

TAKING BACK THE WORDS

By John C. Havens

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At Rise: CHARLIE enters, stands center stage for a long moment without speaking.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. **(long pause)** I truly am. **(long pause)** I hate using those words. "I'm sorry." Everyone uses them for everything. You can be sorry for bumping someone on the sidewalk and you have to use the same words for something like this situation where this is a deep down anguished type of sorry.

I wish I could take back the words. There should be a system in life where you get a do-over like a Mulligan in golf. Maybe someday in the future we'll be able to rewind our actions and words and edit what we say so the end product comes out exactly as we wanted. Throw in a little Photoshop or movie editing software so we can even fade in and fade out at all the right moments with some appropriate background music to boot. But that's not going to happen here, is it?

You're just standing there. This is when most people would say, "I wish you'd say something." I'm not sure if I feel that way. I feel like if you say something, it's going to be, "Get out of my life and stay out." Have my words pushed you that far? **(long pause)** I'm amazed at the skill I have using words when it comes to saying the wrong thing. Truly, I'm gifted. I am. There have been a number of times in my life when there's been a window to say something really great and I've bombed. Then there's been even more times when I could have just kept my mouth closed and for some reason I spoke up and out came some amazingly hurtful thing that really messed up a good relationship. Sort of like what I said to you just now. **(long pause)**

I don't know if you know, but I like to write. I keep journals, write short stories, that sort of thing. I only bring this up because someday I'd love to have people read what I write and move them somehow. More often than not, however, I don't show what I write to anyone because I can't decide if I want to move people more or impress them. And when I'm trying to impress them I know whatever I write totally sucks. You can't write and try to impress people. You've got to write from the heart and not worry about people's reactions. Of course, you can always edit what you write. And delete a whole file if need be. **(long pause)**

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Anyway. I can tell by your expression that all of my words after those first words I said to you haven't really amounted to a hill of beans. That makes sense, of course. Words aren't based on quantity, but quality. "The quality of mercy is not strained. It falleth as a gentle rain from heaven." I'm not sure why I said that. It's Shakespeare I think. I memorized it at some point, thinking the words sounded important. Shakespeare is someone whose words can be said like they're automatically supposed to be important. Quote Shakespeare and people say, "Oh, he's quoting Shakespeare." So what? What if the quote isn't relevant? What if I watch a woman giving birth and quote from Henry the Fifth by saying, "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more?" That would not go over well I'm thinking. But then I could say, "Hey, but it's Shakespeare." What, is the woman going to go, "Oh! I didn't realize it was *Shakespeare*." No way. She's going to put her fist through my skull and that's that.

Wouldn't it be great if there were words you could pull out in situations like this that would act as a healing salve for emotional wounds? (**Off her confused expression...**) Salve. Like a poultice or healing balm, a medicine. Indians, or Native Americans if you prefer, would know which herbs and roots to mix together to place on a wound. Whatever you'd done, within a few minutes they could take the fruit of the earth and help heal you. Use a root to root out the problem, as it were. I wish I could use something like that right now. I'd reach into the soil and mix a potion for you to drink that would warm your throat and heal your heart. (**long pause**)

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