

## 26. “Remnants”

I have been conscious for quite some time that there are many personal developments and incidents in my life and, in particular, my later life that, not adding anything important to what I have already looked at in myself, and not dealing expressly with myself as a truth teller or as one in contact with other truth tellers, are best passed over in silence. Or if a word is needed even in this area, it should only be that I continued to live rough, independent, alone, and sometimes too much alone. Just as it had been in my earliest teenage years, there was a great thorn in my side. It was not being able to find that spiritual mate who, as implacable desire and imagination would have it, bore all manner of female charms. With a few exceptions, whoever attracted me physically had nothing of the spiritual that excited me and often was one I didn't know how to approach or else had but a brief relationship with before being rejected. Nothing inflicted upon me a stronger sense of insecurity and inadequacy than being rejected by a woman. Yet that part of my heart that was more sexual organ than I realized was so large and so much a part of my head (as studious observer of this situation) that, along with my absolute inability to feign a contrary attitude or disposition, I was doomed to discourage all who first fancied and favoured me. And it is with no doubt a greater discouragement that, time and time again, I recoiled back into myself, licking my spiritual wounds and dreaming of some vague conquest or victory whereby none could refuse me.

– *Why're you looking so glum?*

– *I just hate the thought that such beautiful boys could be so malicious.*

– *What on earth are you talking about?*

– *Whispering back and forth in class. Smirks on their faces. As if I were just a doddering old fool who couldn't contribute the slightest to their knowledge.*

But what about the secret or half-submerged enmity I bore towards the professional world? Apart from making poor Carl Ridd squirm in class and accuse me of disrupting it by asking too many pointed questions, and apart from a few skirmishes with other professors, there was only one incident during that first period of my studies where I came close to showing an overt lack of respect. In truth, it was at the tail end of this period: I was thirty-three and going through a period of general discouragement. What followed was my first genuine attempt to go off in a professional direction. Of course I eliminate cab driving and construction work from consideration because, apart from the usual criteria by which to distinguish professional from non-professional, and apart from never having made any special moves in these

areas, no great show of getting along with other people is required (that famous collegiality or team spirit so much in demand). On the other hand, some kind of show *is* required to get in view as a bonafide playwright.

With the conjuncture of having received my BA and being thoroughly discouraged by my writing efforts, I took it into my head that I should become a teacher. I went so far as to apply to the education department of the university to take the required one-year training program. Before my scheduled interviews with a couple of representatives from the department, I heard some talk about this program from other students and it gave me the distinct impression it was intellectually stultifying. The details are no longer with me but they disturbed me enough that I couldn't help but bring them up during the interview process. Both of the officials I spoke to took note of what I had to say not as a misguided conception of the department, but as an objection to my character and to my suitability for the program. With one it took the form of bringing up the matter of my having dropped out of high school. "How do we know you won't do it again?" he said. The other took umbrage when things became a bit heated and argumentative. "Well, I certainly wouldn't want you to teach *my* child!" she said.

*– Nor mine were she still of that age. It's not by continually challenging and arguing with people that one is going to make progress. We all live in this world and all have to respect the rights and feelings of others if we want ours respected.*

*– You're perfectly right, Theo. Still, there's some principle he's hit on, don't you think? I mean, if the truth about the department was being ignored by these two representatives, then surely there's a reason to be critical.*

*– He wasn't being critical. He was being disrespectful. Surely you wouldn't want someone coming here – a teacher, student, or whatever – who started off by listing the Department's shortcomings.*

*– But wouldn't you agree it's usually how people proceed in these matters? For example, if the two boys that complained about me – by the way, the anecdotes I tell in class are experiences by which I try to illustrate the concept of Lebenswelt.*

*– I'm fascinated but get to the point.*

*– Well, if they'd come to me with their complaint instead of rushing to you, it would've been so much better.*

Perhaps being judged disrespectful while thinking oneself merely critical turns on different valuations that grade off on one side towards falsehood and on the other towards constituting an individual freedom that takes itself to be its own rule and measure.

- *Ah, there it is! There's the danger! I couldn't have said it better.*
- *He's saying it in the name of truth-telling.*
- *And I'm saying it in the name of all the terrors and tyrannies that have afflicted this world.*
- *Perhaps then...*
- *What perhaps?*
- *...the two sort of merge.*
- *What're you saying?*
- *There may be a complicity between the two.*
- *What two?*
- *Fear of the truth and taking it as one's right and privilege to say it.*
- *Andrew, you're suffering from Stockholm Syndrome.*
- *That isn't a very good way to meet my argument.*
- *It's not your argument, that's the trouble.*

Is there something like the Stockholm Syndrome that afflicts people who belong to a system? It would be a mild form of course but still potent enough to make its often highly privileged captives sympathetic to a standardized unwritten policy of not rocking the boat. Even in the systems where truth itself is featured as a paramount value, the not-rocking-the-boat policy tends to win out when there is a question of choosing between certain truths and it.

- *I'm sorry, Andrew. Please, forgive me.*

Throughout my life, I have never met anyone who admitted that the good living they made and the honoured position they held had any bearing upon their capacity to be objective about the system that provided them with these. I don't think I would be far wrong in seeing in this strange absence of commentary a willed professional blindness that is one with a subtle and ever-present element of fear. An element that springs up from something irreducibly inhuman and even inhumane about the system that bears upon collective interests and their ultimately overruling private ones.

*– Andrew, one of the things that's always ticked me off is to hear people who, not having done much, criticize those who have for making a few necessary and minor – if this is the right word – compromises.*

Blocked from going on as a university student. Blocked from undertaking a career as a teacher. Blocked from making any progress as a playwright. What a lucky thing for me there was the bosom of my family. First of all, my mother. What a spirit so upraised to her son, so encouraging, so supportive, so unflagging in her love and devotion over fifty years. To think of how I undervalued her friendship in spite of my best intentions. Such is the way when someone or something is easy, accessible, always around, all too familiar, and inordinately tolerant of one's whims and ugly moods. How much more difficult it would have been if not for that one person who took an exceptional interest in my life and who believed in me as someone driven towards the heights. And this she took on faith from me because there was little in her background, interests, or inclinations that was congenial to the high altitude flight that, during her lifetime, was always more envisioned by me than visible to anyone else.

*– I'm looking for it, Andrew. I can't see it. I can't detect this high altitude flight. Oh, wait! There's something up there! I think it's his mother! Yes, she's looking down from heaven and wondering why he hasn't left the ground yet.*

My very clever and level-headed oldest sister. Always the welcome mat put out for me. Always an attentive and patient ear despite her numerous activities. And the same could be said of Sharon, my second-oldest sister, when she was healthy and well or at least appeared to be so. And the same of my brother more or less until we became estranged. But is this estrangement a matter to go into when all it gives evidence of is, apart from my brother's troubled state of mind, my volatile temper and capacity for violence? Have I not laid this out well enough already and indicated that it was a trait even in my later years? Perhaps the only observation worth

anything at this point is that I was far from suffering a bad conscience about it.

*– Oh, listen to this, Andrew! Truth-telling is fine when it's a matter of generalities but when it comes to a matter of conscience, when it comes to a matter of not having one, when it comes to a matter of squaring that with violence, then it's a different story.*

*– Well —*

*– Think of what it is to be continuously assaulted with a point of view that comes from someone who has effectively cut you off from the rest of the world.*

*– Yes, and —*

*– That offers you no respite whatever while setting itself up as the true measure of things.*

*– Perhaps —*

*– That comes with a load of — I was going to say shit but I'll say self-criticism that effectively stops short precisely where outside criticism would come in.*

*– It seems to me —*

*– I don't know what more I can say to you, Andrew, to convince you you have to immunize yourself against this fellow's anti-truth, anti-professional, anti-law-and-order propaganda.*

Despite numerous setbacks, I kept on with my playwrighting, becoming even more marginal and isolated than I had hitherto been. Amidst the most discouraging signs and lack of outside interest, I was still bent on writing the one great masterpiece that would redeem all. But nothing of the sort materialized and every single script I wrote eventually ended up in the garbage. The best I can say is that I read a great number of masterpieces over the next few years: plays, novels, short stories, and some philosophical works.

*– Even if you have nothing to say on the matter, at least keep up your spirits. Don't resign yourself to being bullied.*

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