

FOREVER
BY
YOUR SIDE



MICHAEL BROWN

Perhaps it was the weight of destiny that united one abandoned adolescent boy and one orphaned canine pup. Having come of age together the two set off to a location deep in the great north woods only to realize they have stumbled into that arcane borderland between good and evil.

Forever By Your Side

by Michael Brown

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Introduction

By-and-by, who among us knows what tomorrow brings? The future, by operational definition, might reach out into some distant place and time, stretch no further than just beyond our view or actually, upon our demise, cease to exist altogether. What fate holds in store for anyone may indeed be welcomed or daunting. When all is said and done, however, does much of it really matter? Yet I submit to you that, amidst the day to day sea of churning insignificance that fills so much of our lives, there can be found something that does truly matter. It is in that place where meaning and purpose come together.

What awaits the reader along the following pages is an account I tell of two orphans, one lad and one canine, who, thru the sway of either Providence or fate, were destined to share their young lives together. The bond that developed between the two early in life was to prove vital, as circumstances compelled them to come of age well before their time. The story needs little commentary as it tells itself all too well. It is retold here in order to remind and reassure the reader of that very truth that can be found intimately woven throughout these pages. It is retold as a portent of the coming age and of that beyond.

For those who believe that there is no dominion of good in this world, let them walk the day with my dog and I and we shall show them where it may be found. And for those who believe that there is no evil power

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lurking about and among us, let them be patient for, in turn, it preys upon us all.

“...Formless were they of another vibration,
existing unseen by the children of earth-men.
Only through blood could they have formed being.
Only through man could they live in the world.
In ages past were they conquered by Masters,
driven below to the place whence they came.
But some there were who remained,
hidden in spaces and planes unknown to man...”

The Emerald Tablets of Thoth
Tablet 8

Prelude

How could this be happening? , she thought, as she ran from the south pasture, up and over a hill and then down towards the farmhouse some four hundred yards away. The delicate yet radiant warmth of the early morning sun did little to mitigate the more dominant and menacing bite of a late autumn's chill. Yet she was hardly concerned for trivial comforts or for her own welfare but rather for the overriding safety and wellbeing of her two young children. Cresting the hill and making her way downward through a meadow rife with lifeless burrs and dying milkweed engulfed in a sea of faded pasture grasses, she could see that they were where she'd left them moments ago, playing in the sandbox in front of their barn. Nearly out of breath she had another three hundred yards or more to run before she could get to them.

"Get into the house!" she screamed to her children. "For God sakes, run!"

Nearly exhausted, she was now tugging on every remaining ounce of strength she could muster, with each succeeding breath drawn more desperately than the one before. The sound of her pursuers echoed from behind. They were near upon her but she dared not turn and look back. She saw what was done to the small herd of sheep left to her care and to the Irish Wolf Hound that was charged with their protection. The image haunted her. *What will become of us...Oh my poor babies* she thought, terror stricken, as she saw them standing

motionless in their sandbox staring in her direction. Confused and helpless, they started to cry as they looked on.

Only two hundred yards more, she thought, but by the sound of her pursuers she feared that they would soon be upon her. *How foolish to move here alone. Would it have been better had we just stayed there than to hide from him in this isolated God forsaken wilderness? What have I done to my children?* She agonized. *No one knows where we are!*

Nothing was to change the reality of the now. As she struggled in a desperate effort to reach her children she felt the whisper of a telling headwind that was to betray their looming fortune. This ominous breeze bore along on its path a haunting chorus of dreadful howls that echoed throughout the surrounding hills and isolate forests. The frightening sounds did not spare the ears of her children who remained motionless where they stood while their tears flowed and events unfolded.

Only one hundred yards more, she thought. *One last fence to cross*. But she could no longer catch her breath. In that all knowing yet fleeting interval, time seemed to shed its measure as fate was to sear its mark. The violent end to a frantic pursuit would soon give way to the peace and acceptance of inexorable resignation. There was but that one terrible step in between. She looked behind.

Chapter 1

In the Beginning

**“Out of suffering have emerged
the strongest souls...”**

Kahlil Gibron

For reasons the reader will soon come to understand, I'll begin this story near its end, as it is said that “Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.” (Seneca). Be it enough to recognize that there are those special and favored few who, while they walk this earth, are enriched beyond all measure as they share an abiding and unshakable bond with another. This is the story of one such pairing.

It was near ten PM on a dark and cool November night. Jedidiah, or Jed as his friends had come to know him, finally had time to sit down and tend to the journal he'd been keeping. It was a rough sketched personal record chronicling notable events that had impacted his young life with many of the entries made since his dog, Molly, and he moved to this place several months earlier. The meeting at the fire hall late that afternoon had served to rattle the entire community. It all began to take on the aura of a bad dream. If it only could have been so. Everything was starting to make sense to the lad. Molly and he were ready for come what may. She remained laying quietly by his side having dozed off for some much needed rest. It seemed like only yesterday

that Molly and he had arrived to this forsaken northland. In the quiet stillness of the moment his mind wandered back in time. He reflected upon the course of fate that brought the two of them together and then eventually to this night...

Abandoned by his mother in infancy and never knowing who his father might be, the lad spent most of his young life moving from foster home to foster home. After a series of failed placements and a runaway or two, the county child welfare office was at its wits end over how to manage this bright but rambunctious orphaned boy. It appeared that, other than thru a court ordered secure placement, the county had nearly run out of options for him. It was at about this time that he met Mrs. White, a kindly widow years past her prime. She was a paunchy, affectionate yet stout woman who had continued, albeit with some difficulty, to operate a small dairy farm after the passing of her husband. She lived with her elderly brother, Earl Jones who did what he could about the farm but he was sickly and frail and could provide very little help. The farmstead was located down the road from the Harder home, the site of the lad's most recent foster care placement. While placed at the Harder home, young Jed got to know Mrs. White and the two seemed to take to one another. He soon found himself working the farm part time before and after school hours helping with the host of chores Mrs. White could no longer perform by herself. Along about that time, for reasons unknown to this writer, the Harder home had its Foster Care license revoked by the

county. At the ripe age of nearly twelve years Jed was about to be uprooted again when Mrs. White and her brother stepped forward and offered to have him come live with them. The county, seizing on the moment, consented, accelerated the certification process and in short order placed this itinerant young lad in the White home. It appeared that the boy might at last have found some semblance of stability.

Not much else is known about the boy's past with all records sealed on file with the county's Child Welfare Office. It is known that he remained, at the White home, attended school and worked for Mrs. White whom he soon began to refer to as "Mom." Then three years later nearly to the day he arrived in the White home, the old woman quite unexpectedly passed away. She'd been the closest thing to a mother that he had known. In an instant his young life took a new desperate twist. As it was, her only surviving family was her brother. He offered Jed the opportunity to stay in the home "for as long as he should desire" should the county so approve. In her will Mrs. White left most of her worldly possessions to her only surviving relative, her brother. That included all that remained of the old farm, a pickup truck and a small bank account. As she had grown quite fond of the boy, she left Jed a simple log cabin, primitive as it was, along with some fifty acres that was located far to the north. Earl had shown no interest in the place and in his frail condition would never make use of it. This retreat was a place that she and her husband had purchased some years back. She knew of Jed's love of the outdoors and could think of no

one better for whom to bequeath it. Little was known of the site and neither she nor her late husband had opportunity to develop it. As it turned out, they rarely visited the property. It was to have been a hunting retreat for Mr. White but that was never realized. Over the years following his passing it just remained unoccupied, unkempt and in family hands. The property was left to Jed in trust and would be rightfully his when he reached the age of majority or became an emancipated minor, whichever came first.

With the help of Earl Jones and the cooperation of the county Child Welfare Office, Jed was allowed to remain in the White homestead. The county would continue to act in his behalf as guardian and the boy would need to continue with school and comply with the wishes of his Child Welfare caseworker, Mr. Baker. Baker was a gentle older man, near retirement age, heavy set with salt / pepper hair, a trimmed yet receding hairline and a grey flowing beard. Jed liked him and the sentiments were mutual...

It all seemed so long ago, he thought as he and his dog lay propped up alongside the woodstove. *How time had flown by*. As he sat there with Molly's head resting on his lap he took note of the eerie stillness outside their cabin. Soon his thoughts once again traveled back in time. He recalled that rain soaked morning better than three years earlier. Standing atop the steps outside the entrance to her church he remembered looking down upon the hearse that would lead the funeral procession and carry Mrs. White away...

“How are you holding up, son,” asked Mr. Baker while gently trying to engage the boy in conversation. “Crummy day, huh? This wind and rain couldn’t have come at a worse time for her funeral.”

It was indeed a drenching rain that beset them that morning worsened only by a howling wind. No one or thing could avoid the elements. The boy nonetheless seemed oblivious to the weather and indeed to all those around him including Mr. Baker. He meant no disrespect nor did he intend to be rude. To those around him he presented as collected if not stoic but to young Jed the loss and its accompanying ache were all too real and were taking their toll.

Several of those present considered expressing their condolences to the boy but most recognized that he was simply off in a world of his own and let him be. Scarred again by another of life’s callous twists, this youngster’s cry simply turned inward. He cared little for what those around him might think. He already felt the pang of Mrs. White’s absence. He’d become very fond of her and she of him. They shared a connection that was otherwise absent with so many others whom he had come in contact during his many years in foster care. Yet, like all the rest, she too was now gone.

“Come on, Jed. They’re waiting for us at the limo,” Mr. Baker whispered as he put his hand on Jed’s shoulder.

Those that had gathered followed the coffin from the church foyer to the awaiting procession of vehicles. The entire funeral service had been a surreal experience for the lad. His perception of events was blurred

through a pervasive mental fog. But life had aged him beyond his fourteen years. He knew what had happened was all too real and there remained the devil's work to do. He would need help "*Uncle Earl.*" with the disposition of personal property and getting on with life without Mrs. White. *The quicker the better*, he thought. *Putting it off would just make it harder on both me and Uncle Earl and besides, what will happen to the farm now with mom gone?*

As he pondered such things he watched while Mrs. White's casket was loaded into the hearse and the procession began its lonely trek to the burial site. The grave side service was brief. Good-bye ceremonies weren't typically a part of the convention familiar to this young adolescent numbed from a life of so many good-byes. This time it was different. On the inside the sting would linger yet on the outside he gave no such hint. He just wanted everyone to step aside and leave him alone.

"Come on, Jed. We've got to go now," said Mr. Baker with Earl standing alongside. They were right. Standing at the gravesite in the pouring rain was doing no one any good.

As the procession made its way from the cemetery Jed vaguely recalled hearing the low rumble of conversation among the others in the limousine. He remained detached but was distracted from his mental meander when nudged by Mr. Baker who handed him a letter. The envelope had already been opened. It was correspondence directed to Mrs. White from one known as Darby from this place called Sunnyside Kennels

“Take a look at this,” Mr. Baker urged the boy while glancing over to Earl who was sitting across from them in the limousine. The two nodded at one another.

As he began to read Jed’s eyes welled up as it soon became clear to him that Mrs. White was planning on getting a dog companion for the boy. Apparently she had been in contact with a kennel located about an hour’s drive south of the farmstead. It was to have been a surprise. The letter read...

“Dear Mrs. White,

I write to you in reply to your inquiry about the availability of a puppy for your boy. I recall when you visited our kennel a couple months ago. You were interested in a dog then and I wonder if you still are? If you are, I wanted you two to know that I am planning on working this weekend with a stud prospect from out of state and thought that those people who might be seriously interested in a pup from my kennel line might want to view both potential parents while both were available on site. I have had over twenty parties that expressed interest so I wanted to give everyone ample opportunity this weekend to view both dogs and consider a commitment. So, if you are still interested please contact me as soon as possible with your intentions. To make it fair for everybody I need to rank commitments on a first come first served basis. I hope to hear from you soon and again I can be reached at.... Thank you.”

Jed gave the letter back to Mr. Baker. His eyes welled up a second time and as he wiped away a tear he

returned to blankly stare out the window of the limousine.

“Not going to happen now, I guess,” he softly mumbled in a quivering voice.

Mr. Baker and Earl’s eyes briefly met as Mr. Baker returned the letter to his vest pocket. In about twenty minutes the party returned to the funeral home parking lot.

“Well, let’s hop in the truck and get back home,” Earl said to the boy.

“Yeah, you two head out and I’ll be by in a couple of days to see you Jed”, Mr. Baker said. “And we’re all set Earl, right?” he asked.

“Sure we are,” Earl replied. “Jed can stay on the farm for as long as he likes.”

The boy followed Earl towards the truck, stopped, turned to Mr. Baker and said “was that for real? Was mom going to get me a dog?”

He didn’t wait for an answer. He just turned away, wiped the tears that had returned and stepped up into the truck. He turned to look back at Mr. Baker as they drove off. Mr. Baker and the funeral home were soon out of sight.

Those who have lost someone they’ve come to love know full well the terrible feeling of emptiness and loneliness that overcomes the spirit when returning to and entering the home they once shared together. There’s the sense of disbelief, the anticipation that she who is gone will momentarily walk around the corner of the kitchen and things will be restored just as they were.

But Jed knew otherwise. Mrs. White's absence filled their home with the emptiness of sound and the echoes never before heard. Where does a youngster of fourteen years get the wisdom and strength to forge onward? But that's what he did. For the foreseeable future he would help Earl with the disposition of Mrs. White's personal property and with running what remained of the farm operation. He simply forbid himself to think of Mrs. White. He just kept busy.

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