

Honest Henry's Store

A Sew Powerful Parable by Dana Buck

There's nothing like the morning
When a storm has finally passed
To see the sun now overcome
Those dense and darkened clouds at last

Though all things now have a shadow
Wet dripping's still the sound
That we hear amidst the wreckage
Scattered plainly all around

It appears the ocean came ashore
Pushed landward by the wind
To cause distress and havoc
Then rolled out to sea again

It's left behind such chaos
And a mess beyond compare
Dead fish and muddy seaweed
Strewn about just everywhere

There's hills of random ruin
Left tangled by the sea
And piles of boards and roofing tiles
Where buildings used to be

Afloat in pools of water
And half buried in the sand
Are a plethora of items
That were once brand new and grand

Stools from a soda fountain
Lie upside down and buried
The countertop is missing
Lord only knows where that's been carried

A sign that lists the flavors
Is resting in the moisture
All the syrup's in the water
Now enjoyed by clam and oyster

Down passed these wrecked confections
Lie shoes of every size
While suits and pants are floating
Alongside hats and shirts and ties

In the next intriguing pile
Where they've been transferred by the sea
Are violins and cellos
Black and white piano keys

Tubas, trumpets, saxophones
That once were played so gaily
Rest beside a Celtic flute
And Hawaiian ukulele

There's remnants of a barber shop
And a fifty room hotel
Repetitious in their bobbing
Up and down on each new swell

Yet amidst the ruination
In this devastated land
One building has survived
A single structure proudly stands

It's certainly been damaged
Where it sits beyond the quay
But it's weathered nature's fury
And it wasn't washed away

Though the sign is cracked and twisted
It remains above the door
Where you still can see the letters
Reading "Honest Henry's Store"

For twenty seven years
This place served this community
Established in the summer
Circa eighteen seventy three

T'was that year that Henry Parker
With his wife and baby son
Rolled his wagon down to Texas
To a place called Galveston

There he searched for a location
To set up a little store
He finally found the perfect place
Just what he'd long been searching for

With Galveston an island
Sand was all around the docks
But through Henry's perseverance
He found a patch of firm bedrock

Into this he drove his pilings
To create a firm foundation
For he'd heard the Gulf of Mexico
Could bring great precipitation

When his store was finally finished
He wiped the sweat with his bandana
Then gave the place the name he earned
Tending his store in Indiana

For Honest Henry's reputation
Carried neither blot nor stain
And was impeccable for fairness
From Decatur to Fort Wayne

Though he built far off of Main Street
His customers still found him
Shelves of canned good, tools and fabrics
Filled the spaces all around him

The other merchants snickered
Laughing mean behind his back
"His location's so obscure"
"He built far off the beaten track"

For they had all constructed
On more appealing land
But beneath their stores and businesses
Lay nothing more than sand

So for years and then for decades
Through civil war and reconstruction
Proud Galveston expanded
Without pause or interruption

Honest Henry's stayed in business
Saw both prosperity and strife
Through these twenty seven years
He'd raised his son, but lost his wife

Till at last t'was time for Henry
With his boy now full grown man
To retire to Indiana
And give his son the store and land

As they discussed the pending transfer
On the porch of hand hewn oak
Henry's son sat down to listen
As his Father slowly spoke

"We've seen changes here in Galveston"
"And growth beyond my dreams"
"Many citizens are wealthy"
"So many ships of sail and steam"

"But I've resisted the temptation"
"To raise a larger store and stock"
"For there's no good land to build on"
"Beyond our patch of solid rock"

"You should keep this firm foundation"
"For my son," he said to him
"Just remember, on the Gulf"
"The storms aren't if, the storms are when"

And he gave his son the key
When the day for leaving came
Henry climbed aboard his wagon
To start the journey to Fort Wayne

And as the father left, the son
(His given name was Stan)
Stood smiling on the porch
And in his mind reviewed his plan

“My Father feared the hurricane”
“But they always veer far south”
“Or come ashore up north”
“More near the Mississippi’s mouth”

“Galveston is sheltered”
“With a natural weather shield”
“There’s no reason why I shouldn’t”
“Exploit all that it will yield”

As he viewed the vacant holdings
To the east and to the west
He said “Honest Henry’s Store”
“Is going to launch a building fest!”

And that’s exactly what he did
He brought in lumber by the mountain
And soon held a ribbon cutting
For Honest Henry’s Soda Fountain

To supply the clothing needs
Of wealthy patrons on the rise
Right next door he quickly opened
Honest Henry’s Suits & Ties

There was Honest Henry’s Barbershop
And Honest Henry’s Beauty Parlor
Honest Henry’s Music Store was built
With speed and skill and ardor

At Honest Henry’s Livery Stable
You could rent a horse and buggy
Honest Henry’s Bath & Shower thrived
When it was hot and muggy

Honest Henry's Restaurant
Served quite an awesome pecan pie
And all the farmers bought their plows
From Honest Henry's Tool & Die

But of all the building projects
Causing pride to puff and swell
Were the fifty lavish rooms
Of Honest Henry's Grand Hotel

Lest you think Stan disrespectful
That he thought Dad's way absurd
He'd taken steps that to his mind
Honored his Father's parting words

For each time he'd start a project
It was popularly known
That upon the sandy soil he'd place
A healthy layer of stones

You couldn't really tell the difference
For this mix of stone and silt
Looked like the ground on which his Father
Had originally built

But looks can be deceiving
And no self-deluding thought
Can ever really bridge the difference
Between shifting sand and solid rock

And as Stan was contemplating
Honest Henry's Pool & Park
The wind blew from the south
And the sky grew thick and dark

So the residents of Galveston
Closed their shutters, sealed their doors
After all, they'd seen the weather
Threaten many times before

But today it felt quite different
Something new was going down
As the wind assailed the sea
It pushed the Gulf into their town

The ships and docks and harbor
Were violently consumed
Every business lining Main Street
Was reduced to utter ruin

The storm advanced across the island
Relentless in its wrath
And headed straight for Honest Henry's
On it's wet, destructive path

First it hit the soda fountain
And its destruction took a minute
Honest Henry's Suits & Ties was gone
And all the clothing in it

The barber and the beauty shops
Felt the storm's destructive power
Followed closely by the music store
And then the Bath & Shower

The restaurant, the tool & die
The livery all fell
And the hurricane just laughed
As it pulled down the Grand Hotel

And where, you ask, is Stan?
As wind and waves pound so erratic
He's in Honest Henry's Store
Crouched and frightened in the attic

For when the hotel crashed around him
And he'd looked on in pain and shock
He'd remembered what his Father'd said
About a house built on the rock

So he dashed across the courtyard
Threw himself against the door
Where at last he huddled scared and wet
In the humble little store

He'd kept it mostly for nostalgia
As a tribute to his dad
Now it was his final refuge
As his world grew dark and mad

He couldn't help but think of others
Those refined and rich and grand
Who'd built fortunes, lives and families
On a deceitful patch of sand

And as the storm played out its fury
Consigning many to the deep
T'was in grief and thankful sorrow
That Stan, exhausted, fell asleep

So we've traveled the full circle
To this wet yet sunny morn
From here in devastation
Seeds of truth can be reborn

Truth about your own foundation
What you're building on and in
And knowing when it comes to storms
The question's never if but when

Don't think that sand can be refurbished
That you can add a brick or block
For it can't match the firm foundation
You've been given on the rock

What you build, do with intention
On the rock and nothing more
And you'll endure to see the morning
Just like Honest Henry's Store