

FREEDOM:

The Last Tree Left.

By Richard Lannon

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Somewhere in Upstate New York. In a small town called Hope Falls. Stands a huge tree named Freedom. In fact, it's the last tree left in the world. All the other trees were taken down and destroyed for one reason or another. Next to the tree is an old farm house where Herkimer Diamond lives. He's an innocent young man, with very few needs. He lives in harmony with his tree Freedom. Herkimer takes care of Freedom and Freedom takes care of Herkimer.

In the spring time, Herkimer taps his tree. For the sugary liquid, that flows inside the tree. Boiling the liquid turns the sugary liquid into a golden sweet syrup. The golden syrup covers his blueberry pancakes every morning. Herkimer uses his tree to protect him from the hot sun. All summer long when it's hot and humid out he lays under the tree where it's always cool and dry. In the fall, Herk rakes all the leaves that fall from Freedom. He puts the leaves into his garden. The leaves deteriorate and put the necessary nutrients back into the soil. It helps his garden produce the food he eat. In the winter, when the snow is three feet deep and the temperature is below zero. Herk puts another log on the fire. A log that fell from Freedom, during the year. You see, Herkimer can not survive without his Freedom and now Freedom can not survive without Herk.

It's summer time, Herk is lying on his back under Freedom as usual, his hands are resting behind his head. He is looking up at Freedom's many leaves. Blowing in the breeze. He hears a voice from far away. He sits up, looks in the direction of the voice. But no one is there. Then he hears the voice again, it says.

"Herkimer, Herkimer Diamond." Still no one was in sight. Herk's eye's followed the direction of the voice.

Then the voice said. "You're in the news ,boy."

A man on a bicycle finally becomes visible. It's an elderly man. Climbing the hill that leads to Herk's house. "It's Smiley." Herk says to himself.

"Smiley has a big hairy gray moustache and a bald head. He always wears black suspenders, brown pants and a white shirt that always has coffee stains on it. He owns most of the town of Hope Falls. People say Smiley always rides his bike because he's too cheap to buy gas for his car. Herk couldn't figure out why the town people called him Smiley. Smiley never smiled."

Smiley spoke again. "Herkimer you're in the news, boy". Smiley finally reached the white picket fence that ran between the road and Herk's property.

"Remember that man with the fancy camera who stopped by to see you last week". Smiley huffed.

"Sure." Herk said

"Well he took a picture of you and that tree and put it in this National Newspaper. Here take a look." Smiley huffed. Smiley took the news paper and shows Herk the front page.

“ Well I’ll be. I’ve never seen myself in a newspaper before”. Herk said.

“Herk, you want the newspaper?” Question Smiley.

“Yea.” Herk said.

“ Then that will be \$2.50.” Smiley said.

Herk was surprised, he thought Smiley was giving him the newspaper but in reality he was charging him for it. Herk reached his hands into his pockets in search of the money. But his pockets were empty. Smiley watched carefully. Herk pulls his hands out of his pockets and hands the newspaper back to Smiley.

“ I’m sorry Smiley I don’t have any money on me today.” Herk said looking to the ground.

“That’s alright kid you can have the news paper.” Smiley said smiling. “ I read the paper this morning that’s my personnel copy. My wife won’t miss it. Oh buy the way, I’m running short of that Golden Syrup. Drop some by when you get the chance.” Smiley said. As he got on his bike.

“Thank you Smiley.” Herk said smiling.

Smiley turned the bike around. “Have a good day Herk.” Smiley said. As he rode down the hill.

Herk watched as Smiley went down the hill back to town. Then Herk noticed, the red haze. It not only covered the horizon. But all the sky around him. It was air pollution, because there were no trees left to filter the air. The air all around the world was becoming polluted at an alarming rate.

The next morning, Herkimer awoke to a glorious sound. A hundred birds were chirping. He ran to his window. He gazed at Freedom and to his astonishment. In his tree were more than the normal amount of birds. Herk watched in amazement. Still more were flying to his Freedom. They were using his Freedom as a sanctuary, to protect themselves from their predators. They were feeding on the bugs that climbed on Freedom’s limbs. Soon, the entire tree is filled with all kinds of birds. Some of the Birds, Herkimer had never seen before. Some are big, some are small, some are colorful and some have no color at all.

Some of the birds looked like they traveled a great distance to visit Freedom. After a few days all the millions of birds and their total weight, began to hurt Freedom. Large branches came crashing down on the ground all around Herk. He ran quickly into the house and reached for the rusty shotgun that rested in the corner of his kitchen. He couldn’t remember, when he used the gun last. After grabbing the gun he opened a kitchen drawer and reached inside frantically. He found a moldy old live shotgun shell. He loaded the gun and sprinted back outside to his tree. He raised the barrel of the gun in the air away from Freedom and yelled.

“You leave my Freedom alone”.

Herk pulled the trigger of the gun and a loud boom exited the barrel. Knocking him to the ground. "In one fast motion all the birds in Freedom began to take flight; the sky turned black. The air was so thick with birds you couldn't even see the sun."

The birds made so much noise. Herk had to cover his ears with his hands. In a matter of minutes all the birds were gone. In search of another Freedom. Little did the birds know. There is no other Freedom. Herk breathed a sigh of relief. Out of desperation, he had saved his Freedom. Herk ran to Freedom, putting both arms around his friend. He gave Freedom a big hug and whispered.

" I promise Freedom, I will protect you".

An hour after sunset Herk still lying under Freedom began to get tired. He got up lit his lantern and started to walk back to the house. He turned his head and looked to the distance and noticed lights. Lots of lights are coming in his direction. Scratching his head, he stood dumb founded. The lights looked like thousand's of fire flies. Floating through the fields towards him. Then suddenly the noise from the lights became audible. It sounded like bee's buzzing at first. As the sounds got closer, it sounded more like motors racing. The noise became louder. The light's got brighter. The ground began to shake.

The fireflies turned out to be thousands upon thousands of Cars, Motorcycles and RV's full of people. Heading towards Herk. As all the cars, motorcycles and RV's pulled in all around Herk. The people got out of their vehicles and surrounded Herk. At first, ten people, a hundred people, then a thousand people were all standing around staring at Herk. He raised the lantern above his shoulder.

Herk yelled out to the crowd . "Can I help you?"

A woman from the crowd yelled back. "We're here to see your tree. My four year old daughter has never seen a tree before."

Herk explained. "That tree you refer too, I call Freedom. It stands over there on top of the hill."

The woman says. "We can't see it, it's too dark."

Herk explains. "The full moon will be rising shortly, and you will be able to see it then."

As he spoke the moon began to rise right behind Freedom. Illuminating all it's beauty. The crowd roared. As some people wept.

From the crowd comes a tall skinny man, dressed in a suit and tie and says. "Hello I'm a business man and my name is Mr. Cap Italist. He reaches out to shake Herks hand. Herk glances at the mans hand and then looks back into the mans eye's.

“I’d like to buy your Freedom from you. I’ll give you a million dollars, for that tree.”

Herk shakes his head no.

The man says. “ I’ll give you 5 million dollars!”

Herk says. “ No.”

Then Mr. Cap Italist became upset. He closes his left eye as he reaches for his chin with his right hand. He gently rubs his chin and says. “ Alright, alright, my final offer I’ll give you 10 Million dollars, for that damn tree.” The crowd grew silent, all eye’s are on Herk.

Herk looked up to the mans cold stare and says. “ I’m sorry sir, my Freedom is not for sale.” The crowd gasps.

Just then a Rolly Polly man, walks from the crowd towards Herk. He is also dressed in a suit and tie. He questions Herk.

“Son, do you know who I am?”

Herk searches his memory and says. “No, should I?” The crowd chuckles.

The Rolly Polly man reaches in his pocket. He pulls out a business card and hands it to Herk.

“Well son, my name is Senator Bellee Fulajelly and I’d like to make you an offer.” the Senator bloated.

Herk says. “ I’m Listening.”

The Senator continued. “Well me and a few of my Congressman friends, down in Washington, would like you, to donate your entire piece of property, including the tree, to the Government and in return, we will turn this area into a National Park. Will give you a free pass to visit the park any time you like.”

“No thank you, Sir.” Herk responded.

“Young man, do you understand the power I have down in Washington?” Questioned the Senator. “ We could pass laws and take your property away from you, like we did with the American Indians 300 hundred years ago.” Yelled the Senator. The Senator grins and stares deeply in to Herks eye’s.

Herk looked up into the Senator’s sinister eye’s and says. “ Sir, I don’t care how much power, you have. I will defend my freedom with my life, if I have to, now please get off my property.”

The crowd roared with approval. The Senator lowered his head and shuffled his feet back through

the crowd. Herk search the crowd for a familiar face. There were none.

“I’m tired and I’m going to bed.” Herk yelled to the crowd and then he said. “I suggest you all do the same.”

He turned around towards the house, the crowds eye’s followed him. He walked through the white gate. He climb the stairs to the porch he turned to face the crowd again and spoke.

Herkimer raises his left hand pointing his index finger towards Freedom. The tree stands majestically on top of the hill.

“My Freedom is an important part of my life. Something I don’t take for granted. I feel very lucky I still have my Freedom. I feel sorry for all of those who have lost theirs or never had it to begin with.”

Herk lifted the lantern and turned it off, leaving the crowd in the darkness. He turned around walked through the door way and closed the porch door behind him.

A child from the crowd, yelled to Herk. “Good night, sleep tight.” Herk didn’t hear the child. The crowd slowly dispersed.

In the morning when Herk awoke. He again looked out his window. To his astonishment he saw people everywhere, some were sitting on blankets, others were standing around Freedom, children were climbing up Freedom, and sitting on the branches.

Herk yelled. “ If you people can’t respect my Freedom. Then get off my property. You are trespassing.”

No one paid any attention to Herk. Herk quickly put his clothes on. He went outside to tell everyone to leave. Herk noticed, over by the fence. In front of the house. A crowd had surrounded Herks spring fed well. In the crowd was Mr. Cap Italist. The crowd quickly walked away. As Herk got closer.

Herk noticed the boards that covered his well had been moved. Because he lived in the country side far removed from civilization. His water supply comes from the well dug by his grandfather many years ago. The boards that covered his well protected the well from little critters that might fall in the well and die. Poisoning his water. He put the boards back in place and moved on. By the afternoon everyone had left.

It’s a long hot day. Herk, worked very hard in his garden. Harvesting red ripe tomatoes and large green peppers. Just before he went to sleep. He had a large glass of water from the well. The water didn’t taste like it normally did. It had a sweet taste. Because Herk was so thirsty it didn’t matter what the water tasted like. So long, as it’s cold and wet. He went quickly to sleep.

Herk awoke later than normal, the next day. He felt sick, his head was pounding, his mouth is dry. The air had a funny smell, it didn't smell clean like it normally does. Herk slowly put his clothes on and walk into the kitchen.

He fixed himself some Blueberry Pancakes, he reached for the golden syrup, and yelled.

“Freedom.”

Herk quickly ran to the door and opened it, he looked in the direction of Freedom. But his Freedom was gone. Herk couldn't believe his eye's. He wiped them with both hands. When he looked again, his Freedom was gone forever. During the night while Herk was sleeping. Someone had cut down his Freedom.

Herk ran crying to the top of the hill, where Freedom once stood. The tears ran uncontrollably down Herk's face. Herk fell to the ground, holding on to the huge stump where his Freedom once stood.

Herk looked up, to the heavens and screamed. “They've stolen my Freedom!”

The tears poured from Herk's eyes. They ran down his nose and formed a puddle on the ground. Herk looked down at the puddle. He couldn't believe his eyes. In the middle of the puddle stood a 3 inch baby tree. Herk smiled. A tear rolled off Herk's nose and fell directly on the little sapling, watering it.

“A child of Freedom.” He whispered.

Herk looked and studied the little tree.

“Hello Friend.” He said. “I shall call you Liberty.”