

scm Presents

The Quiet Ledgers of the Ocean von Nickel Institute

Created, written & illustrated by scm

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Churchill knew a man who lived out in the country. This gentleman was tall & well dressed & had since retired from being the owner of a hen ranch. He was also the owner of a small institute for creatives whose parents had since passed away. His name was Ocean von Nickel. They say he was named as such because he was born on a boat in the middle of the ocean. He wouldn't say which one. When asked of his birth country, he said none, claiming to be from non-delineated waters that belonged to none.

He always wore a short brim hat, the color depending on his choice of boots. His boots always had to be a shade darker than his hat. Unless he was wearing all black, in which case his hat would be black & his boots would be burgundy. His eyes were blue. He wore his hair thick & long in the style of the Carpathian kings.

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Ocean had built a tall chapel on his property that was heated through a fire furnace. When his wife passed away in her sleep, years ago, he moved his very few belongings out to the chapel & began to live there with a pet panther. The panther was scared of the garden but had a sandpit on the side of the chapel. The sandpit had a light that faced the garden that refused to turn off. The panther would stand at the edge of the sandpit & overlook the garden at night. He wasn't black. He was white.

From five in the evening until ten, Ocean walked the streets with a ledger in his hand. Armed with a mechanical pencil, he would arrive at his friend's bistro & have supper while taking time to write in the ledger. On Thursday nights, the bistro would fix Ocean a deliciously roasted rabbit with mountains of carrots cooked with sugar. When finished with his meal, Ocean would enjoy a glass of milk & play with the skeleton key that he had made for his vault lock. The key was about 2 inches long & had a circular ring that was the exact size of his left index finger. The key was plated with a fine polished nickel.

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Nobody had ever seen a word of what Ocean was writing in his ledger. Not even his belated wife, Chloe. She once tried to peak over his shoulder with the pretext of bringing him a tea infusion. He took the ledger & placed it into the vault in the den. After three days of not writing in the ledger, his wife questioned him. He said, calmly & without judgment, that if she was ever to try & read his ledger, he would never write in it again. Chloe, understandingly, apologized for her indiscretion & visited the office of the town bookkeeper. She ordered a ledger from the man. She brought the purchased ledger to the hardware store & had it fitted for a lock & chain. Then, she spent the next sixty odd years, writing into her own ledger. It was divided into two columns: Incoming & Outgoing. In Outgoing, she wrote of herself. In Incoming, she wrote about her husband. She never showed it to anyone & taught their daughter, Madison von Nickel, to keep her own ledger. Chloe argued that a ledger made everyone seem more important & interesting than they might actually be. She insisted that mystery made for an entertaining romance with a partner.

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When Ocean von Nickel lost his wife, he walked somberly to her bedside, reached over for her ledger & kept it guarded until she was buried four days later. At the burial, he unlocked the ledger & placed it in his wife's casket. She was lowered into the ground, unread ledger & all. The honor with which he performed the ceremony could only be called alta-military.

Ocean von Nickel never admitted to anyone that he wished to read his wife's ledger. Primarily, because he had created such a legacy of secrecy with his own. Enthusiasts would argue that Ocean's love for his wife grew exponentially when she began to keep her own ledger. When questioned, he reported that it was mathematically impossible to love his wife more than he always had at any given moment from the first moment they met.

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Ocean held a course in "Ledgeristics" for the residents at the institute. He taught them to keep their own ledgers. When completed, the ledgers were grouped together & placed into the vault. Since he was old, Ocean asked his daughter to look after the vault in case he should pass on. Madison believed in the code but also believed quietly that the material could be useful to others. She would wait for an idea to present itself.

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One day, Ocean von Nickel walked into a salon where they were setting up a fashion show for Green Fig Wardrobe. Churchill had already arrived & was seated in a chair in the back of the room. Ocean headed in the same direction as Churchill, grabbed a chair & sat down next to him. This was the first time Ocean & Churchill met. They introduced themselves & Churchill told Ocean that he was a friend of his daughter. Ocean seemed pleased. He described what the Green Fig show was all about & told Churchill some stories from years past. When he was storied out, he opened his ledger & began to draft some notes.

Churchill mentioned that he knew something about the Quiet Ledgers on account of his friendship with Madison. Ocean admitted that he was quite curious as to the content of the ledgers from his Institute; one in particular. He explained to Churchill that the mind of a creative person was an incredible phenomenon which could not fully be explained by even the healthiest & strongest of minds. Ocean had spent the last thirty years researching the psychology of creativity with a team of well-received scientists. They concluded that there was no explanation or description that could be taken as fact to define the nature of the condition. It was this mystery, as well as the individual personalities of the people, that kept Ocean engrossed at the Institute.

Churchill asked him what he thought of Madison's idea to utilize the Quiet Ledgers in some fashion. Ocean remained quiet. Churchill began to retract the question but Ocean detained him. He told Churchill that it was a fair question & that Madison was more right than she was wrong. He explained that the privacy that he shrouded over his own ledger made the situation difficult. He could not without good reason ask anyone to share something that he was unwilling to share himself. In short, he wanted to respond to Madison's idea but he didn't know how to make it possible. He confessed to Churchill that the very issue was very troubling for him because he felt that he had a relatively short time to act on his daughter's idea. Whilst he did not care to leave a legacy of any type behind, he felt that the Institute was important & he worried for its future after he was gone.

Churchill had an idea. He paused to try & get his thoughts in fluid form. He turned to Ocean & proposed the following: An exhibition of illustrated portraits of each of the members of the Institute. Then, next to the illustration; the titles of the stories. Upon entering the exhibition, the visitor would see read the following:

OvN proudly presents:

The Quiet Ledgers of the Ocean von Nickel Institute

They carried ledgers & no one knew what they were writing & that gave even greater value to the words.

Churchill was inspired & it was making Ocean smile & laugh. He stopped & turned to Ocean to see his response. Ocean held out his hand & shook Churchill's paw. He loved the idea, he was ready to leave the Green Fig show & get started. Churchill offered to draw the illustrations based on the yearbook pictures. Ocean asked him to come by the ranch to tour the Institute & to be given the yearbooks. The Green Fig show was starting but neither of them watched the show very closely. They were both attending the exhibition of "The Quiet Ledgers of the Ocean von Nickel Institute" in their minds.

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Churchill met Ocean in the early evening to have a celebratory hen dinner on the ranch. Ocean was preparing one of the 13th floor hens that were raised for special occasions. They had supper together & talked about the Institute & the proposed exhibition. Churchill had brought a portfolio of illustration styles. Ocean picked the style that he liked best. He then picked a few of the quiet ledgers, opened them cautiously & without reading the entry, transferred the title to a piece of blank paper. Churchill looked over his shoulder at the title. He dropped his pencil & put his paws over his eyes. Ocean reached over to touch Churchill on the shoulder.

Churchill stood, walked to the other side of the room & then asked Ocean if he could just imagine the value, the beauty, of these unread stories. Ocean stopped transcribing & simply nodded his head.

Ocean invited Churchill into another room on the ranch & they each had a glass of champurrado. At the end of the room was a small picture; what seemed to be like a pencil drawing. Ocean walked Churchill to the drawing & asked him what it meant. It was a picture of a piece of coal with a light flashing out from the inside. The light was like a ring of colors wrapped in smoke, attempting to be blue & purple & red all at once. Below the drawing it said: Energy is the Soul in Coal.

Ocean walked him back to the catacomb stools in the drinking room. He told Churchill about his wife Chloe. He told him about the time that she looked over his shoulder to read his ledger. He didn't give

an explanation for what he did, he didn't defend it, and he didn't act like what he did was right. He just stated the fact that most of his ledger was about her.

Ocean wrote about how much Chloe meant to him. How he felt the first time he saw her. He wrote about the tattoos that he would have put on his body for her & the bullets he would have taken for her. He wrote everything he could for her & about her. Churchill asked him why he had been so resolved to not share any of it with her. Ocean responded that they were just words & even the most beautiful of words weren't powerful enough. Likewise, he told Churchill, the titles of these stories are bound to be amazing. And the stories behind them are surely even more incredible. But yet, not the titles, nor the words, nor the stories can compare to actually having a relationship with the people who wrote them.

Later that night, Ocean admitted that the real beauty in the quiet ledger was that inside there were figures that could not be multiplied, divided, added or subtracted to equal a sum. By not allowing anybody to read them, the quiet ledgers were able to become infinite.

Churchill was quiet. Then, he volunteered an idea about the pencil drawing of the Soul in coal. He proposed that the energy inside the coal, whilst it was closed off & unavailable, that seal created the Soul. Once the seal was broken, it ceased being the Soul of the piece of coal any longer. Once broken, it was just energy that had been released & the piece of coal ceased having Soul. Churchill looked at Ocean who was smiling & drinking his sherry. Churchill recalled what he had written several days ago:

In the ocean, every step towards the sky brings us closer to the stars. Instead of speaking loud, let's speak in metaphors. We want to insist, we want to let you know: Everyone will want your Soul, do not let it go!

Ocean nodded & told Churchill that he would never let a ledger go. Churchill began to understand why.

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There were some entries in the first Thirty Years of Quiet Ledgers that were simple & fun & everyone who passed by them shared a smile. There was one title that caused a huge commotion & members of the media & the scientific community pleaded with Ocean to reveal more information on the source &

the entry behind the title. Ocean knew that the entry was special & detailed & worth revealing. The infamous entry assumed one individual's entire ledger. Ocean's code would not allow him to release further information.

The individual who wrote the entry was not born creative. She had developed a minor case in her youth & it had developed as she got older until it finally consumed her & took her life. Her parents had always supported her at the Institute & when they passed on, Ocean took a special interest in creating a support group for the girl.

The girl had an overwhelming interest in planes. She learned about them through her parents. Both of her parents worked for a large airline corporation that had an operation in Puerto Rico. Her father was an engineer who worked on the wings of the plane & her mother was the manager of the airhostess training group. When the girl was very young, she toured the hangers on a weekly basis & was given many opportunities to be a guest on local flights. She took no interest in dolls or toys or any sort of childhood games. She focused solely on animals with wings & planes.

The father had developed a problem that had left him incapacitated. The mother, in leading the family, discovered the Ocean von Nickel Institute. At the Institute, the girl found a happy home & a filled a private room with model planes, her father's blueprints & posters of butterflies. She was interviewed several times for a variety of publications & programs; each under the direction of illustrious scientists. Ocean von Nickel developed a think tank of mechanical engineers who would come monthly to the Institute to discuss the future of aviation. The girl was the guest of honor at all of the meetings & kept a copy of the meeting's minutes. Ocean kept her minutes in a three ring binder beside her bed & noticed that all the pages had been marked neatly with a red pen. The margins also filled with well-written notes & careful illustrations. Ocean, believing the binder to be a supplement to her ledger, kept this knowledge to himself.

A rumor had begun to circulate which was fit for a soap opera. The majority of the public at the exhibition believed it to be entirely accurate. They whispered about it while looking at the title. They continued to discuss it further at dinner after the exhibition.

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The rumor told the tale of a young girl who was fascinated by butterflies. A father who taught his daughter simple engineering rules & encouraged her to develop an understanding of the fundamentals of flight. The girl, inspired with an incredible understanding, put together a prototype which astounded her father. Her father took it to his manager who in turn took the prototype to the head of the company. The prototype was suppressed for unknown reasons & the father was threatened in a variety of ways. Most of which surrounded the well being of his family & especially his daughter. The father was so frightened that he took the original draft of the prototype & told his daughter that it was never to be shared with another soul. The daughter, upon suppressing what was most valuable to her, developed a rare condition & never communicated again.

At the exhibition for the Quiet Ledgers, Churchill had created an awesome display for her title. He, too, had realized how fantastic it was. He made it the last title that people saw before leaving the building. The eyes of the girl in the illustration, albeit unintentionally, wore an easily recognizable mark of genius. The title was:

The Puerto Rican Girl, age 11, who invented human wings during three days in April.

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Churchill had created his own title fit for a ledger & placed it into the pocket of his boardshorts & dove into the surf. He didn't show it to Ocean because it was written about Madison. Instead of his own picture, Churchill had done a special portrait of her. At first, he thought of sharing with someone. Then, he thought about asking someone to deliver it to Madison wherever she might be. Instead, he chose to keep it quiet.

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