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Such Great Height and Consequence

To be clear, the statue came down for its own protection. Not because the lawmakers and politicians and folks at city hall finally grew themselves a conscience. Not because they wanted a new chapter for Aberdeen, a new image of unity and tolerance, though that's what they might say now. To be clear, enough people had left the safety and comfort of their own homes to march around the statue of General James Hixby and enough of them were circling it, leering up at the statue like they had never noticed it before¹ and hoisting their handmade signs in its direction—almost threateningly, as if the General could read them—while enough camera crews had arrived on-scene to film the protest and label the town and its statue as *backwards* and *bigoted* and then some little shithead snuck up to the statue under the cover of night and proclaimed in shining letters that *The general sucked his horse's DICK!*² that someone up top gave the order for the statue to be removed and stored somewhere *more suitable*.

Plenty of folks wrote in to suggest more appropriate locations for the General—some of them sincerely—but where he sits now is probably a storage locker in some undisclosed facility.³ The statue was removed in the middle of the night, at a date and time undisclosed to the public.⁴ What they left in its wake was the pedestal.

All accounts suggest that James Hixby—called Jim by his familiars, as well as, reportedly, “The Confederacy’s Thunderbolt”⁵—was a real son of a bitch. He came from money, and was born with both a silver spoon in his mouth as well as a slave he inherited upon birth

1. And perhaps they hadn't?

2. There exists no historical evidence to confirm this claim.

3. Only one such facility in Aberdeen offers storage pods tall enough to house the General and Whicket standing upright.

4. This has since come to be viewed as a missed PR opportunity.

5. Though this was asserted as fact by a genuine Daughter of the Confederacy at the original unveiling ceremony for the General and Whicket, no historical record confirms the nickname.

whose job it was to polish said silver spoon. His family is said to have treated their slaves well, which could mean anything you wanted it to. The small plantation they ran on the land which today hosts the Aberdeen Wildlife Park was home or hell to a relatively small group of slaves, which in this case means 30–45 owned individuals. Though the Hixby home remains intact as a historical structure on the park's grounds, it was discovered upon renovations to expand the Big Cat Pavilion that the exhibit had been built right over top of slave burial grounds, determined to be such by the nicks and breaks and general signs of torment evident on the unearthed bones. The remains of the slaves were reinterred on a plot just behind the big house they once served, with a small plaque to explicate the historical context.⁶ The Big Cat Pavilion, now expanded, features a pair of lethargic mountain lions named Pat and Christopher Walken.

It is said that James Hixby's dying request—suffering from a lethal infection incurred by a poorly dressed knife wound to his abdomen—was to bequeath all his worldly possessions and inheritance to his horse, Whicket, the very steed he'd been memorialized riding into battle.⁷ It's widely held that General James Hixby sustained the wound whose infection would kill him far away from the battlefield.⁸ The statue portrayed the General waving a bayonet ahead of him and looking backward, as if he were cheering his battalion onward. Whicket is shown rearing and chomping at the bit, though it is admittedly difficult for a horse to do otherwise with a bit fit into its mouth. The statue was erected in 1905, forty years after the Confederacy had turned tail and scampered off. Until its removal, small Confederate flags could still be seen tucked into the General's curled fist some Sunday mornings in tribute, before the caretaker arrived to remove them.

6. The plaque, which is often overgrown with weeds, reads, "Here lie former servants of the Hixby Family. May they find some comfort here." It does not specify the names of the deceased, as no original markers were present or accounted for.

7. This request was not honored.

8. Rumor has it that the General was more lover than fighter, at least when it came to other men's wives.

Popular opinion held that the empty pedestal left in the General and Whicket's wake was unsightly. Some said it served as an unwelcome reminder of what had been there, just before. Others complained that without the bronze topper above it, the pedestal was simply a scarred hunk of concrete, set right in the middle of our town's most idyllic park. It should be mentioned, too, that though the majority of the graffiti scrawled across Whicket's flank and leg was removed along with the statue, some of it had trailed onto the pedestal and despite the caretaker's painstaking efforts to remove it, was seemingly determined not to rub completely off. It had been written in silver paint so that, though faded, the top of the pedestal still shone gently with the word *DICK*. It practically glittered at dusk.

Some folks suggested that the removal of the statue and the now-empty pedestal offered an opportunity. A small coalition of librarians released a statement that read, *We have such a rich history here in Aberdeen. Let us uphold our best and brightest, rather than some racist loser on his poor, innocent horse.* They suggested a list of figures to memorialize in the General's wake—people born and raised here who'd gone on to do bigger things. The inventor of the waffle press had grown up in Aberdeen. We had produced a famous '50s-era scat-singer, an almost-astronaut, and the man who first rafted the length of the Chattahoochee. We had also raised a raccoon that acted in the original Dr. Doolittle films and had once saved a boy from choking by slapping him squarely in the back.⁹ It was to be put up for a vote on the Internet, along with a campaign to raise the funds to build it.

But while that was running, the pedestal stood empty, still weathered and gray and disagreeable. In an effort to quell the dissenting opinions that flooded in on what to do with it in the meantime, the local parks department circulated a list. For two to three hours of any given day, residents could sign up to stand on the empty pedestal and do whatever they wanted, as long as it could not be deemed hateful, harmful, or illegal. Spots would be issued on a

9. This suggestion was later struck, as evidence emerged that the raccoon had severely bitten the boy immediately afterward.

first-come, first-served basis. Documentation from the Parks Department's meeting implies that the sign-up sheet was not intended to be taken seriously,¹⁰ though in practice, of course, it was.

The idea was wildly popular, firstly with supporters of—if not the Lost Cause, then at least—the General and Whicket, then with dissenters of those supporters, and so on. Within two months of the statue's original removal, all the steam had died out from that original debate, the way that these things often play out. What was left in its stead were folks who truly wanted to stand on a pedestal—to whatever end—and then the folks who didn't want to find they had missed out.

Given the political climate, it became uncomfortable for certain people to take their turns on the pedestal. For those who'd always held the power, the raised platform provided a visual representation of the step above the rest of us where each of them stood on any given day, regardless of merit. Some relished their time up there. The park was central, and so we stopped through on our lunch breaks, or on our trips to the grocery store. In the slots on the local news where we'd once watched deadened shots of traffic or else undistinguished ankles as they walked across our sidewalk, they now played the feed from the pedestal—a livestream they'd established to deter further unsubstantiated defacement—over anchors shuffling their papers and clearing their throats in preparation for the day's report. We noticed then how many white men had seized upon the opportunity to sign up and the postures they adopted and how many of their wives signed up for the next day's slot, equally proud and venomous, though so much of what they professed from the height of the pedestal worked directly against their own interests.

10. Excerpted from meeting minutes: *Chair proposes that something must be done about the pedestal; suggests community involvement. Chair counters that his inboxes are full-up with community involvement. Chair suggests that if the people know what's best, then the whole ordeal should be handed over to them. Chair agrees; posits that if the General did such a bad job, why not let the people give it a try? Chair inquires, Well how long would you give them up there? Chair suggests 2–3 hours at maximum, lest anyone actually take them up on the offer, fall out in the heat, then cost a fortune in insurance payouts. Chair seconds the motion. Motion approved.*

The idea was floated, for a spell, that anyone from an under-represented community in Aberdeen should have extra time on the pedestal. Practically speaking though, it became difficult to parse out who qualified for these slots and who didn't and, when pressed, at least one potential candidate sucked her cheeks and said—in short—No, thank you.¹¹ This caveat was put to rest. Instead, it became a sort of civic duty to take a turn way up on the pedestal.

Folks used their time for a variety of pursuits.

Suzy Pine, at the delight of her parents and classmates, used her time at the pedestal to direct a large game of Red Light, Green Light until the children got too far away to hear her, at which point Suzy Pine began to cry and threw a tantrum that embarrassed her parents and classmates. She was lifted away from the pedestal, and carried home, though she could be seen reaching toward the pedestal over her mother's shoulder as she was hauled away, whining, *But it's not time to go yet!*¹²

Wendy Howard noticed how the light struck the pedestal just so, and, in her allotted time, used the platform to sun. She climbed right up and stepped out of her dress to reveal the bathing suit beneath it, then began to layer on a coconut-scented tanning oil, though that sort of thing had been proven unhealthy and had gone out of style long ago. Wendy used her discarded sundress in place of a towel, and draped her bikini-clad form across it, turning when she felt herself catching a burn. It was suggested that this violated the terms of the pedestal as it related to public nudity, but because Wendy was not nude and also because she was not visibly uncomfortable in any way, but rather supremely confident in her skin way up on the pedestal, looking over the sunglasses she'd worn with a challenging expression at anyone who stopped by to ogle, Wendy was left unbothered for the duration of her time slot, and noticeably more tanned by its conclusion.

Hernán Ríos was incredibly shy, but wanted to work on his public speaking, as he was preparing to deliver a speech at his brother's wedding. He pulled the speech from his shirt pocket, then unfolded

11. The exact response was reportedly more colorful.

12. Suzy was correct. There were two hours left in her slot.

and proceeded to deliver it, haltingly, with pauses for the laughter he presumed he'd be drawing from the crowd. It was noted that Hernán rushed at times, particularly during the moments in his speech when he complimented his soon-to-be sister-in-law. Each time he concluded, Hernán smiled and made as if to step down before righting himself and beginning the speech again.

Jacob Lee had spent his young life learning all he could about trains—their operations and feats and mechanics and track systems throughout the U.S. and abroad—and used the entire duration of his time on the pedestal to talk about them. Who among the townsfolk could say they didn't learn something new that day?

Dr. Hilling, rather than giving a report on public health or proper hygiene, instead used his time to work through a book of crossword puzzles that he'd been given as a gift, but rarely had the time to do. Dr. Hilling used a pen as he worked through the puzzles and could be seen to scrunch his brow and lift his gaze in contemplation upon encountering certain clues that puzzled him or tied him up completely. Frustrated, he asked some of them aloud, to whichever residents might be passing through the park at that particular moment. *What's six letters for a climber's victory?*¹³ he asked. *Does anyone know what won the 1994 Tony for best revival?*¹⁴ He did not want passers-by to use their phones to search the clues, yet became visibly affected when they could not answer. It's said that at one point, he punched through a page with his ballpoint while trying to write over an answer, then threw both the pen and book of puzzles away from himself. Dr. Hilling spent the remainder of his time on the pedestal sulking, only to climb down to search for the items he'd cast away in the falling light.¹⁵

Leslie Adams used his time to explain how Leslie was not *necessarily* a girl's name, and that generations of Leslie Adamses before him had been men who opened factories and businesses and carried the name proudly until they, too, decided to name their first-born sons Leslie.

13. SUMMIT

14. CAROUSEL

15. Dr. Hilling denies any reports of poor or sullen conduct, and says that he is more than capable of finishing crosswords easily and without assistance. The livestream does not store its recordings.

Janet Baitling knew far too much about everyone. When folks saw her name on the sign-up sheet, they grew nervous of what she might say. She approached with a portable stepladder and arranged herself atop the pedestal with a fold-out chair, her feet crossed daintily at the ankles. Janet had amassed quite the audience, which was the thing she wanted most. She stayed quiet, swelled up with power, for the majority of her time, but as soon as anyone left—out of boredom or to make an appointment or to pick up their children from school—Janet told those who remained gathered the deepest secret she knew about them, which for some was only an embarrassing thing they'd done in sixth grade, but for others concerned the substantial amount of debt they'd accumulated by ordering antique Hummels over the Internet or else talking to a phone sex line operated out of Taos.¹⁶

E. J. McClain practiced his violin solo with his eyes closed shut, letting the beauty of Chopin's Nocturne in C sharp minor flow through his fingertips and bones and marrow, and out into the surrounding park.

A traveling preacher took a turn at the pedestal. It was argued that he was not a true resident, but it was also argued that all of this earth was home to God and therefore unto his shepherds. Folks learned quickly that the preacher's sermon was of a fire and brimstone variety—that he was of the opinion that Aberdeen was chock-full of sinners and burning up. Susan Childers, too sweet for her own good, asked the preacher if he might like a glass of water seeing as how hot it was—maybe *that* was what he was sensing, rather than the overwhelming presence of sin? Once she'd gone and fetched it, the preacher took a sip, then called out, *POISON WATER FROM YOUR POISON WELLS* before dumping the rest of the contents right over Susan's head, in a sort of cursed baptism. Susan wept and dismissed herself from the sermon, dripping. Still, some townsfolk remained around the pedestal's perimeter while the preacher carried on, presumably enraptured by the wisdom and fury he offered. Each of them kept a safer distance than Susan had.

Yani Reston wanted to know who among us was interested in becoming our own boss by selling clinically proven and yummy dietary

16. An investigation is reportedly ongoing to determine Janet's methods for gathering information, though it's been stalled substantially by rumors that Janet has dirt on the Aberdeen Police Department, too.

supplements that demonstrated unbeatable results at a fraction of the prices offered in big-box stores.¹⁷

Reggie Kent had an upcoming track meet he intended to stay fit for, and used his time on the pedestal to complete a workout comprised of squats and over-unders and ab exercises, which some folks saw as a public class in the park—the sort of public forum and entertainment that might happen in a town or city much larger than theirs. Eventually, Reggie began to give cues to the impromptu audience that gathered, spread out on yoga mats and blankets. *Twenty flutter kicks—let’s go!* he called out, and while many attendees were appreciative of a free class, a few shouted back, *Count louder!* or else, *This beginner’s class is way too hard!*

The fourth-grade class of Aberdeen Elementary used the pedestal as a makeshift stage for their Spelling Bee, which had originally been scheduled for the school’s auditorium, but was double-booked over a dance recital. A set of stairs was wheeled up and secured to the pedestal, and parents set out lawn chairs to cheer on the contestants. Though the words *clandestine* and *antebellum* were spelled successfully, the final word of the contest proved to be *saltine*, as the runner-up confused the placement of vowels.¹⁸ The runner-up was gracious about the loss, though his parents were not.

Stella Ransom, a young activist and budding historian, announced all of the slaveholding families of Aberdeen and the surrounding counties, which was an admittedly lengthy list, from the pedestal. She then listed the names and ages of their slaves at time of purchase and death,¹⁹ which was an even lengthier list.

Charlotte Denning was actually very tired and had not slept much the night before. She set up a sunshade and donned a sleep mask and curled up on the pedestal to take a nap. Though the sunshade protected her from public view, it is assumed that Charlotte slept soundly. She dismounted looking refreshed.

17. Yani invited those around the pedestal to a taste-testing to be held at her residence the following Saturday afternoon. Those in attendance were required to sign a waiver before testing said tastes, and went home with salted-caramel- and banana-flavored samples, whose packaging read in bold letters, *DO NOT SHARE*.

18. S-A-L-T-E-N-I

19. In cases where this data was available

Parker Lee Woodard proposed to his girlfriend from the height of the pedestal, which she both anticipated²⁰ and tearily accepted.

Wylie Lennox brought his dog onto the pedestal, a rescued Rottweiler mix, who despite the fact that he was a good, sweet boy and lacked an aggressive bone in his thick, muscular body, could not catch a pat or a *here-boy!* from the residents of Aberdeen on his twice-daily walks. Wylie had named the dog HamBone in an effort to placate his neighbors, though in practice, this worked against his interests by making the dog sound ravenous. While he hoped that their time atop the pedestal would soften the dog's public image—*See how he can sit, lie down, roll over? HamBone, give me a paw!*—both had to leave the pedestal before their allotted time was out because Wylie had forgotten a water dish and HamBone, despite all intentions, was a black-coated dog on a concrete platform in the dead of summer.

Faye, whose last name was not offered, but who was so well known about town that she did not need to offer it, used her time—not to speak on how cute their toddlers were or how excited she was about their daughters' graduations, the way her comments and cheery demeanor from her long-time job at the diner as a waitress might come to suggest—but instead to pontificate about their poor table manners. Faye knew who amongst the townspeople could be expected to chew with their mouths wide open or to forget their to-go boxes on the table or to tear their napkins up into little bits that then mixed with the syrup left pooled beneath their plates when the table was cleared. She had opinions on the tip you owed a server after your child—who had no business at a restaurant if she couldn't act right—had crushed and then dropped each sliver and berry from their fruit cup onto the tiled floor beneath the booth. Faye said that if one more person held up their glass without looking at her, and then swirled the ice around in order to signal for a refill, so help her God. She said that the only way for her to retrieve that extra lemon for you was by hand, because the diner always misplaced the set of tongs designated for the pre-cut wedges. Do with that knowledge what you will, said Faye, and plenty else, before winking and climbing down for her shift.

20. She had mentioned the phrase *oval cut*. She had walked Parker to the jewelry store and shown him the very ring she wanted in the display case. Two weeks before his slot on the pedestal, Parker had asked for her ring size.

It seemed that, given the opportunity and platform to do so, most of Aberdeen had something to say or do or play or confess. There had not been an outlet or attraction quite like the pedestal in some time, and it was generally held that the platform was a productive means of expression and community-building. Some got up on the pedestal and grew shy, then climbed right back down. Some had to be reminded when their time was up, and at least one resident was forcefully removed.²¹ But generally, the pedestal maintained its own sense of order.

Over time, it grew evident that the pedestal was not holding up well to its new purpose. It seemed that *set in stone* held true for sediment, too, and then after decades beneath an inert cad of a soldier and his trusty steed, the new task of holding up an entire town, even one by one, proved wearing. Wendy Howard had dripped tanning oil onto the platform, which the stone had soaked right up. One resident, who'd signed up for a slot under the pseudonym *The Wolf*, strung a series of extension cords from the back of the ice-cream shop where he reportedly worked and hefted an amp and electric guitar onto the platform. When his performance began to deteriorate, The Wolf grew enraged and hacked his guitar against the pedestal repeatedly which, besides destroying the instrument, chipped one edge of the platform and littered the base with flecks of glittering, orange enamel. The pedestal had grown dingy with all the shoes that tracked across it, and pocked where residents' grills and golf swings and easels had dug in. It was suggested by consulting stonemasons brought in to examine it that either the materials used or the insufficient time it was initially left to cure would not have stood up to the test of time, even without the townsfolk's intervention.²²

The Parks Department announced that the sign-up sheet would be closed imminently, then announced that time slots would be doubled and tripled-up in that closing period in response to public outcry. Teenagers flocked to the spot for selfies and short, stilted videos. They allowed their friends to climb up too, until this was deemed to be a violation of policy. Local politicians used their influence to secure spots on the waning schedule, so that they could pose and

21. By residents, rather than by authorities

22. Their official reports used the terms "shoddy" and "rushed."

gesture for campaign photos. A Black descendant of the General himself had a time slot donated to her,²³ and reported that standing on her ancestor's former perch felt—mostly—*stupid*.

The pedestal's very last official occupant was a newborn named Jerry, whose parents had signed him up antenatally and then induced labor so that he could begin his life with momentous occasion. The newspapers ate this up, though onlookers reported discomfort with seeing an infant hoisted onto a crumbling platform and also offered that his parents should have given him a few days to shape up, maybe, seeing as how he appeared unappealingly withered and squashed. When Jerry awoke atop the pedestal and began to cry, his new mother realized that she needed to feed him and also that she had not brought any accessories—a scarf or blanket or even a loose shirt—to facilitate this. She was a conservative young woman, and both she and onlookers grew flustered about the best way to appease her baby from such great height and consequence.²⁴

The pedestal was officially closed up for rotation, first cordoned off with caution tape as if the spot had become suddenly hazardous, and then simply left bare as public attention shifted away. The online fundraiser fell short of its goal and refunded the raised amount back to donors. The public vote on a replacement statue closed out with “Other” as the winner.²⁵ In the end, it was visited regularly only by its caretaker, who had seen to the General and Whicket for three decades, along with the other statues and monuments throughout Aberdeen, one of which was of a tugboat wheel and another of which memorialized a Nazi scientist who had defected to the U.S. during the Cold War.²⁶

23. By the same resident—a well-meaning but overzealous white woman—who had initially suggested that minority residents be given extra time on the pedestal

24. Young Jerry, hungry and enraged, was said to bear a passing resemblance to the General's statued visage.

25. The majority of write-ins had not specified who the “Other” should be.

26. The local YMCA's aquatics center is also named in the Nazi's honor.

The caretaker had shifted his focus to the pedestal almost entirely during its time in the public eye. It was he who had wiped away the bird shit and sandwich condiments and paint splatters that befell the stone. He who had scrubbed at the remaining graffiti long after it was sensible to do so, but in the hopes that some chemical compound in recent rainfall might prove him wrong. After the initial protests, when the General and Whicket were still standing, the caretaker had wiped them clean of egg splatter, had un-draped the toilet paper strung around it like tissue Spanish moss. It was the caretaker who collected the discarded trash atop and beneath the pedestal, as well as throughout the surrounding park where onlookers had gathered to observe it. It was the caretaker's job to see to the pedestal, and also the thing he'd done for so long that it took more energy to question it than it did to carry it out. It's the caretaker now who can still be seen, on occasion, sitting atop the pedestal in the middle of the park, mopping at his brow with a worn handkerchief, his dark²⁷ skin dewy with sweat and grime and gleaming against the light that graces that weathered stone. It's as good a place as any to catch a sunset, or at the very least, the smallest sense of peace.

27. Black