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The Station

by Caroline Sims

A solitary man walked a decided path. His only companion being the shadow that followed him. He had walked many miles over days and now his weariness was evident in his gait. Apprehension of the long journey home eclipsed the man's thoughts as he walked slower steps and zipped up his overcoat to guard himself from the hastening chill of the evening.

The weather, unusually mild for a September day, cast a gentle light over a landscape of a changing season. Evening was now beginning to loom, causing the shadows to darken with the fading light of the day. A more sombre atmosphere began to emerge, creating an invisible tension in the ether, which was somehow discernible to the senses.

From afar, the silhouette of a railway station became visible, illuminated from the amber glow of the windows. His want of comfort and warmth beckoned him decidedly to walk towards the station door. At last, his destination was in sight and the late night train would take him home.

The door opened into a warm waiting room. A fire burning in the hearth and gas lanterns offered the comforting welcome to the weary traveller, that he had envisaged. Placing his bag on the wooden bench, he sat down, easing the pressure from his feet and sat back looking about the room. The ticket office, dimly lit, denoted a nostalgic charm of an era gone by, holding a sense of bygone years. Only the sound of the station clock and the occasional crackling of the wood on the fire were audible which highlighted the surrounding silence even more.

The station master appeared in the ticket office and approached the counter precisely. Stepping onto the lit area, his countenance denoted an aged man, wearing a carefully ironed uniform, with a presence which commanded respect.

Greeting the traveller, he inquired about his journey and acknowledged the last train's arrival at 23:00. This train was always on time, and on its departure, the station master would be able to carry out his final ritual of closing his station and returning to his snug behind the office.

Their conversation centred upon the events of the day. The station master spoke of his responsibilities, his duties and handed the traveller a small bespoke notebook, recounting the history of the station.

The last train arrived in a billow of steam, which engulfed the platform. The man boarded the train and sat down immediately, needing time to recuperate. As the train gathered speed, he reflected upon the day. Glancing down, he realised that he still held the small notebook in his hand. At once, he went to the window of the carriage. The night air, waved past him as he lent out of the carriage to look back.

All that was visible was a dark empty silhouette of a disused station. Drawing away.....he wondered if he had walked from a dream.