



THE SHARECROPPER
William Frederick Harrison, III

In peaceful calm and patient stride, he toils the endless rows. Sometimes in the dawn's cool mist... sometimes in the twilight of the setting sun... In springtime's rain and summer's breeze, through autumn's gold and winter's cold... Still, always looking toward the harvest of tomorrow... Never back, at the pain and sorrow of yesterday.

Foreword

Good evening gentlemen,

With store shelves becoming a little sparse in some favorite and necessary items along with social distancing, work from home and shut-ins... You might think that we planned the name for this budget. I assure you... we did not. But seeing how the stay-at-home order has in some cases, challenged the love of friends and family... you may see the point of my comment.

And then, there is romance. But we will save that for later.

First, allow me to offer my thanks to my friend Bill Sena who is unable to participate in this Budget paper.

So... Bob Burdette will get us started with our topic...

Food, Love and Romance

Bob...

Food, Love and Romance

Without a doubt one of the most primal things for our existence is food. And even though we give little notice when gulping a glass of milk or munching a donut on our way out of the door for work, school or wherever our plans for the day may take us. It usually begins... and ends, with food.

Whether you are a junk food junkie, health nut, or a real foodie... eating plays a major role in just about all we do. There are even calculations noting the percentage of our lives that is devoted to eating, but I won't go there. However, think about it! Because, for the world as a whole it has not always been so easy.

Back in 1845 a fungus-like organism ran wild throughout the country of Ireland. And in that year alone about half of the potato harvest was lost. What's worse for the next seven years most potato crop yields were only about 25% of normal. And all said and done about a million Irish died from either starvation or food-related causes during that period of time. Moreover, at least that many became refugees and had to leave their homeland.

So, let's keep in mind what could be as we adhere to social distancing, shut-ins and even quarantine during the 2020 Coronavirus epidemic. And smile while waiting in the grocery pickup line at your local Kroger store, or trying to get a delivery slot on Instacart. The point is... It might be... just an inconvenience. And also keep in mind that today, as it was for the Irish back in 1845, it was the poor and less privileged who were hit the hardest.

Someone once said that the way to a man's heart, is thru his stomach. This is indeed interesting at this point in time. I have witnessed, and I am fairly certain that you have too... the countless images and news clips of long lines of people waiting to receive food handouts. And this after only a few weeks of social distancing and staying at home. And yes, I know much has been made about the difficulty in finding toilet paper but, believe me... the real issue is food. And it is kind of scary when you think of it. But many near fistfights and worse have resulted from grocery store squabbles. So, for a moment, think of that on a global scale.

So how do we go from peaceful congregation and distant love to such violent behavior? Well, I don't suppose to have the answer to that but, do find it somewhat puzzling how loving families and individuals can act this way. And to a degree, I silently wonder... about nations.

Looking back at my childhood... I can remember feeding the chickens and noticing how quickly the feathers would fly if a young poulette got a bit too close to the food of the lead hen. Not to mention feeding the dogs. All-in-all food, or at least the feeling that it is becoming scarce, or about to be taken away... is at the heart of fading love.

I wonder how many of you remember feeling a bit slighted or less loved when your little sister or brother got the last portion of your favorite dish. And we can all identify with the chore of dividing the candy bar. Oh, do I remember that! My mom would say something like... ok then, you divide it, but let your brother gets first pick. Anyway, you see what I mean... It that fading love again. But that was when we were kids, right! Actually no... it does not stop there.

Strangely, food can also be the catalyst for budding and sometimes loving, even lasting friendships. How often have you said to someone whom you like to know better... let's do lunch, or what are you doing for dinner? Well... you get my drift.

Love...

Anyway, let me share a story of love that is actually close to my heart... at the very least, this incident, though far in my distant past, has played a part in making me who I am today. I guess I was about sixteen years old or so. And as I recall became grief stricken and a bit broken-hearted after having read the story of Romeo and Juliette.

After so many years, perhaps it is shameful to admit it, but I was never lucky at love. Seemingly, things would get all mixed up, and almost always resulted unhappy endings. How does that old saying go? Seems like... the good die young. Well, for a time, it seemed to me... to be the story of my life, as perhaps it did to many other young men growing up at that time.

You know... when you stop and take a good look around, it is really strange how some things are so easy for some, and yet so unfulfilling for others. And stranger still, that this often happens at the same time. Think back to the Irish Potato Famine for a moment... did you know that two years after the initial strife of that horrible time in history, somewhere around 1847, records indicate that common food items of that time, things like peas, beans, rabbits, fish and honey were regularly exported from Ireland, even as people in the countryside suffered from hunger.

Ah... the countryside, now that is where I most enjoy spending time. And as a kid growing up, a place where seldom I ventured very far away from. However, after being out on my own for a while, I do recall wandering into the crowded streets of the city. Admittedly, it was culture shock 101 for this teenage country boy. So, for a time, I just walked around asking people about the sights and nice places to eat. Most were friendly and said try that cozy little diner at the end of the street... so that is where I went.

It was one of those on the street seat-yourself-places. And it sat up kind of high too, giving one a great view of passersby. I looked around, found an empty table and sat down facing the street. Somehow, seeing other people made me feel less alone. It was about then when I found myself looking into the eyes of a beautiful lady standing on the sidewalk by the window. And to this day... images of her are still indelibly etched upon the walls of my memory. The sheen of her hair, the sparkle in her eyes and glistening soft lips are but a few of the happy thoughts that flood my mind.

We have all had awkward moments, but when I first saw her... my eyes uncontrollably followed her beautiful cheek bones, soft shadows just under her chin, and then down to the sheer perfection of her body covered by a long silky dress. Perhaps, this all happened in a few seconds, but like the stab of a rusty sword... the pain from thoughts of never seeing her again left everlasting scars upon my foolish heart. Seemingly, I remember muttering some sort of hello, but as I said, it was awkward at best. She smiled but, said nothing. And maybe, sensing my inability to keep the conversation going turned to walk away. It escapes me now of just where my next words came from but, with all the bravery of a Knight's-Errant... I blurted out... Do you come here often? Then what was a few seconds of silence, seemed like an eternity... and she said, yes, quite often but, I have not seen you here before!

Oh! Well, I have never been here before. But heard that the food is good.

Quickly she replied, Yeah, it is really good. What are you having?

I... I am not sure there are so many choices. Could, could you suggest something?

Our conversation went on and I am not sure about the rest of it... but luckily, we ended up having lunch. Nearly two hours passed by in a flash when she said I must get back to work. A kind of sadness came over me as she was walking away... but in that instance, our eyes met. She said. Maybe I will run into you again here!

Well suffice to say, I made sure to see here again, and again. And as time went on... we enjoyed many great meals there and would often sit and talk for hours... reminiscing about life, the things we had done, the things we hoped to do, and about things that perhaps, would never be.

Time and again I was often asked... How in the world were you able to get so close to such a beauty woman? Truth is, as grateful as I was to have known such a charming lady... I don't really know. As I said before, I was never lucky at love. So, perhaps my honesty imparted a frail attempt of romance. You see, when your past is shrouded by such humble beginnings... you learn to walk a bit more slowly and speak softer. I am not sure that I realized it at that time so long ago... but now, I know that gentleness plays a part in romance.

Once during a moment of silence in what were usually very talkative times, she asked... what are you thinking about? My mind used to, and still does wander endlessly... usually into situations of things that most likely... will never be. I smiled and said, I was just... daydreaming of you... Really, she said... tell me about it. I smiled and said ah... I will sometimes.

I was a bit shy, but I did tell her what I was thinking about. I wrote it down in a letter and mailed it to her. In those days, social media was not even a distant thought. And mail could take several days, particularly in rural areas. I later learned that she really liked my letter... so much so... that she told her friends about it.

She often asked, do you write a lot? And why don't you try and get your writing published. But as I said, it was really a long time ago, and quite frankly, few would lend an ear to a struggling African American boy trying to make his way on borrowed money. She continued to ask me questions and shared my letter... as well as a few other pieces of my writing with her friends.

Somewhere along the way, someone suggested I submit my work to the local paper using another name... a penname if you will.

In time... I actually used several different names, and after converting the letter into a poem I renamed it. "Daydreams... with love".

It goes...

Romance

Daydreams... with love

I wander the empty roads and streets
coming from nowhere, with nowhere to go
following only paths... that keep the wind at my back
...and

I have dreamed... of ladies like you
all full of life, charm, style and, that gentle touch...
their heads held high, awaiting the kiss of the morning sun

I have watched the birds that fly the skies
Studied the fish that swim the seas
Admiring how effortlessly they swoop and glide... in a world where I could never be
...and

I have dreamed of ladies like you

With bright shining eyes, silk soft hair
and Angel-like voices that whisper enchanting word of love
I have picked Springtime's pretty blooms
Bathed in the Summer's sun, adored Autumn's yellow gold and cursed the Winter's cold wind
...and
I have dreamed... of ladies like you
With the beauty of life, soft smooth skin, and caressing arm that tease in the night
I have slept the night thru in dew-drenched fields, dined on bread alone... all the
while chasing fond memories with the peasant's cheap wine
...and
I have dreamed of ladies like you
Hoping never to stir fear, but to warm the heart, slowly arouse the imagination...
And gently haunt the soul
I have endured the pain from the bite of love's sharp teeth
Licked the wounds of loneliness while wearing the scars of desire
...and
I have dreamed... of ladies like you
only to be counted among the many on whom love seldom smiles
...so
I wander the empty roads and streets
Coming from nowhere, with nowhere to go
Following only paths that keep the wind at my bank...
...and
I dream... of ladies like you