

2022-07-06 The Bookmark

(With appreciation to S. D. Krzhizhanovsky.)

The ragged, creased old bookmark rested his head gently between the leaves of a novel, a murder mystery. It whispered to him hints of 'whodunnit,' 'the big reveal,' and other sultry promises. For all the stories he'd seen inside and out, he'd never once read an ending. Bookmarks never do.

"It would be nice," he thought, "to learn just why that woman killed her husband. I thought it would've been for the money, but then there were hints of jealousy, real feeling, there too..."

Alas, he was ignominiously pulled out and laid aside when his reader finished that mystery in a late-night sprint of fevered reading, without bothering to show the finale to her trusty bookmark.

The next volume, a textbook, had no ending worth speaking of.

He was just a placeholder, static, until the exam passed and he absolutely couldn't stand another minute with that alphabetized, serialized, enumerated, pre-digested mish-mash.

A dry spell came. The battered old thing just rested on the bookshelf, surveying his conquests, and those new volumes he hadn't yet explored.

At long last, he was plucked up and, creased ever so slightly backwards, nestled in a collection of short stories. He had a low opinion of such transient work, but couldn't honestly say he'd ever tried it before.

"Maybe," he thought hopefully, "just maybe I'll be able to sit marking the place of a new story, while still able to look back at the ending of the old. I wouldn't see the middle of many stories, but still... to read an ending!"

Luckier yet for the poor tattered bookmark, he found himself in a section of flash fiction. Each story was but a page! No matter where his reader stopped, the faithful slip of a bookmark always had two sumptuous stories, pressing in from both sides, just for him to read end to end.