Lasting Black Monday

The clanging of the massive iron doors as they shuttered for the final time still echoes, not just in my memory, but in every fabric of this city. They ring even louder now that the streets have gone silent. Most of my friends, drawn here by the promise of steady work, have scattered to the wind, returning to their families and the familiar comfort of their hometowns. After all, they were here for the job, not the place.

Some went even further, abandoning their homes and belongings, leaving behind a hollow reminder of the lives disrupted. Besides, there was no sense in trying to sell them, many rented anyway, and it’s not like anyone is really looking to move here *now*. Yet, as I continue to navigate these deserted streets and gaze upon all the boarded-up windows and overgrown lawns, that have replaced all the familiar faces, it leaves me with a feeling nearly as empty as the city itself. I almost wish I had that luxury, the choice to walk away and leave these vacant streets behind. But my roots are *here,* my family is *here*, and all that I have left is *here*; my heart still lies within this city.

Now in the quiet evenings, I sit on the porch and watch the sun dip below the horizon. The night sky, no longer illuminated by the amber glow of the mill, means that I can finally admire the glimmering nightscape. Each twinkling constellation above carries a rich history of its own, offering solace to a city, and its people, in search of their next chapter. As shooting stars sail across my view in a dazzling splendor, suddenly the city’s troubles don’t seem so vast anymore. I begin to think back on the sounds that used to fill the air when the mill still glowed. Not just the metal clangs or the incessant humming but the chatter, the laughter, and the conversations.

Of course, it was not all good then; I lost nearly as many friends to the job as I did to its closing. The mill with its towering structures, billowing smoke, and blistering heat was not heaven on earth, and neither was life outside of it. Soot would blanket the sky, covering building windows, car windshields, and even leaves with a charcoal film. The river itself never froze because of all the superheated water and industrial waste being dumped back into it, only recently have I seen it blanketed with snow and ice for the first time in a long time. I still wouldn’t swim or fish in it though.

However, I do miss the bonds and community that were forged here. There was a time when you couldn’t navigate the downtown strip without rubbing shoulders with your fellow man. The crowd could be overwhelming at times, especially with my children. If we went shopping, I made sure they held my hand, so as not to get washed away in the sea of people. The bars could be even worse come shift change. Though now, I almost miss the bustling streets full of my colleagues and their families, as overwhelming as it could often be.

I can remember the days immediately following that dark grim Monday morning. The fear and uncertainty that seemed to melt through the community. However, as the realization of what had happened set in, a moment of hope began to cast itself. Local community members came together, and we attempted to buy back that shuttered mill, to operate it the way it was meant to be, by the people who truly ran it. However, our attempts at employee ownership amounted to little avail. We couldn’t raise enough capital, a true testament to our economic struggles. Not even our combined wealth, if you could even call it that, was able to buy back our livelihood. I truly wish that it could have come to fruition, but I wish so much more that one day we can again stand in such solidarity.