

*A Seasoned Story*

By Danny Cove

For each of us, living our lives is like the construction of a story, and I think if we pay close enough attention, we can identify those seasonal separations which show us where we are.

The story begins with a prologue in the spring. The scene is set, the setting is established and explored, and the very first seeds which were planted before the story's beginning start to sprout, almost like harbingers of the story the audience is to experience. Perhaps the characters are introduced, and you're among them. Your character is described, your motivation, your background which establishes how you came to be. In this springtime idyll, all seems fine and delightful, but if you pay enough attention, you can see the hints of deeper things, the plants which have not yet grown or just barely broken the surface, the small Easter eggs hidden by the writer to point to what will most surely come to pass as the story itself moves beyond this precursory chapter and into its first act. There is a heaven of possibilities, an absolute freedom with the hope that we will like all the characters. We hope for the best for each of them.

But inevitably, the springtime must end, and we enter into the hot summer of the rising action. The characters begin to play their parts, to make decisions that become more and more convoluted as their machinations cross with those of others. And you, among these players on the stage, begin your steady ascent up that hill and toward the climax of the story.

This isn't to say that everything is difficult and arduous, nor that it isn't. During the rising action, you engage with other characters, you marry, bear children, frolic in the sun with them and play in treehouses and pools. You go to the zoo, the opera, fancy dinners and fast food chains. Then there are the times when you fall in the mud, when you dirty yourself and tarnish your soul, only to find God and seek to polish it back up.

You forge alliances with friends, form bitter rivalries or feuds with the enemies that enter into your life, and ultimately discover the characters who are to play second fiddle in your story. And beyond them, you discover your antagonist, the one who opposes what you do, and the epic battle between the two of you pushes the action, driving you to make decisions you never thought you would. After all, without an antagonist pushing against you, you can never be your own protagonist, making the action rise and drawing you toward that climactic confrontation. But who is your antagonist? Is it your aggressive neighbor who yells at you and your children? Is it a religious leader, or rival, or perhaps some non-believer who hopes to squash your faith? Perhaps your antagonist is a former friend, or maybe even a family member for whose antics you're somehow responsible, and so a major component of your life becomes damage control. Or maybe, just maybe, your antagonist is yourself. Perhaps the one with whom you struggle the most is that part of you that is reticently opposed to your goals in life. Your struggle, then, becomes all the greater, for in this rising summer, your ultimate foe knows all there is to know about you, is capable of honing in on your most hidden of weaknesses in order to cut you down and drown you in a depression.

The rising summer can be a golden age for you, when the hints you felt in spring have come full bloom, and the storms rage when the sun's rays aren't falling bright and warm upon your life. With the alliances forged, the audience will hope that you find the strength to combat your antagonist, as more and more of your story focuses on the brewing storm of war. Then, in the end of the summer, plot lines begin to converge, characters leave to start their own stories elsewhere and finally, on the last day of the summer of your life, you reach that pinnacle which writers call the climax. You face your bitter foe, you clash atop that mountain which you've been ascending your whole life. That which has built you up, and those harbingers of spring are far

below you, and yet their effects can be felt as you struggle against your enemy, protagonist versus antagonist in the struggle of your life. Your friends cannot be there to save you, but without them you never would have made it this far. All that you have is the character which you've been developing, and your only weapon is the mind you've honed and the heart you've forged. The climax may be a year, a month, a day or possibly even a single hour. This is the hour which defines you, and its result will carry on for the rest of your story.

When that climax finally ends, when the antagonist is defeated and killed, or made into a friend, or frightened enough to flee in terror, then the time has come for you to descend from that mountaintop, to enter into the autumnal falling action. As you descend from that battle, you begin to feel its effects, as your bones start to ache and your muscles lose the youthful fervor they once had. More allies leave to continue their lives elsewhere, and the children for whom you fought now begin to upstage you, starting the ascent up their own summer mountains. And you take the elder role of guidance.

In that autumn comes some of your darkest days. Not only do your allies leave, but your generation begins to dwindle, your parents to leave for good, your friends to feel the full effects of their machinations. There is more freedom, yes, but little to do with it, for the path you forged in life has become the only path for you. You set your ways and feel the finality of your climactic exchange. Some people, resistant to the falling action, try to keep the fight, to reenact the great climax through a crisis moment, but even this must end as the descent into old age grows colder by the day.

At last your play ends with an epilogue, a wintry postscript in which you lie on your bed, unable to rise. Your skin becomes pale and your memories are all that sustain you, until these, too, begin to desert you. The new actors take their places around you, and some dare to hold your

hand as your body grows cold, as the last hint of wind blows the flakes of snow into their final resting place. Then, finally, when all lies still, the curtains close on your story.

But that's not to say that everything ends there. In that final winter, your body was weak, but your soul planted seeds, seeds of sadness and seeds of joy, seeds of tragedy and triumphant hope in those who gathered around you. And we must eternally remember that the ending was not a note of finality, for what follows every winter is a new and hopeful spring, in this world and the next.