



L. Chance

“Resurrection”

A Remembrance Day Soliloquy
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"Resurrection"

Why am I here? . . . This earth-bound corpse, mid-thrust 'twixt heaven and hell, is not the answer to Eternity. This mouldering remnant of a vacant shell is not a housing for nobility. This greening husk, smelling of clay but falling not asunder, is not the ultimate desire. Then, why am I here?

I wander aimless, but I go unseen. No friendly hands reach out to quell the horror of my emptiness. I quicken not when eager voices near. I bend to play with laughing children, and find their laughter stilled. I gaze at lovers, and a sadness grips their entwined hands. I cup a rose to grasp in hunger at its scent, and the rose withers and the petals fall away. I cry in vain for understanding . . . for in all the world there is no one to understand.

Once again men talk of War. The sky darkens, and a leaden hail of wantonness descends upon a screeching earth. Leaders who have felt the pain of useless combat have forgotten. Winged legions thunder through the twilight of a civilization. Hunger and fear and blood stalk silent through the streets of death. There is talk again of Armageddon. I cry aloud for peace, but no one heeds my cry.

Then . . . why am I here? . . . There is some distant message beating upon my brain, forbidding me the balm of sleep eternal. Some words are there that yet can save Man from himself, if I could but remember. But I am betrayed by all the mists of lust and greed and pain that rise around me. I am a soul not lost, nor gained; I am nothing, and I am everything.

Why have they not let me slumber in peace?

I remember that August afternoon, when I first fell asleep. The world trembled with the shock of barrage, as we struggled over poisonous ground. All the earth seemed heaving to meet the unclouded, untroubled blue of the heavens. My comrades were melting away from around me. Suddenly I stood alone. There was no fear in my heart, only gladness, as I sensed the ultimate moment. I was being called to rest.

I felt pain, and yet there was no pain. I stood outside myself, and watched that insane, twisted thing that had been my home for three and thirty years leap and convulse in frightful torment. I even pitied the hurtful agony of the contorted features. But in this detached part of me there was no pain . . . and I slept . . .

Why was I not left alone?

They wakened me with clanging shovels. It was raining. The mud clung to my casket . . . good, clean, wet mud. I was awake again, and yet I knew I was dead. Sleep had been so perfect, so seemingly everlasting. They spoke in coarse voices, as they placed my clay upon a cart, and carried me away.

And then I could not sleep. Some inner voice kept urging me to wakefulness. My clay did not move, had no vitality, but my soul lived. I was resurrected.

They took me on a boat. I smelt the sea; the fog engulfed me; I almost slept again. But they came and spoke in hushed voices, and asked each other who I was, and no one knew. And I could not tell them for I did not know myself. And if I had known, I could not have told them. They would have thought it only the sighing of the wind. 'Twas then I first had the feeling that I had words to speak, if I could but remember.

They gave me a name. They called me the Unknown Soldier . . . kings and statesmen came and bowed before me; archbishops prayed; soldiers stood at stiff attention. But I knew it was only lip service. They were forgetting, but I could not forget. One day in all the year they thought of me; every day in the year I thought of them. In my dead wakefulness I lay, and heard and saw and felt all the horrors pulsing through the world. And I suffered. I longed to speak, but words would not come.

Oh, they haunted me, those words. I knew that I had spoken them once a long, long time before. Men had listened to me, then, but each time now I went to speak those words they were drowned in the laughter of guns, the chuckle of pain, the grin of death, as I remembered best the futile things.

I had long to think. Each second tolled a knell in passing . . . each minute seemed a dragging weight . . . each hour begged for its finish. . . . I prayed for sleep, but sleep never came. Years were eternities. I wondered why God had ever created Time.

And all I have is memories. . . .

Strange memories . . . There comes to me at times a vision of a flat-shored sea, and fishermen stand around those shores mending their nets and gossiping. And I see myself coming towards those men. But as I go to speak, the air fills with the shriek of a passing shell, and I sink down at its passing. The vision fades, and I am once more on war-torn fields.

But I cannot remember. . . .

Then why am I here? . . . Why must I suffer for what other men have done, are doing, and will always do? Millions like me sleep under a coverlet of red poppies. They know no pain, no sorrow. Then why am I resurrected, if those we left behind are much too blind to see?

Can all these be mere visions? Reason answers "Yes", but if Reason be true, then why am I here? Why am I tormented with a thousand hells of Tantalus? Surely there must be infinite compassion somewhere, a tenderness to heal my wounded soul and make me whole again. Surely the rain does not fall, the grass turn green, and Man struggle for a light, if there be not some purpose.

That distant message beats again upon my brain, words that yet can save Man from himself. . . .

I see a hill . . . a stark and lonely hill. I see three crosses, like those I saw in Flanders, only crowned in enormity. I see a man . . . a young man . . . I see. . .

. . . Now I remember . . . Now I recall those words I spoke a long, long time ago. . . .

. . . I said, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do."

The End