



“Man and His Farm” and “Pattern, Recognition”

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Man and His Farm

Well, it's a sunset to beat them all, blood red and tearing the sky apart. It could be the same as any other evening but for the missing sounds. No cows trudging, no shouts from the boys as some of the wilder ones veer off the well-trodden path down the hill towards the parlour. The absent hum of the milking machine is louder than the sound itself.

Underneath the huge old horse chestnut tree that guards the entrance to the farm, sit remnants of where the girls, his grandchildren, once played. Old tin cans, the Homestead paper signs long since peeled off, rusting beside each other. They'd play shop and beg him to buy from them.

'No, granddad, buy from me, mine's cheaper!' or 'no, that's not right, we want the list like granny makes for you. Where's the list?'

Jesus, he can hardly bear to think of it. Those children so bright, so full of laughter and only years later did they tell him what had been going on at home, did all the sewage spill out. Infecting the entire family.

No matter how much he squints, how hard he tries, they are ghosts, those girls. Had they ever really existed? He had thought they were happy. His own children, split up, one dead, some not even talking. How had it happened? And not one of them, not one, would stay and tend the farm. Years of work, years of loving and hating the land, providing for them and not one of them wanted to carry it on.

The eldest girl, he forgets her name all the time, is waiting for him. The one he once thought might take it over. She looks like a stranger and in many ways she is.

'It must be a sad day for you Granddad. The end of an era.'

'Aye, it is I suppose. How as your mother couldn't make it?'

‘She was afraid Uncle Dave would be here I guess’, she shrugs the question off, as tired as he is of their ongoing battles.

‘I used to love it here you know. I’ll really miss coming back. Do you know who’s bought it, what their plans are?’

‘I don’t. And I don’t want to. It’s theirs now. You mustn’t come back here, tormenting them.’
‘I suppose.’

Then, a deep breath, picking his words carefully, ‘Do they know, the rest of them? You’re very young for all this.’

‘I don’t know. Sure most of them don’t talk. Look Granddad, I want to take care of you now, it’s my turn. I can do it.’

As they drive out the bumpy laneway for the last time, the girl, this child, now a young woman with pink hair and metal in her face, and lace on her hands and arms stops the car and gets out closing the gate behind them. When she returns he sees her looking in rear view mirror with longing. He settles in for the long car journey that will take them to her house, to his new home. The man starts a rosary, silently praying to Our Lady for the courage to someday tell this girl so full of forgiveness that he loves her too.

Pattern, Recognition

I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the pavement. I see it is there. I fall in — it’s a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am.

I walk down the street.

Go through the grind, the routine, the humdrum. Keep to the mundane, I know this. I can cope with this. Wake up, get up, go to work, clean toilets, eat lunch, more toilets, go home, fall asleep watching TV. Drag myself off the sofa and into bed and set the alarm.

Sometimes this is interspersed with meeting mates down the pub. Mates? Chums, pals, buddies...none of those. OK. Start again. Sometimes the routine includes meeting wankers down the local. A competition to see who can moan the most. About anything. The weather, the job, the boss, the other wankers who haven’t made it to the pub.

Nothing breaks the monotony. Sometimes at work the intercom calls for a blocked toilet to be cleared. Endless days melt into weeks and months. Drip. Drip. Drip.

There is a deep hole in the pavement.

And now, the nagging starts. Whispers at first — gnawing at the framework, the structure that keeps everything in place; that keeps me functioning. Work is not enough, the couple of pints with the wankers aren't enough; it never has been. This is no kind of life for me. I stop meeting them, stop going out; get up only to go to work. Earn money to pay the rent. And have some left over. What to spend it on? The whispers have become demanding and aggressive, in constant battle and turmoil, leaving me exhausted, fatigued and weakened. They have chewed through the fabric of my mind leaving a gaping, bottomless hole where my resolve should be.

I see it is there.

Go and score, it's just one hit. Nobody else need ever know. Fuck everyone else. They're just casualties, weaker than you. It will erase the numbness, the emptiness, the fucking boredom. Nobody needs to know. But I will know — I know what this means. All the scarred relationships defenceless to yet another ambush of broken promises. Like shards of glass they become sharper and jagged with multiple shattering. They will pierce too deep. It will be too much. There is no resilience left.

I know what this means.

I fall in — it's a habit.

My fingers dial the number. My legs make the journey. I take the hit.

This time there are no parties, no lights, no laughter. There is nothing from which to suspend the illusion that this will end anywhere good. But like any determined and ambitious individual I throw myself back into my calling with a vicious intent. The binges are longer, the hit less intense. The afterglow is replaced by the hazy consequences I try quietly to ignore. I fall further down the hole, like Alice, confused and exhilarated. Unlike Alice I don't end up in Wonderland. I never do.

I open my eyes.

The weapons I sharpened execute their undertaking expertly and efficiently. There is nobody left. They could not take it anymore. I am empty and alone.

I know where I am.

Back to recovery. Listening to the same old miserable stories. We are failures. Doomed to always find ourselves back here. Sharing 'experience, strength and hope'. Well I haven't got

much strength. Hope scuttled dejectedly away long ago. And experience teaches me the right things to say to get outside again.

After a few months I am released. Back to the real world, to work, to another cleaning job. I believe it is called life.

I do want it to be different this time but I know how dangerous hope can be.

I walk down the street. I know there will be a deep hole and I will keep my eyes open for it. I promise to try hard to avoid it. But mine is a circular story — I will probably fall in.

It's a habit.