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He sat in a poorly lit room, with just a single lamp casting barely enough light to illuminate the keys on the vintage manual typewriter.

The Remington Special had belonged to his father - the *old man*, as he liked to call him, who had purchased it in 1947 when the model first came off the production line. In its day it was state of the art – whereas now, a mere relic – replaced by digital keyboards and artificial intelligence auto-translators.

When the old man passed away, he left the typewriter to his son, Frankie, along with \$210; the entirety of his fortune after a lifetime of trials and tribulations, two failed marriages, and a bankruptcy which finally sent him to the poor house where he stayed until he quietly faded away, unnoticed, one night.

Frankie had never known his father as closely as a son should. What he knew of him was what he saw; a man who lived his life for the story.

He worked by day at a job to pay the bills, and wrote by night, engaged in an endless struggle to find his lucky door into the publishing world.

Sadly, in his forty-five years of writing, he never once got an article accepted or published by any newspaper, particularly **The Star** – the largest paper in the city.

His father, despite anything, remained undaunted and kept writing to within weeks of hanging his hat for the last time.

Frankie recalled the countless times when he would wake up early in the morning only to find his father slumped over the Remington Special, fast asleep.

Without a word, he would rise, feed his son, and head off to work, extremely anxious to return home that night, to begin writing yet again.

For all his efforts and the omnipresent bags which hung below his eyes, betraying his eternal fatigue, Frankie's father carried his Remington into battle every night, like an intrepid soldier.

The Remington had survived the post-World War II era, the 1950's, 1960's and into the 1970's before it finally went to rest in an attic, where it stayed until the day his father's will was revealed to him.

Frankie remembered the moment when he went to the old house to pick up the machine. It could have been yesterday; it was that clear to him. Yet, it had already been twenty-four years since he brushed off the layer of dust from its keys and placed it on a table, where it has remained, unmoved, since.

Looking back at that time, he still sensed the feeling he had experienced as he held that typewriter in his hands for the first time. It was, in fact, the only thing that truly embodied the heart and soul of a man who had spent the better part of his life clinging to a mountain and never making it to its peak.

It broke Frankie's heart to see his father struggle as he did – but it was not until Remington became his own, that Frankie came to realize what role it would play in his own life.

Now, as he stared out the window of his flat at the vacant parking lot, he listened to the howl of a lonely wind as it picked up a swarm of leaves and sent them skittering by.

Frankie drew a breath and exhaled.

Alone, a solitary life, he found solace in listening to the wind – its moaning call, sometimes a mere whisper, often times brushing against his window as if to beckon him to come out and play.

Frankie turned and stared at the sheet of paper in the typewriter – with just several lines – lines which he had typed nights before and then abandoned as sleep called him away.

He needed to end the book, his book.

It had been twenty-four years in the making.

The Remington had, by whatever bewitching spell, taken hold of him, and like his father, there was not a day in the past twenty-four years that he did not find himself sitting in front of it, even after an exhausting day of work.

Like the wail of a siren in a fog ridden sea, he found himself gripped by an irresistible and haunting force – as if the Remington, somehow embodying the spirit of his father, compelled him to draft his own story.

Like everything else in his small one-room flat, the typewriter remained exactly where he had put it on the day, a quarter of a century ago, and it had not moved an inch since.

Piles of books adorned every corner of his flat, old books he had rummaged from library giveaways, the trash, or purchased from second-hand bookshops.

Over the years, he had read every single one of them, searching for a modicum of inspiration, that gem, the one thing that would vault him forward and turn his story into the masterpiece he wanted.

Was he authoring the book because he wanted to, out of some inner passion, to tell his story?

Or was he doing it for his father – a man who struggled to get published and never did accomplish that goal?

Frankie did not know the answer to that question, one that often challenged him during his late-night rituals in front of the Remington, but he reconciled that it had to be done – and soon, because time was not on his side.

Of course, the other question that plagued him at times, sitting alone in his flat, usually staring out the window at the windswept parking lot; was he to follow in the old man's footsteps? Would he too die before his one literary endeavor was a fait accompli?

The idea for the book had not been spawned from any depth of imagination, and certainly it was not inspiration.

Nor had it come from any plan or skill as far as writing would have it.

Frankie was simply not a writer, and he knew it; but he was driven, in part, by a sense of duty, respect, and love for his father and to see his legacy through.

It was as if, in being bequeathed that Remington, his father had handed him the torch to carry, a burden no doubt – and Frankie took it upon his shoulders to see it to an end by telling his father's story.

Certainly, there was nothing about his life worth telling – but he could memorialize the life of a man who refused to give up and who died climbing, but never besting the mountain of his dreams.

Every typewriter ribbon he had used in the past twenty-four years lay stacked in the corner of the shelf, to his right; testimony to the hours, the endless tapping, and the countless pages he had finished – feeling that for every page he successfully completed, four more lay crumpled up in balls – a literal pile on the floor which had not been moved – not one iota.

He stayed up that entire night, finishing not one, but four cups of coffee and emptied the last of his Jell-O Pudding, savoring it to the last spoon.

Frankie lived a meager existence. His food stores were week to week, if even that – just a few essentials, coffee being the least expendable of them.

It frustrated and perplexed him, in fact, to the point of tearing his hair out, that after all these years, and arriving at this juncture in his life, he could not produce the final words to end the book – a tribute to his father.

His mind was as blank as a whiteboard, and no matter what he did to stimulate creative juices, he just sat there with his fingers hanging listlessly over the keys, waiting to be animated by a mental bolt from the blue - one which simply did not come.

By 6 a.m. the first rays of a new day had begun to usher the night from the sky and Frankie had not added a single word, not a single punctuation, not a thing.

The final pages of his book remained unfinished.

He packed up his work clothes and went to his job, like he did every day, every week, every year – working as a maintenance keeper at a nearby school.

He had been doing the same job for fifty years now and his seventy-five-year-old body was beginning to show signs of being battle weary.

Although he did his best to put up a good show, his joints ached and there was a pain, a constant pressure in his chest – like something inside was trying to push its way out.

He knew he should get it checked, but with barely enough money to pay his rent and buy a little food, a typewriter ribbon here and there, his financial situation simply precluded the luxury of visiting a doctor.

That night, when he went home, plying the usual streets, the same route, passing the same houses and the same people he had seen repeatedly – Frankie suddenly came to a stop and looked across the street at a small boy who was staring at him with the brightest eyes he had ever seen.

Nobody ever noticed Frankie.

Nobody talked to Frankie.

Frankie was like a fixture on the wall of life – everyone simply took him for granted, like a streetlamp, or a tree, or something.

He was so common, so unnoticeably routine at the school where he worked, that people just shuffled around him, by him or sometimes it seemed, right through him, as if he were not even there.

He had no friends, no living family, nobody called on him and no one visited.

He was, for all intents and purposes, a non-entity on this Earth and could have lived on the moon - it would have made no difference to anyone.

As he watched the boy, his pure innocence and remarkably captivating smile, something happened inside him. Frankie felt a sudden burst of life. He felt light-hearted as if a door, long ago closed, had creaked open, letting his quintessential life-energy seep through and touch his heart.

He smiled at the young boy, waved, and then turned to go home.

As he stepped into his flat, the eyeless Remington beckoned him to strike yet another key and to make something tangible, something beautiful, something which could be called - a story.

Even though hunger panged in his stomach, Frankie dropped into the creaky old chair and touched his fingers to the keys and tapped.

In fact, he tapped and tapped and tapped and the words flowed out of him like a rushing stream.

He felt adrenaline pumping into his blood as he did.

The final pages were materializing onto the paper with articulate nouns, pronouns, modifiers, punctuations, indents, and finally - it was done – the story was a wrap.

He stared in disbelief.

Twenty-four years in the making. Two and a half decades of his life, embodied, embraced, and paginated into one, solid, compact sheaf of papers. Papers which were in fact so old now that they were yellowed, dog eared and bent at the edges. He had not copied or retyped a single page. Every word was original. Every paragraph was exactly as it had been crafted and composed at the time.

There was no editing.

There would be no editing.

It was done.

His mind lightly maundered over the events of the last twenty-four years, sitting in this very chair, typing away – as if to validate him for all his hard work.

Chapter one had been written in the wake of Nixon's resignation from the Presidency and as the Vietnam war faded into history as one of the greatest debacles of America's storybook – only later to outdone by the debacle in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Chapter two had been finished when the first space shuttle successfully landed at Edward's Airforce Base in the beginning of the 1980's.

Chapter eight, he recalled, had ended on a very dark day, a day when two airplanes had flown into the Twin Towers and when his country went to war.

Every chapter reminded him of a period in his life – the embodiment of history itself played out in a different narrative.

Carefully pulling the final sheet of paper from the Remington, like an ancient Egyptian scroll, he placed it onto the stack, which by now had been sitting and growing to the side of his typewriter since the day he had begun.

He went to his kitchen table and picked up the glass jar where he kept money for his weekly groceries. It was all he had - a meager \$49, enough to place the ad, if he did not buy any food.

He had no bank account, no credit cards and his next paycheck was not due for another week, but that did not daunt him. Tomorrow he would contact **The Star**, the very newspaper his father had aspired to become a journalist for, and he would place the ad and pay personally with cash, and then he would wait.

On the following Monday, Frankie stretched his hand into his overalls as he walked home from work, extracting twenty-five cents, dropped it into the coin slot and took out the daily edition of **The Star**.

He ruffled through the paper until he found the classified ads, whereby his eyes lit up as they rested on his own, which read:

**MY STORY IS READY. Contact Frankie. 403 Naples St. Flat #1.**

Frankie was ecstatic!

He went home that night, smiling at the old Remington, as if it were his dad sitting there, and then proceeded to make himself a cup of coffee.

“Well, old man,” he chuckled. “I finally finished your damn story,” he said aloud, his words echoing in the small flat.

The Remington did not respond, of course, but despite the resonating silence of his flat, Frankie felt a sudden sense of closure. He had fought an uphill battle for the last twenty-five years, authoring a book that he never planned or even felt capable of doing, and yet, compelled by a sense of love and duty to a man, to not let his dreams fade away like his body which by now was just dust.

Days passed as Frankie waited for a response to his ad – but there was none.

He waited a full week, checking eagerly to see if anyone had sent him a letter or left a note, but there was nothing. He did not have a phone. He did not own a computer.

Unless someone came knocking or did it the old-fashioned way, there was little hope of ever hearing back.

As more days passed, the only knock he heard was that of despondency thumping away at his soul.

*Had it all been for nothing?* He wondered.

*Was this it? My father's story left sitting here?*

On the tenth day of agonizing waiting, with a hungry stomach screaming for nourishment, food he did not have because he had spent his remaining cash to buy the ad, Frankie sensed the depth of discouragement and failure that his own father must have lived with for over four decades.

It was a bewildering and yet overwhelming feeling of rejection from the entire world.

He had spent a quarter of a century of his life drafting a book and no one seemed to even care enough to inquire about it.

The next day he collected his paycheck, paid his rent and utilities, and instead of buying the food he desperately needed, he paid for another week of advertising, with the exact same ad.

Some would call his action self-destructive, because a body needs food, but to Frankie's sense, he was simply being as pertinacious as his father – the mountain top was within sight, if he kept climbing, he would get there, and that was all that mattered to him.

For the entire duration of the second ad, he heard from no one. No letters came to his mailbox. No messages on his door. Nothing!

During this time, he fought off the impulse to go into despair, to give up, but despite his hunger and growing weakness, he steeled himself to believe that it would happen, somehow, and that small thread of hope was all he had to go on.

When he arrived home from work one day, his head pounded with a brutal headache and a harsh angry cough hacked deep from within his lungs.

Frankie made himself a cup of tea with the last of his teabags, and then sat down in his old chair, pulling up the blinds and watching as the wind churned up the fallen leaves and scattered them about.

There was a certain peacefulness to watching Nature's choreography, as leaves spun and danced across the parking lot, and as the wind whispered a wailing lamentation to the trees who now stood bare.



On the other side of the city, Melvin Thomas, owner of **The Star** newspaper and its subsidiary publishing house, and one of the wealthiest men in the land, glanced at the note on his desk as he came in that morning.

His secretary had printed out a copy of the classified ad, thinking that it might interest him. She had done it many times before, providing him with potential human-interest stories which the paper could feature – and this was just another one, he assumed.

**MY STORY IS READY. Contact Frankie. 403 Naples St. Flat #1.**

Thomas had seen countless classified ads run through his paper, and being a publishing man, he made it a habit to read a handful every day, trying as he did, to glean a little insight into the people and lives behind those ads.

This one struck an odd chord inside him.

He sat there for a time, wondering what it could mean.

It was a haunting statement and the more he thought about it the more he wanted to know the story and the man behind it. It also struck him as bizarre that in this day and age someone would not provide a phone number or email address.

When his curiosity reached fever pitch, Melvin Thomas emerged from his office and told his secretary to hold his calls and meetings until the afternoon.

He donned his overcoat, made his way to his car, and drove to the address given in the ad. He was going to find out for himself who Frankie was and his story.

The building, located in an area of town that Melvin Thomas rarely ventured to, was an old fire-brick structure, with rotted wood door frames and peeling paint – a façade that clearly denoted its age and dilapidated state.

He knocked on the door. It shook on its hinges, betraying its antiquity.

There was no sound except for the hollow reverberation of his knuckles striking against the wood.

He knocked again and the door creaked open, just a crack.

“Hello, Frankie?” he called out.

There was no answer.

Melvin Thomas was not a man who faltered when he started on a course of action. His father had taught him that lesson when he had groomed and trained him to take over the newspaper.

“Once you put your feet on a road, walk it to the end, son! It might not always lead you to the pot of gold you want, but you will know that you did not give up.”

Those very words echoed in his head as he stood there staring into the dimly lit flat, wondering if he should take the next step.

He pushed on the door, and it creaked open further.

“Hello. Frankie?” his voice echoed back at him.

His curiosity, now piqued, he stepped further into the small kitchenette.

There was a strange sense of stillness about the place.

In one way he felt that he was trespassing, and yet in another, he sensed that the man who had placed that ad had sanctioned this very move.

Stepping through the tiny kitchen, he rounded a wall into a slightly larger room, albeit smaller than the walk-in closet in his own home.

The first thing he saw was the old Remington. He had not seen one of those in years.

As he stepped deeper into the room it was then that he saw the man, sitting in the armchair to his left. In his hand was a cup, slightly tilted, and yet still half full. His head was lulled to one side.

“Frankie?”

There was no response.

Thomas approached him and touched his arm. It was stone cold. It was then that he saw the trace of blue in his lips and the pallid lifeless skin of a man who had passed his ticket to another conductor.

He was dead.

Melvin Thomas had been exposed to the tragedy of death in his day. It was part of running a newspaper. It did not alarm him or shock him because it was an inevitable part of the path of life, but that did not mean that the stories and accomplishments, nor the suffering or triumphs of those who had lived those lives, were not important.



He noticed the sheet of paper in the Remington and pulled it from the carriage and read it aloud.

*“My name is Frankie. I lived a simple life. No one will miss me. No one will even notice I am gone. I know, as I write this at this late hour, that I will be cashing in my last ticket before the sun rises in the morning. I am not sad about this. My only hope in these dying hours is that someone answers my ad and that somehow, the work of my last twenty-five years, and my father’s legacy, will be given a chance. The finished book sits by the old Remington. It is not a work of a genius, but it is a work of love and respect for a man who spent a lifetime trying to tell his story and who never saw it come to fruition. - Best, Frankie, this day, 22 November.*

Melvin Thomas turned and looked at Frankie.

He seemed peaceful in death.

He looked a simple man, one who had lived an austere life, and one who had departed it in a pair of torn and tattered overalls.

As his eyes moved over the room, it too was a testament to the life he lived.

Melvin lingered there, feeling his throat constrict with a sense of inexplicable grief for a man he never knew.

*Why did he feel something for this man?* He wondered.

It drew him back to memories of his own father and of his own ambitions to measure up to the goals and expectations he had set for him. A man he too had respected.

Here, before him was a man who had spent twenty-five years of his life penning a book, on a Remington typewriter, because of his father and in respect of that man’s life. What courage it took to devote himself to such a project. What kind of man was Frankie?

He picked up the sheaf of papers with a sense of humble homage.

Dust rose from the stack as he did, as if it had not been touched in decades, and indeed, unknown to him, that was truly the case.

Stepping out into the grip of a sharp November wind, he dialed emergency services, and then stood there for a long moment as the wind howled and bellowed between the old apartment buildings and as leaves rustled and swirled about him.

It was as if the wind was bemoaning the passing of an old friend.

He waited there until the police arrived.

When his statement had been made and all the details were recorded, Melvin Thomas went home, kissed his wife, and sat down in his study and read the book, from start to finish.

It was clearly the work of a simple man, not a writer, not an author, but a man who had delivered each word and each line with passion, sincerity and the love and veneration he had for his father and his father’s dream.

In the weeks to follow, one chapter of the book was released as a weekly special in his newspaper. The story struck the hearts of hundreds of thousands who wrote in to the newspaper lauding the author and demanding to know more about him.

So many people were deeply touched by the narrative and wanted to know about Frankie and his father.

A simple man's tale had accomplished something that Frankie never anticipated or expected and for that matter, Melvin Thomas and his editors were flabbergasted by the overwhelming public response.

Two months after the first chapter ran, the public demand for the story had escalated to such a pitch that Melvin had put a special team together to edit the book for formal publishing through his own publishing house.

If the whole experience had not already touched him deep enough, Melvin Thomas was to be shocked yet one more time, when one of his staff knocked on his door one day and brought in an old, tattered banker's box full of papers, dropping it to the floor with a nod and a glint in her eye.

"Found this in the archives, thought you might be interested," she said with a smile.

Leafing through the box he found a tome of articles, submitted to his very newspaper. The articles dated as far back as the late 1940's, with the last one ending in the early 1970's. He looked at the name on each article and felt his heart sink, because Frankie's father had penned each, and to that end, it was entirely possible that his father, who had sat in this very chair, heading this very paper, had also seen them.

For the longest time he stood staring out the window and wondered to himself - how could it be that this extraordinary event had happened, and how was it that the wheel of life had come full circle back to his own doorstep?

In a sense, it seemed inconceivable that these two men had crossed paths decades before; his own father and Frankie's; and that decades later, he should be the one person to answer Frankie's call, on the very day he had died.

*Was that fate at work,* he wondered?

*Or was there a Universal and omnipresent force that inexplicably and yet irrevocably connected the dots of life?*

Frankie had sought closure for his father's life cycle, and now, it resided in his hands, to bring the story to a proper conclusion – very possibly providing closure for his own father.

Melvin Thomas did not have the answers to the questions which plagued his mind at that point, but he knew this much – despite their sacrifices, their lives of quiet desperation, neither Frankie, nor his father, would be forgotten.

It gave him a profound sense of satisfaction in just knowing that he had helped to give their lives the respect they both deserved.

And what of the old Remington Special - had it been relegated to the junk heap, or was it now sitting in someone else's attic?

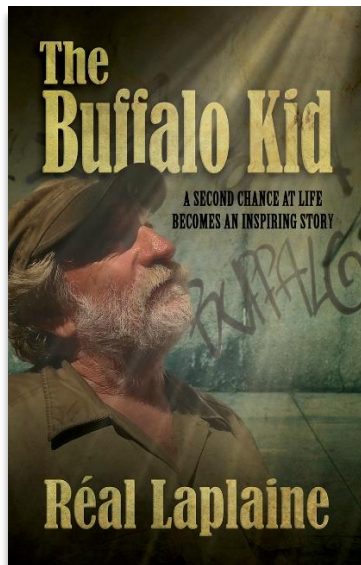
No, in fact, Melvin Thomas had the Remington polished up and placed on a pedestal, enclosed in glass case in the lobby of **The Star**, with a plaque which read:

DEDICATED TO THE HUMBLE, THE COURAGEOUS - THE UNFORGOTTEN

THE END

## Read **The Buffalo Kid**

An inspired story about 2<sup>nd</sup> chances in life.



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