

Dana, Massachusetts, was gone.
Enfield, Massachusetts, was gone.
Greenwich, Massachusetts, was gone.
Prescott, Massachusetts, was gone.

Hand shaking, eyes suddenly blurry with unexpected tears, Eli tugged his grandfather's watch and chain from his vest pocket. His family pulled closer to him to watch over his arm as the second hand swept past midnight.

At 12:01 a.m., April 28, 1938, small children in the town hall looked around at the walls, at the adults, at each other, incredulous at the miracle. They had believed they would all evaporate at midnight. It wasn't true. Life went on.

Then the grownups, in an unusual, rather grotesque display of open grief, sang "Auld Lang Syne" and wept, and then the children knew the world was over after all.

Eli closed the watch, gathered the chain and fob, and pressed it, warm from his hand, into his son's hand.

"This was meant for you." It had been unfinished business. He capped it off by kissing his wife, as if that were also a matter of unfinished business.

Jenny watched her parents, and all the old folks, and the children. Day laborers and farmers dressed in the suits they would one day be buried in; wives and daughters dressed each in her plain, simple, one good dress. Bearing witness to the last time most of them would ever feel a sense of belonging and of community; Jenny, with her documentarian's eye, knew that's what it was.

Roger Lewis shook hands, cast his eye around the crowded room, hugging his wife and shaking hands with as many people as he could reach, like a candidate seeking votes.

Mary turned to her daughter Ella, whispering something into her hair, with arms around each other's waists like girlfriends. It struck Jenny that Ella did not need her.

Jenny blew a kiss to her that was free and with no obligations or debts. Then Cousin George and Cousin Eliza stumbled through the crowd. Eliza, tear-streaked and pitiful, nodded to Mary and twisted her gloves. Mary, in a frenzy rarely seen in the Valley except at infrequent religious revivals, not that she ever partook of them, threw her arms around Eliza and bawled.

George and Eli shook hands quietly, and George smiled to see all of Eli's children here. Of George's boys, only Calvin came with his two kids. They did not speak of Alonzo, but each privately thought of him. Without realizing they were doing it, they searched for a sight of his face in the crowd. The rumors about him were obviously rather foolish, but those who liked romances and fantasy stories enjoyed them and made up more. Alonzo Vaughn, the great, brooding giant of a man, like a pioneer man, like rebel Dan Shays, and like Shays was chased off his land. He would wander in hiding, ever sorrowing for his lost home and his lost love, some said, like an old New England ballad of ghosts and hardship.

Jenny believed they must have been secretly glad he wasn't here. That would ruin the scenario. If he had suddenly come through the door in a new suit announcing that he had a swell job somewhere, that would just ruin the romance. She had seen the darker side of the romance. But she looked for him, too.

Other missing faces were recounted less romantically: Miss Rebecca, who used to run the Prescott Hill store; the Sullivans; Miss Murphy the Greenwich Village teacher...only his family remembered John Vaughn.

Jenny stepped out into the cool, damp night air that still smelled of dust from their long auto convoy earlier in the day. Wandering people coming and going searched for their cars or

smoked, and drank beer under moonlight, and the massive collection of stars which seemed within arm's reach, and the hanging lanterns, less enticing because they were within reach. Dick followed behind, dreading what she thought as she searched the black, shaggy Prescott Hill with her eyes.

“This isn't the end, Jenny,” he said.

“As long as someone makes a buck?”

“No, I don't mean that,” he said, pained that she used his words against him.

“This place, it's got a life of its own. And what was here...you'll always carry that around inside you. Somebody like you would.”

“Then you believe in redemption? And eternal life?” she asked, turning to face him, with more acceptance, even humor, than he expected. “I'm glad. I think I do, too.”

Just as though stating a matter of fact, she gently pulled herself against him, and kissed his lips. She looked into his eyes for confirmation, brushed his jaw with her cheek, slowly nuzzled and kissed him again.

Over his shoulder, her eyes searched the dark sky over where Prescott used to be until an hour ago.

“I can't ever remember not knowing this day would come.”

He smiled, holding her closer against him, then realizing with disappointment that she was talking not about him, but about the destruction of the Valley, and the coming of the reservoir.