Maggie agreed it was very interesting. On the way out he saw Joy. He was dithering over how to introduce the two women when he turned and she was gone. Later that week they were at the Symphony. At intermission talking with a group of Margaret's friends, George mentioned the lecture and

launched into the concept of 'white privilege' . The group seemed to vaporize. Maggie gave him the 'look' .

Sometime after that occasion, George was out in West Chester sitting around the table at the 19th hole with his golf buddies. What was their first job he asked the group. As they went around the table he asked a follow up - how had they gotten the job? The pattern was identical - a parent, a neighbor, a friend had set it up. He said, "I have never done a cold application for a competitive job. Has anybody?" Finally one guy said, "Does the Navy count?" George thought about it all the way home - to downtown.

At least twice a week he and Leroy walked and talked with Joy and Grace. The park became their place. He learned that she had traveled more than he. When he told her about his career in insurance, she asked what he knew about the Big insurance company that wanted to buy the Anna Louise Inn. "They are buying up the entire park" she said. "They own everything except the Pike St. buildings, and their real estate division is the management company for your building." What about the Federal style house over on the northwest corner? They were sitting on their bench, it was Monday night and a bunch of older men were climbing the front steps. "That' s the Literary Club, they own their building, but I' ll bet the Big insurance company would buy it in a minute." She went on to offer her view of the negotiations and pressures that the Anna Louise Inn was facing. She told him that originally the plan was to convert the Inn to condominiums, but the numbers didn' t work because the building needed so much done to it. Now she heard that it was to be a hotel, grander than the Phelps.

Meanwhile, George realized that he and Maggie were spending less time together than either had thought retirement would bring. Most of the schedule belonged to Maggie, but some was George not wanting to be at everything Maggie tried to include him in. An example was the opera. George was a reluctant attendee at best, and when she offered to find a substitute, he was happy. Her choice was her new best friend, Alonso. He was one of the paid church choir members. He had an accent which he claimed was from his native Ecuador. George suspected that he was a native of New Jersey and the accent was for his job as a snooty waiter at one of the very expensive restaurants downtown. None the less, he went along. However the next week it was the ballet and she didn' t ask, she just informed him. Monday night she ran particularly late after the rehearsal and came in laughing about something funny Alonso had said. George was cut in responding to her standard questions - how was your evening, what did you have for dinner? And she recognized he was pouting. "What' s wrong "she asked.

George muttered something about her spending more time with Alonso than him. "You're jealous" she recognized, "You know he's gay!" Of course George knew. The thought that Maggie might somehow be unfaithful never crossed his mind, but he was jealous of the time she spent with others and how much she obviously enjoyed it.

Leroy was not happy with the tones George and Maggie were using. After they finished and went to different rooms, he moved back and forth between them talking to them with an occasional bark until they began laughing. Then they both took him for a quick walk around the park. That was more like it.

George always felt that what happened was not his fault - or not entirely his fault - well maybe he could have done some things differently. It began with a normal mid-morning walk around town. As he approached the church he noticed a crowd across the street in front of the city's newest, tallest skyscraper. Hearing the chant, "Hands off the Anna Louise Inn" he remembered that the building belonged to the Big insurance company and the president of the Big insurance company had an office there. Seeing Joy, he and Leroy moved to meet her. By the time he got there he had a sign in his hand. He realized he had joined the crowd's chant - "Save the Anna Louise Inn." Things still weren't entirely out of hand when George saw the pretty TV news person and smiled. It seemed natural then when she and her cameraman came up to George and asked his name. "George Brown" he replied proudly. In the interview that followed, George announced that he lived on the park, the Anna Louise Inn residents were fine neighbors and he couldn't understand why the Big insurance company continued to risk its reputation acting like a bully when for less than their lawyers' fees, say a few hundred thousand, they could solve the problem, provide the Inn with a new home and begin the work to preserve this fine landmark. George and Leroy and Joy walked down Fourth St. on a cloud of adrenalin and self-righteousness. For George this came crashing down about 6:10 when the pretty newsperson, George and Leroy appeared on the TV screen.

George had forgotten, if he had ever known, that Maggie served on an art museum committee with the wife of the president of the Big insurance company. Things were rather frosty around the condo for a while. George took comfort in walks with Leroy and conversations with Joy. As for the Anna Louise Inn and the Big insurance company - possibly encouraged by the words and publicity engendered by George's foray into the 6 o'clock news - they found a mutually satisfactory and beneficial solution. It called for construction of a new facility to carry on the work of the Inn and the preservation of the historic landmark as very upscale hotel.

In the midst of this development a terrible thought hit George. He paced by the window waiting for Joy to come back from work. As soon as he saw her and Grace, he called to Leroy and raced into the hall, jumped in the elevator, scurried across the through the lobby into the street, and in as close to a trot as George could manage, raced to meet the ladies. Joy smiled, but before she could greet George he blurted out, "Where are you going to live?" , for the paper had reported that the Inn would shortly be closed and the various programs temporarily relocated. She took his hand and they sat down on their bench. "I' ve found a place nearby that will accept pets." And she nodded towards George' s building.

Leroy nudged up closer to Grace and thought - this is going to get interesting.

Edward Lee Burdell