

The Watchman

By Nick Solari

It was my duty to ring the bells.

For the Angelus and the time of day, the gatherings and the exorcisms, the weddings and the funerals. I rang the bells.

“These bells, Isaac” Father Benjamin had said, “they warned our boys about the British.”

The words squeezed their way through the yellowed teeth of a prideful grin. What Boston churchman didn't say such things about their bells?

Of all the clergy in the rectory, I was always the first to rise. I thought my eagerness would be well received by my superiors, as it had been in the seminary, but instead it was only why I rang the bells. My body “worked like clockwork,” they had said, and so my body worked the clock. My eyes opened mechanically at 4:45 AM to the words that had been frescoed to the roof above my bed:

“Nunc autem manet fides, spes, caritas, tria haec maior autem his est caritas’ - I Corinthios 13:13.”

Father had me memorize the verse from the King James.

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity,” his croaking voice had said. “These three; but the greatest of these is charity.” It meant “love endures forever,” I told myself. That made it easier to remember.

After I read the words, I would kneel by my bed for my prayers, as any holy man would. Though, I do not consider myself a particularly holy man. Only when I had finally crossed myself,

To read more, or to offer publication, email: contact@nicholasrsolari.com

firmly enough to feel the places on my body where my fingers had been, would I check the pocket-watch on the table: 4:49, it always read - without ever a minute of difference.

Moving from the rectory to the chapel, I wound the watch in my hands, and the ridged knob left its marks in my numbing fingers. Sometimes, I would rub my fingertips together, grumbling that the springs were wound too tight. I don't know if that's true. I don't know much about watches.

In the chapel I'd pass between the pews to the belfry door. I'd turn the key in the lock that was built to keep out young lovers. There weren't many young people in the town, I often thought, unfastening my umber robe from its hook. There were never as many as there ought to have been.

When the cloth was wrapped around me and my cord was tied, I'd shiver at the frigid air. Then I'd shiver at the silence. The mornings were always cold, even during the warm times, and the chapel was always empty - always before the bells. What little light came through the colored windows in the brighter months gave me some comfort there, but more often these things which I describe to you were done in darkness. Nonetheless, my feet knew the way.

They knew the way up the dimly lit spiral of wooden stairs. They knew the sagging spots in the center of the steps that the men before me had made, and they knew the creaking protests of the cedar underfoot. They knew the length of the climb, the toll it took on the legs, and the time it took to complete. Twenty-three seconds, it was. Sometimes it was more, but never less.

Like the light from the windows, the view from the tower's top varied by season. In the winter months, only the closest graves in the yard could be seen. But in the summer, when the fog permitted, visibility went as far as the gates. Every morning I took a long look over the yard to pass the time, one glance at my pocket watch for security's sake, and then my hands were on the rope at 5 o'clock. Five slow rings. To the second. Every morning.

To read more, or to offer publication, email: contact@nicholasrsolari.com

Every morning but one.

It was one of the darker, February mornings when I first saw the Tall Man.

...

To read more, or to offer publication, email: contact@nicholasrsolari.com