

The Spirit of Reconciliation

by [David Portyanskiy](#) (February 2025)



Two Men Sitting with a Table (Honoré Daumier)

The dog barked at the roaming squirrel while the man uprooted the vegetables from the ground. He plucked the ripe carrots from the earth and rubbed the dirt off of them and ripped their top green stems. He rose from his knees and walked to the compost bin where he discarded the stems and returned to his point of harvest and placed the carrots in the clean bucket. The dog returned from her chase and sat next to the spigot. The hose was on the ground unrolled. It faced the east

and ended at the center of the backyard. Most of the crops had wilted and died from the summer heat and the ones that remained lied in his collection. Days of solar intensity scorched the field towards poverty.

The house was disconnected from electricity and the water line had ceased to flow. The only useful elixir was the collected rain that sat in the boiling pot until the steam fluttered out. Packages of mail were scattered on the kitchen table. The wooden floor was splintered and it creaked. Chipped and pealed paint marked all of the furniture. Portions of the wood had been feasted and digested by the critters. The only sound inside that abode was the movement of the dog and the evaporation of the water. The birds chirped harmoniously outside. He washed the carrots in a large pot that was filled with the sterilized water from the previous day. He cleaned and ate them.

He left three months later. The property was leveled and cleared. The dog was gone, lost after she ran away one night when the door was accidentally left open and a whistle only a dog could hear captured her attention. The man held his bag and slung it over his shoulder. His clothes were worn but built from the material that have outlasted twice the dog's years. His hat, stained with the dust from the wind, kept him in partial shadow from the harsh rays of the summer sun. In his pocket was a bank receipt for a deposited check. There was no say in the matter. Take it or leave it. He walked two miles from the bank where he reached the railroad tracks. One mile south he stopped a few yards away from the fresh steel rails and drank from a plastic water bottle that he bought from a convenience store with his new investable funds. He drank half of the bottle and then sealed the lid and placed it in his bag and continued onwards.

Closer to nightfall, he reached the border line that exited him from his county. He lived on these lands for almost twenty years; ever since he moved here in his youth. Excluding the

familial visits, that he rarely partook in, he had never left the state of his residence for all of those decades.

When the sun approached its end for the day, he stepped off the tracks and made camp next to the river for the evening. He slept in a makeshift tent that he constructed from the branches that laid abundantly underneath the trees.

In the morning he washed his face in the river and the sun dried his skin shortly afterwards. He continued southward until he reached a bus station that carried passengers through the interstate. He bought a ticket and loitered in the air-conditioned waiting room. There was an old phone booth, that last of its kind, in the corner next to the restroom. He reached into his pocket and extracted the quarter that had lost its luster through its journey of the many changed hands. He walked to the phone and inserted the coin and called his brother. They talked for a few minutes and made arrangements.

The bus arrived an hour later and he boarded it and sat next to the window and watched the traffic and the trees that littered the interstate. When they reached the next town, he noticed the stark differences from the years gone by. What once was no longer remains. Not just the streets and the buildings and the shops but also the people and the dress and the mannerisms. He confirmed it was not the fading of his memories but the accuracy of his present visual senses.

He got off the bus and found himself in a town he had not been to since he was a young man. His brother loves to drive and always visited him. Today he returned the favor. He called his brother at a café and ate three eggs with four strips of bacon and two slices of buttered toast. He drank many cups of freshly brewed coffee. Straight. It was almost sunset and he was in the café for two hours when his brother arrived. He got into his truck and they both went to his house where they each drank a glass of whiskey. They talked and drank for the rest of the night.

And for the rest of the night, they drank and talked but they did not talk of the past or the present.

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