

The SAD YOUNG MAN

**IN A FINE BIG HOUSE AT THE END OF OUR STREET
LIVED A HANDSOME BLUE-EYED YOUNG MAN
WHO HAD MORE MONEY THAN WE COULD EVER IMAGINE.
HE HAD A PRIVATE PETTING ZOO WITH THREE PANDAS;
AND A CAR SO LONG THAT IT COULD NOT MANEUVER WITHOUT HELP
AROUND CERTAIN SHARP CORNERS IN THE TOWN;
AND GAMES AND TOYS AND LADY FRIENDS AND PRIVATE CHEFS;
AND A SAILBOAT, AND A PRIVATE RAILROAD CAR,
AND HIS OWN OFFICE BUILDING.**

**BUT FOR ALL HE POSSESSED, THE YOUNG MAN WAS SAD
BECAUSE HE HAD NO MUSIC:
NOT THE LEAST TRACE OF A TUNE WAS IN HIM
NOT THE HINT OF A SONG OR A LILT OR A HUM.
THOUGH HE OWNED MORE CD'S THAN THE STATE OF OHIO,
AND WENT WITH HIS FRIENDS TO CONCERTS
IN PLACES LIKE PARIS OR BERLIN OR VIENNA,
AND KNEW ALL THE NAMES OF ALL THE BANDS,
HIS HEART WAS AN EMPTY TUNELESS PLACE.**

***I AM IN IT, NOT OF IT, I KNOW THIS,
HE WOULD SAY TO HIMSELF: I WATCH ALWAYS
FROM THE OUTSIDE, JUST ON THE OTHER SIDE
OF THAT GLASS THAT'S SO HARD TO BREAK.
I LOVE MY PANDAS AND MY BOAT AND MY CARS
BUT MY MONEY CANNOT BUY WHAT I LOVE MOST.***

**AND SOMETIMES WE WOULD SEE HIM STANDING AT HIS WINDOW
ON THOSE SUMMER EVENINGS WHEN THE REST OF US
WOULD GATHER IN FRONT OF EDDIE DOLAN'S GARAGE
AND LISTEN TO EDDIE'S FATHER AND HIS UNCLES
AND BLIND JIM CREEGAN FROM THE NEXT STREET OVER
AND OLD NORA WHOSE DRESSES WERE ALWAYS THE COLOR OF DUST
DO WHAT THEY ALWAYS DID ON SUMMER EVENINGS
WITH FLUTES AND FIDDLES AND ACCORDIONS AND WHISTLES
AND VOICES.**

**AND THERE WOULD BE DANCING AND MUSIC UNTIL VERY LATE
WHEN AT LAST THE MOSQUITOES FROM OVER IN DEAD CAT SWAMP
MOCKING IN THEIR HIGH-PITCHED INDISPUTABLE WAY
OUR SPRAYS AND SCENTED CANDLES AND LOTIONS
WOULD ARRIVE TO TAKE CONTROL
AND DRIVE ALL HUMAN EFFORT FROM THE WORLD
INSISTING THAT WE TAKE OUR ENJOYMENT INSIDE
TO LEAVE THE OUTDOOR FROLIC TO THEM.**

The SAD YOUNG MAN

ONE COOL SEPTEMBER NIGHT WE WERE SURPRISED TO SEE
THE SAD YOUNG MAN COME OUT OF HIS HOUSE
HOLDING SOMETHING AND APPROACHING US.
TOMMY O WHO WORKED AT THE TENNIS CLUB
KNEW THE YOUNG MAN SLIGHTLY
AND GREETED HIM ON OUR BEHALF:

- *NICE TO SEE YOU, TOMMY O SAID,
AND WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE? HOPE OUR MUSIC WASN'T TOO LOUD.*
- *NOT AT ALL, SAID THE SAD YOUNG MAN, IT'S WONDERFUL AS ALWAYS
BUT ... ACTUALLY I CAME TO SEE IF I COULD JOIN IN.*
AND HE PUT THE SOMETHING DOWN AND IT WAS A BANJO CASE.

POORLY PREPARED TO DEAL WITH THE UNEXPECTED
WE LOOKED AT ONE ANOTHER AND PRETENDED TO TAKE DRINKS
FROM LONG-EMPTY GLASSES
AS THE HALF-MOON PEERED CURIOUSLY OVER CASEY'S WAREHOUSE
WAITING FOR SOMETHING INTELLIGENT TO HAPPEN.

NORA'S PHONE RANG SEVERAL TIMES BUT SHE NEVER LEFT TO ANSWER IT.
- *IF IT'S IMPORTANT THEY'LL CALL BACK, SHE SAID TO NO ONE IN PARTICULAR.*

FINALLY BLIND CREEGAN, TO BREAK THE SILENCE, SAID:

- *IS THAT A BANJO I HEAR RATTLING IN THAT CASE?*
- *INDEED IT IS, SAID THE SAD YOUNG MAN, AND I WAS WONDERING ...*

- *DO YOU PLAY OUR MUSIC ON IT? CREEGAN RUDELY INTERRUPTED.*

- *I HOPE SO, SAID THE SAD YOUNG MAN, AND WE LAUGHED NERVOUSLY.
I'VE BEEN TAKING LESSONS AT THE CONSERVATORY FOR A FEW MONTHS NOW.*

YOU COULD HEAR GASPS
WHICH FORTUNATELY THE SAD YOUNG MAN
SEEMED NOT TO NOTICE.

- *THEN TAKE IT OUT, WHY DON'T YOU, SAID CREEGAN QUICKLY,
AND GIVE US A TUNE FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE?
IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE I HEARD A BANJO,
NOT SINCE CONNIE BROSAN PASSED AWAY
TEN OR FIFTEEN ... MAYBE TWENTY YEARS AGO.*

THE SAD YOUNG MAN GENTLY OPENED THE CASE

The SAD YOUNG MAN

**AND LIFTED OUT THE BANJO, WHICH GLITTERED AND SHONE
AND TRAPPED A MILLION HALF-MOONS
IN ALL ITS SHINY METAL.**

**- I HAD TO TRADE ONE OF MY PANDAS FOR THIS, HE SAID.
I HOPE IT WILL BE WORTH IT.**

HE PASSED IT AROUND FOR US TO EXAMINE.

**- IT'S A BEAUTY ALL RIGHT, SAID JOE HEALEY THE FLUTE PLAYER.
MY UNCLE TIM HAD ONE LIKE THAT
BUT MY AUNT TESS WAS JEALOUS OF IT
AND MADE HIM GIVE IT AWAY ...
THEY SAY IT BROKE HIS HEART.**

**THE SAD YOUNG MAN SAT DOWN ON A FOLDING CHAIR
THAT SOMEBODY HAD BROUGHT OUT FOR HIM
AND STRUMMED THE BANJO A BIT TO CHECK THE TUNING.**

**- GIVE ME A D, WOULD YOU PLEASE? HE SAID TO JOE HEALEY
WHO OBLIGED.**

**THERE, THAT'S NOT TOO BAD, SAID THE SAD YOUNG MAN
AFTER MAKING A FEW ADJUSTMENTS TO THE TUNERS.**

**- THE A IS A LITTLE FLAT, SAID BLIND CREEGAN HELPFULLY.
YOU MIGHT WANT TO GIVE IT A BIT OF TURN.**

**- THANKS, SAID THE SAD YOUNG MAN.
I'M STILL GETTING THE HANG OF ALL THIS.**

**WE WAITED POLITELY
IN AN INFINITELY LONG AND UNCOMFORTABLE SPACE.
NORA'S PHONE RANG AGAIN, TWICE; SHE TOLD IT TO SHUT UP, AND IT DID.**

- HOW ABOUT ...

**THE SAD YOUNG MAN POISED HIS DELICATELY TRANSLUCENT PLECTRUM
AND BEGAN TO PLAY.**

**IT WAS JUST THE ONE TUNE
AND WHEN WE THOUGHT IT WAS OVER
WE APPLAUDED POLITELY.**

**- HAVE YOU ANOTHER ONE? EDDIE'S FATHER ASKED
MORE TO BREAK THE SILENCE THAN ANYTHING.**

The SAD YOUNG MAN

- ANOTHER ... ? THE YOUNG MAN WAS CONFUSED.

- YOU KNOW, ANOTHER TUNE FOR US, EXPLAINED EDDIE'S FATHER.

**- OH NO, SAID THE YOUNG MAN. JUST THE ONE FOR NOW.
MY TEACHER SAYS HE DOESN'T WANT ME TO OVERDO IT.**

**BACK WENT THE SHINY BANJO INTO ITS VELVET-LINED CASE
AND BACK DOWN THE STREET WENT THE SAD YOUNG MAN.**

**WE ARGUED IN A MORE OR LESS FRIENDLY WAY THE NEXT EVENING
AS TO WHETHER IT WAS "LARK IN THE MORNING"
OR "DONNYBROOK FAIR"
THAT THE SAD YOUNG MAN HAD PLAYED
BLIND CREEGAN WAS AS USUAL UNCOMPROMISING:
WE WERE ALL WRONG, HE SAID.
IT WAS A REEL, AND HIS MONEY WAS ON "THE SHASKEEN".
BUT CREEGAN'S NEMESIS PATSY QUIRK RESPECTFULLY DIFFERED
AND SAID IT WAS OBVIOUSLY THE "STACK OF BARLEY",
ALTHOUGH WHY THE SAD YOUNG MAN HAD PLAYED A G TUNE
IN THE KEY OF D FLAT
WAS SOMETHING HE HADN'T YET FIGURED OUT ...**

**FINALLY THERE WAS NO MORE HUMOR IN IT.
WE HAD LAUGHED OURSELVES OUT.
WHAT EVENTUALLY WAS LEFT WAS NO LONGER FUNNY:
IT WAS A DARK SCARY THING WE DIDN'T WANT TO SEE.**

**- AH WELL, GOD KNOWS, AT LEAST HE TRIED, SAID JOE HEALEY AT LAST
TO GENERAL NODDING OF AGREEMENT.**

**- IMAGINE ...WHAT IT MUST BE LIKE ...
BEGAN PATSY QUIRK IN A QUIET HORRIFIED VOICE:
NO WONDER HE'S ...**

**NO NEED TO FINISH THE THOUGHT:
IT WAS THE SAME ONE WE ALL HAD.
THE SESSION ENDED EARLY THAT NIGHT.**

**WE NOTICED THAT THE MISSING PANDA RETURNED SOON AFTER
TO THE SAD YOUNG MAN'S PERSONAL PETTING ZOO.**

The SAD YOUNG MAN

**TOMMY O STOPPED BY A FEW TIMES
TO INVITE HIM BACK TO THE SESSION
BUT THE YOUNG MAN ALWAYS POLITELY REFUSED.**

**- YOU GUYS ARE TOO GOOD FOR ME,
WAS ALL THE SAD YOUNG MAN WOULD SAY.
BUT TOMMY O HEARD BEHIND HIS WORDS:**

***I CANNOT EVER HOPE TO FILL
THAT EMPTY SPACE IN MY HEART.
I SHOULD NOT HAVE TRIED.***

**AND TO TELL THE GOD'S HONEST TRUTH
OUR SESSIONS WERE NEVER QUITE THE SAME AGAIN.
IT WAS ALMOST AS IF WE WERE NOW THINKING TOO HARD
ABOUT SOMETHING WE HAD TAKEN FOR GRANTED BEFORE -
ONCE WE RECOGNIZED THE GIFT IN IT
IT BECAME TOO FRAGILE; IN A WAY, AS CREEGAN SAID,
WE GREW TO FEAR IT,
AND NO ONE CAN LOVE THE THING HE FEARS.**

**AND THEN WE HEARD THAT THE SAD YOUNG MAN
WAS DEVOTING HIS LIFE
TO MAKING EVEN MORE MONEY.
WE NOTICED ANOTHER SPORTS CAR IN HIS GARAGE
AND A WOMBAT (OR MAYBE IT WAS A WALLABY) IN THE PETTING ZOO;
A NEW SHOPPING CENTER WITH HIS NAME ON IT
WAS REPORTED IN THE NEXT TOWN.**

**IN HIS HOUSE, THE WINDOWS THAT FACED OUR STREET
WHERE ONCE HE USED TO STAND LISTENING TO US
WERE NOW COVERED OVER WITH SOME HEAVY DARK DRAPERY.**

**SUDDENLY A MONTH OR SO LATER
THE SAD YOUNG MAN MOVED OUT OF THE HOUSE.
THOSE OF OUR NEIGHBORS WHO COULD BE RELIED UPON TO KNOW
SAID THAT HE HAD SOLD IT FOR MORE MONEY
THAN ALL OF US PUT TOGETHER
WOULD EVER HAVE IN OUR LIFETIMES.**

**THE PETTING ZOO WAS NOW EMPTY AND QUIET;
THE GARAGE WAS VACANT, AND THE HEAVY CURTAINS WERE GONE
FROM THE WINDOWS THAT NOW LOOKED DOWN ON OUR SESSIONS
WITH BLANK INDIFFERENCE.**

The SAD YOUNG MAN

**INQUIRIES WERE MADE
BUT NO ONE COULD FIND OUT FOR SURE
WHERE THE SAD YOUNG MAN HAD GONE.**

**THERE WERE RUMORS, REPORTS, SIGHTINGS -
CHICAGO, TEXAS, BRAZIL, CANADA
MAYBE ALL OF THEM, MAYBE NONE OF THEM; IN ANY EVENT
WE SAW NEITHER HIM NOR HIS BANJO AGAIN;
NORA'S NEPHEW REPORTED IT WAS FOR SALE ON E-BAY.**

**- *WHEREVER HE'S GONE, I HOPE HE'S HAPPY,*
SAID CREEGAN ONE NIGHT AFTER A SESSION
TO A GENERAL CHORUS OF AMENS.**

**- *BUT YOU WONDER,* SAID PATSY QUIRK, *YOU HAVE TO WONDER ...*
AND NOBODY SAID ANYTHING MORE.**

**AND THE MORAL OF THE STORY
(IF ONE IS REALLY REQUIRED)
IS HOW THANKFUL WE SHOULD BE FOR THE GIFT OF MUSIC
A GREAT GIFT OR A SMALL GIFT, A GIFT ALL THE SAME.
YOU CAN HAVE THE WORLD'S WEIGHT IN GOLD,
BUT WITH NO MUSIC IN YOUR HEART**

YOU MIGHT AS WELL HAVE SAWDUST.

= o 0 o =