

Hell No We Won't Go

Prologue

“There is a tide in the affairs of men. Which, taken in the flood, leads on to fortune.”

Forty years ago I would have been the last person on earth to quote Shakespeare, but a lot can change in forty years. It's been that long since I set foot on this campus. I haven't missed it, and seldom think about it. I've been invited back numerous times. People have found me, called me, offered to pay me to return, but I always refuse. I had no interest. The flood passed, and the fortunes I once believed were mine went out with the tide.

I return today, not for me, but for my father.

I park the rental car on the far end of campus, not far from where the house used to stand. It was torn down years ago. I'm not sure why, but probably after a prolonged slump in fraternity membership. The athletic fields remain in place. The track stadium still revels in its wooden, hundred year old design. The old basketball arena has been replaced by a new sleeker stadium on the other end of town. I'm not sure if the old building has any purpose any longer. And across the street, nothing can or will ever change the cemetery, which sits, as it has since before the Civil War; one securely fixed point in the changing ages.

Molly, who always walks a half-step ahead of me, turns to see what must be my facial expression of misunderstood awe, “Nostalgic?” she asks.

“I'm not sure,” I answer.

“You're positive you want to do this?”

I look up to see our family, standing on the corner, waiting for us to complete the group. “In for a dime, in for a dollar,” I tell my wife.

Mary, my oldest daughter, asks as we meet, “A lot's changed, huh, Dad?”

“Maybe,” I say to her.

We turn on University Avenue and walk toward the center of campus.

It is a crisp, fall Saturday, still dry. The monsoon season hasn't hit yet, but it will, and it will rain until April, as it does every year. As I look around, I wonder if the more time that goes by, the less things change. There is a banner strung between the street's light posts advertising Homecoming 2013. It is exactly the same as the one which read Homecoming 1969.

“What's the matter, Grandfather?” Tony, my astute, eight-year-old grandson asks.

“I just thought of someone,” I tell him.

“Who?”

I quickly remember the person I once was and tell him, “Someone who lived here a long time ago.”

Molly stops with me, takes my arm, and pats me gently on my wrist. She is the only person who could ever know what I am thinking.

“You guys go on to the luncheon,” I tell the family. “I'll catch up with you later.”

“I don't think the committee is going to like that, Dad,” Ellen, my middle daughter says.

“Well, if nothing else, at least I'll be consistent.”

My family walks down the slight hill towards the student union. I stand alone on the sidewalk and picture in my mind a young man in his prime, full of piss, promise, and great expectations, but mostly full of himself. Everyone knew him as Touchdown Tony McIntyre.

NOVEMBER 1969

CHAPTER 1

Homecoming Week.

Stupid concept. The only real reason they have homecoming is to sell out the football game, something they seldom did until I got here. Money, that's what it's all about. Suck in as much money as you can by staging events for old, rich, slap-on-the-back alumni to greet fellow old, rich, Pioneer alumni they can't remember, or don't want to remember. And while it's all going down, the university powers-that-be, mill around, putting the arm on people to donate anything from a new building to five bucks for some minority program nobody cares about—except the three or four minorities in the group. It is the one weekend of the year when the band has clean uniforms, the campus is spotless, and the townies stage a parade on the main drag, so every store can sell football souvenirs and paraphernalia—almost all of which has my picture or name emblazoned across it. I don't make a dime from any of it.

Just wait until it's my turn.

The kickoff event, no pun intended, is a noon rally on Monday, held at the student union. There must be a thousand people in front of the outdoor stage and hundreds more inside the building pressed against the eight-foot plate glass windows. I'm standing inside the union with the rest of the team, waiting to make our big entrance. We all wear ugly green sport coats, tan slacks, and bright gold ties; standard dress code to make us look like we have brains as well as brawn. Truth be told, most of the guys on the team have to have someone help tie their ties; these are the students who receive the scholarships.

The head cheerleader, Beth, or Betty or Brenda—I can't remember names too well—has the tightest ass on campus. The only one even close in comparison is her twin sister's. I know this from personal experience. I had her cheering for more the night we beat Utah 36-3.

Beth and her cheer-buddies are on the stage, spinning and tossing each other around like pizza pie dough, as the worst band in the history of college marching bands toots their horns and bangs their drums in a rhythm all their own. Thank God there are only two games left in the regular season, because now every time I hear Oh Pioneers, I want to heave.

Pioneers lead us forward
Onto the battlefield.
Let us fight in all your glory

With your courage and ideals.
May the actions of our warriors
Emulate your spirit here.
Onto the field of victory,
March the fighting Pioneers.

“And here they are, the 1969 Fighting Pioneers,” Betty wails into the microphone.
The crowd goes wild as the team takes the stage.

I always find it interesting, the second stringers, the special teams, the managers, and the water boys, in other words, the guys who never play, come out first, like they’re the stars. They bounce out smiling, shuckin’ and jivin’, like the cat’s meow. I don’t care. Let them have their few moments in the spotlight. The best is always saved for last.

The defensive team prances out next. Most of them are black, colored, or whatever they call themselves this week. They aren’t bad guys. They don’t have that we ain’t taking no more bullshit attitude like a lot of blacks who hang around campus like they own the place have. Mostly, the blacks on the team keep to themselves. They eat together, take a corner of the locker room, and listen to their own music on their 8-track players. I do find it interesting how the coaches treat them differently than they treat us. Like, they won’t let the black guys wear afro hair-dos, which makes a lot of them pissed. Maybe they do that to make them meaner on the field. Who knows? Who cares? Personally, I think getting all that hair inside a helmet is more trouble than it’s worth. As long as the defense can make the stops and keep us in the game, that’s all I care about.

The offense comes out last and gets the loudest cheer from the crowd. Lester Tollinger, a one-man gang who has the IQ of a retarded Labrador, dances out, leading his buddies. He flails and flexes his arms and legs, like one of those zombies in Night of the Living Dead. The crowd loves Lester. I don’t. I think he looks like the idiot he is, but I have to be nice to him since he is the offensive tackle who protects me in the pocket.

Lester brings the crowd close to a fevered pitch. Brenda takes over the microphone and announces, “And here he is, a junior from the State of Washington, the heart and soul of the Pioneers, Touchdown Tony McIntyre.”
And, as usual, the crowd goes into a frenzy.

I take one step, but a hand clutches my arm, holding me back for just enough time to allow two massive posters to unfurl from the roof of the student union. It’s forty-feet of me in all my glory, arm cocked, ball in hand, about to throw another perfect spiral for six points.

Now, it’s bedlam.

Cheerleader Beth/Betty/Brenda gives me a huge smile, leads me to the microphone on the stand, and stays draped on my left shoulder. I call out to my fans, “Come on, let me hear you!”

The band pipes up another rendition of Oh Pioneers. Some in the crowd sing, some scream, some dance, and all applaud. The players behind me suck the adulation up like new kitchen sponges. I can see their heads swelling.

I raise my hands like Jesus, before he announced his free loaves and fishes lunch.
“What are we going to do next Saturday?” I cry out.

“Win.”

“What?” I ask, cupping my hand behind my ear.

“Win.” The answer comes back louder.

“I’m sorry,” I say. “I didn’t hear you.”

“WIN!”

I raise my hands once more so they quiet, and can hear what I have to say. “I want to thank all of you for coming out today and coming out next Saturday to see us beat the crap out of Northern.”

Applause, applause, applause. Cheers, cheers, cheers.

I’m about to continue, but I’m interrupted by a drum beat, one not coming from some idiot in the band. The beat gets louder. This isn’t right. I look out, past the far edge of the throng of fans, and see a small group of students, way, way in the back. They’re chanting to the beat of the drum, “All we are saying...”

“Hey, you back there,” I call out, then pause.

“...is give peace a chance.”

“This is a football rally,” I inform them.

The chanting continues.

I see to my right, my Alpha Tau, frat brothers, already drunk from squirting boda-bag liquor into each other’s mouths, turn to the offending group and start yelling and swearing at the offenders.

“Hey, shut up back there,” I order to no avail.

“All we are saying...”

“You can do your protesting some other time,” I try to reason with the group. “But this is about football.”

“...is give peace a chance.”

The drum continues along with the chant. I see the Alpha Taus head in the direction of the protesters. “You people can protest after the game on Saturday,” I continue to try to reason with the idiots, “but right now all we care about is beating Northern.”

“All we are saying...”

The rally on the stage abruptly stops. The whole team, cheerleaders, band, and a lot of the crowd, stand flat-footed, watching the protesters lock their arms together and continue to chant, “...is give peace a chance.”

Lester Tollinger bumps me to the side sending Beth off my shoulder and onto the stage floor. “Shut... the... fuck... up,” is Lester’s subtle message into the microphone.

“All we are saying...”

Lester comes off the stage and rushes toward the protesters, followed by his fellow linemen. The crowd parts like the Red Sea to let them through. I’m about to join the posse, but a set of hands holds me back.

“Don’t do it, Tony, you can’t get hurt.” It’s my halfback Arthur, one of the few members of the team that actually takes classes to become something after he graduates, talking sense into my ear.

It doesn’t take a lot of convincing for me to stay on stage. I stop. I know a mob has no brains and just heads. The mountain of football flesh reaches the arm-in-arm protesters.

It isn’t pretty. Lester and the linemen, helped by drunken frat brats, go through the peace-lovers like a tornado through a trailer park. The locked arms are ripped apart, the circle separated, and bodies are tossed around like Frisbees at a frat picnic. The drum is destroyed. Love beads are ripped from necks. Tie-dyed shirts are torn to shreds. The already hyped up crowd, now acting as if they’re ringside at a prize fight, screams for a

knockout. The protesters hold to their belief of giving peace a chance, but their theory doesn't work. The protesters get hammered. Their bodies careen into one another like junk cars at a demolition derby. Protesters are slapped, stomped, and spat upon. Lester heaves one person after another in a mock hammer throw, each one achieving a new record in the human projectile category.

I can only hope the fight on the field next Saturday will be this easy to win.

It all ends when there is no one left to punish. Each protestor has run, limped, or crawled to the safety of a campus building or classroom. Lester and buddies stand, victorious in a pack, like coyotes after a kill, and let loose with a frightening rebel yell, which puts an exclamation point to the end of the kick-off event.

What a great start for Homecoming Week.