

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss

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The Edits

As I promised last month, I'm going to talk about the edits on "The Rise and Fall of Man." I received them on February 7th.

The edit was not a full edit, not even a full overview edit. It is what the editor calls a manuscript diagnostic. I read the editor's e-mail with trepidation. I was pleasantly pleased as I read. He said that overall it is in good shape.

He felt that even though it is a collection of short stories it held together as a whole. That there was lots of feeling in the stories and that it was a good read. I couldn't have been happier.

All of course wasn't perfect. He pointed out two places that needed work – both of which make sense when I look back at how I wrote the book.

The first two chapters of the book have lots of information, but not much heart. There is good stuff there, but it's dry. Why does this make sense? I wrote this novel as part of the National Novel Writing Month. These were the

chapters I wrote while I was trying to get into the swing of writing 2,000 words a day. I was working so hard at just getting words out that I wasn't letting the stories tell themselves. As I got going in week two, the heart came back and the stories are much more "people sharing their lives."

The last chapter of the book is the other problem. It is short, confusing, and left the editor wondering what was going on. This too makes sense. I wrote the last chapter on the last day of the month, while trying to get done before midnight struck. I wasn't focusing on wrapping things up, I was intent on getting to my word count and calling it done. While the stories do have heart, for they are testimonies on the positive legacy of man, they don't tie up all the loose ends.

The middle of the book is in good shape. That doesn't mean that with a full, detailed edit there won't be lots of changes there, too, but it does mean that my stream of conscientiousness writing, without going back to evaluate and edit, was pretty good.

So what does all that mean? It means I need to write some new stories, rewrite some of the stories I've already got, and clean up the rest.

John David, my editor, recommended a new book for me to get and use, "Self-Editing For Fiction Writers," by Renni Browne & Dave King. I've purchased the book and it now sits on my desk, but still unopened. I'm wondering when I will have time to read it.

I've also started thinking about what new stories to write to pep up the first two chapters. It is a little freeing starting from such a short novel. Instead of having to worry about what to cut to make it short enough, I can add to what I have in an effort to pull it together.

I've written a few new stories for chapter two. Chapter one is about technology, while chapter two is about the dying world. So here for your enjoyment are three of the new stories.

Doug

John Cunningham

Excerpts from his diary, June 12th, 2037

It's never gone. Sometimes it's less. Sometimes I'm too busy doing something else to notice, but always, as I lay down to rest, it is the last thing I'm aware of before I sleep. I know my parents worry about where our next meal will come from. I know sometimes they are even hungrier than I am, but they always make sure that I get my share. But that's not what I worry about.

Sometimes I wish I had been the one to not wake up that morning – my brother doesn't have to be hun-

gry any more. Sometimes I imagine that I won't wake up the next morning. That's what I worry about – my parents. I remember how my mother cried when my brother didn't wake up. I remember how they gave me his portion at dinner, and maybe some of theirs, too.

I worry about my parents, about how sad they'll be when I'm gone. How life won't have any purpose anymore if I'm not there to fuss over. I wonder if they will stop trying and just not wake up, too.

Every Last Drop

By Jessica Logan

Modern Economy, January 2176

It happened fifty years ago – peak oil. Most people didn't notice, but the oil companies did. Some started investing in solar and others bio. The efficiency of cars kept getting better and as prices rose, people drove less.

Economists call it supply and demand. As supply goes down the price goes up. As prices go up, demand goes down. Supply and demand stay in equilibrium and all is well. The economists, however, didn't tell us the whole story. When a supply is a necessity, the equation can't balance.

Twenty-five years ago we turned the corner. Despite attempts to increase supply – fracking, shale-oil extraction, biodiesel, and synthetic-oil – and attempts to reduce demand – better gas mileage, alternate fuels, and reduced driving – the supply still wasn't enough.

I remember it all too well. First were the lines – sitting in the passenger seat of my dad's car I learned several new words as my dad voiced his options about the government, oil companies, and the guy who thought he would cut in line.

The next week the lines were shorter and the prices had doubled. That was the week I stopped playing baseball – mom said we couldn't afford to "drive all over town." The lines shrunk a little over the next three weeks and the price continued to climb slowly. Twice the two gas stations in town ran out all together.

One day that Spring I woke as the front door slammed. I jumped out of bed to see what was happening, but stopped short of opening my bedroom door when I heard my dad's bellows. Between his screams and my mother's attempts to calm him, I learned that someone had siphoned all the gas from the car, which my dad had filled the night before. After coming to terms with the situation my dad grabbed a gas can and slammed the door again on his way out. I was home from school before he made it back.

A Letter to Grandma

Bobby Lee, August 9th, 2052

It was my birthday today. I wasn't expecting much – a few hugs and a swat on my backside from my dad for luck. And that's what I got before I went to school. My first surprise was when I opened my lunch pail. There was the half a sandwich that I get on good days and a quarter of an apple. The surprise was hiding under them – a cookie.

I know what you're thinking, "Big deal. You got a cookie." You know what, it was a big deal. The last time I had a cookie was at Christmas when we visited you – that was a spritz. My birthday cookie was an oatmeal one with raisins. There was a note with it. I didn't even have to read it to know that you had brought it by.

It wasn't just the cost of gas that went up. Almost everything went up as shipping costs went up. Mom planted a garden and I helped keep it weed-free, while the price of vegetables at the store doubled. By July my dad had parked his car and started taking the bus – waking at four in the morning so he could get to work by eight. By September the cost of riding the bus had doubled and he usually had to stand on all three of the buses he took. November brought longer rides because the buses were full, and even higher prices.

As Christmas approached I was wondering if I would get any presents that year, in fact I was often wondering if there would be enough to eat for dinner. The wondering stopped when my dad came home broken. He didn't yell – he just came in and sat in his chair and was silent. He had lost his job. That winter was long and hard. He got a few part-time jobs, but often the cost to get to the job was more than they paid.

A year after the gas prices had started their run away increase, we sold our house. We moved into the city where my dad had found a new job. I say sold, but in truth we just walked away from it. No one wanted a house in the suburbs – half the houses on our street had "For Sale" signs in their yards. We moved from our 2500 square-foot house to a two bedroom apartment.

Over the next five years we move four more times chasing the ever more elusive jobs. Since I've left home, my mom and dad have moved three more times. I live in a small one bedroom apartment, ride my bike to work, and haven't been to visit my parents in three years because it's just too expensive, but I do video chat with them every weekend.

When I got home I got my second surprise. My mother met me outside and told me to close my eyes. I was so excited. She led me inside and then said I could look. I gasped when I opened them. It's blue with splotches of green. The seat is covered with bright blue duct tape. I grabbed it and pushed it outside. It squeaks when I peddle it and when I coast there is this clicking sound.

Today is my birthday – the best birthday I've ever had.