Front Porch Review

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All Men Are Islands
- Mark Decker

All men are islands,
surrounded by love, hate, fear,
courage and such;
He will get acquainted,
at worst, tainted,
with the bad of life;
At best, he will rest
knowing he’s lived,
perhaps on the edge,
but on the straight and narrow;
In the end,
he stands alone;
He hopes his song
has brought joy;
his light, attracted
more than moths.

Better Days

- Bruce Harris

Coming Home
- Jerry Durick

Perhaps, it’s the exit you take
after hours on the interstate
racing, jockeying for position,
the way heavy traffic makes
you feel anonymous, singular
just a small part of a too large
machine racing forward with
no destination, just movement
carrying you on. So, perhaps
when that exit comes, the one
you know well, the one that’s
been there waiting all the time
you were gone you exit and
then everything becomes part
of you, familiar and knowable,
this road, these streets, the house
you see when you turn the corner
drive slowly, almost ceremonially
then pull onto the driveway and
you are finally home.

Dark Symphony
- Peycho Kanev

Fat silence falls down only to be cut into pieces
by the crickets.
The moon rises slowly, like a cuddly pincushion,
between the pine's branches. Somewhere
a heavy paw snaps a twig, elsewhere – darkness
hides inside itself.

And music starts to play. And everything else ends.

Tufted Titmouse

- Gaby Bedetti

Alpine Incense
- Nancy Jentsch

Clouds halo alpine peaks
sanctify tree lines and snowpack
above rivulets and gullies
that lead to a wood
dappled with autumn's paraments –
it taunts the monochromatic sky
and glass lake surface
with umber, amber, gold
and green so deep its scent
serenades blesses
our rucksack with lightness
for the hike home

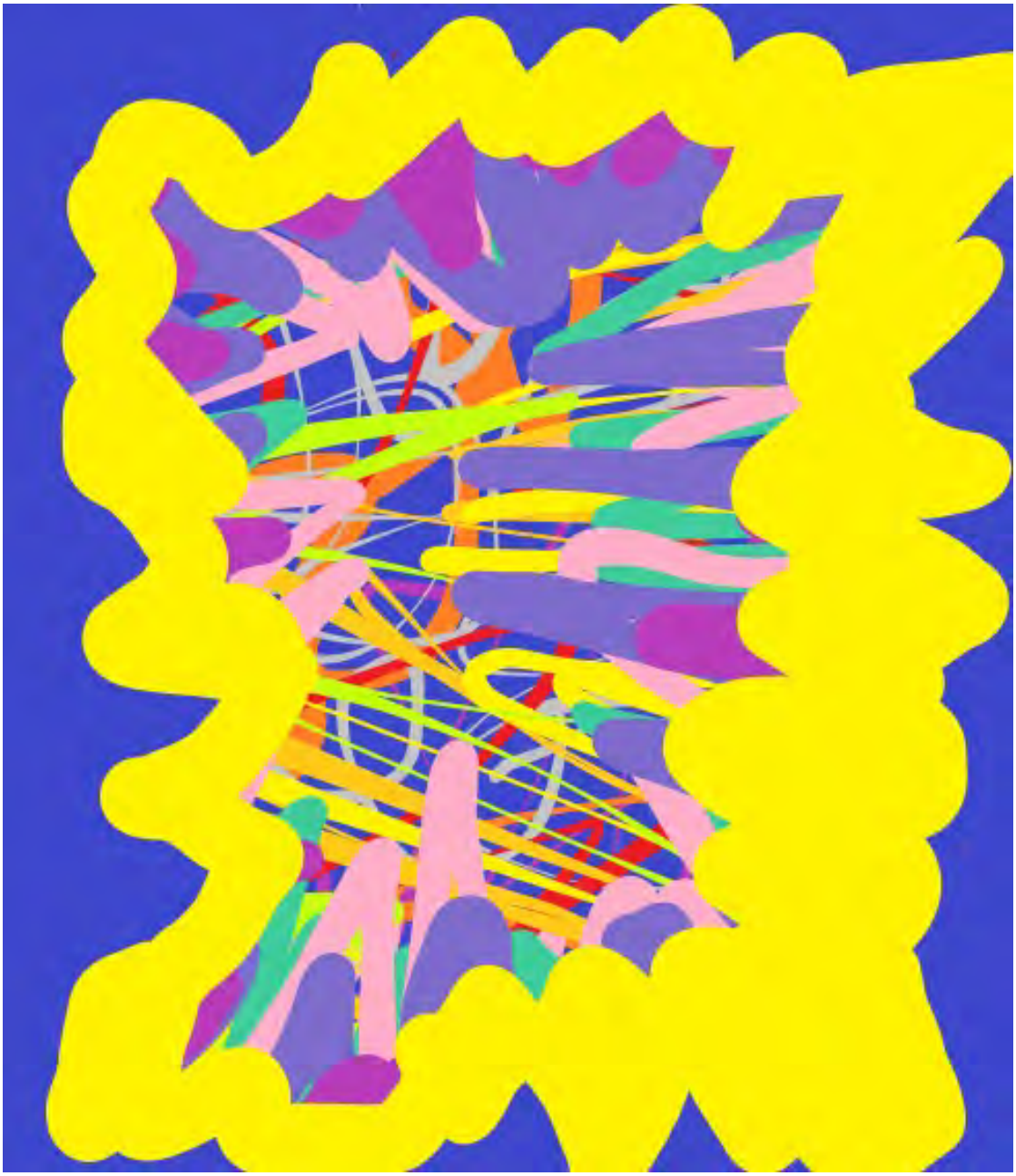
Behind smudged glass, we sat
- Caroliena Cabada

watching hawks and shadows.
Sunset lights the underside
of glide wingspan, golden.
To be hollow-boned,
feathered, flicker yellow,
swooping fast on gale winds
rattling human windows. Two birds, circling,
seeming to hover, flap
only to course correct, grow
closer, then further. We sat,
pointed fingers as they turned
around maple boughs that shed seeds
in the summer.
Here, hunger pivots
for a kill, and sunset paints glass
fingerprints redder still.

Emotional Expressions

- KJ Hannah Greenberg

Tension



Kazam

Hope Is
- George Payne

why the universe
is so cold and silent and empty, yet arrives,
each morning on my door like a bag of flowers.

Without Blessings
- Sasha Wade

Don’t forget to bless
the animals, says my son.

Yes, without blessings
the mason bees, ripe, may flee

the eaves in spring rain. Drained,
the lonely goat, resistant cow

will stiffen as small hands,
sweetly whistle to wake

the insistent wren — so loud,
conspicuous, paused in song.

Even the starling stalking
our elm tree wonders will

they forget to bless my wings,
black shells, scarred oyster heart.

Types

- Ira Joel Haber

Extrovert

Introvert

estate sale
- Beth Lynn Clegg

decades of
worldly goods
tagged for
quick sale
scattered under
spreading oaks
provided buyers
shade from
summer heat
while haggling
for bargains
as their rowdy
children explored
barn loft
tractor and
hay baler

dusty rooms
tattered curtains
creaking floors
belling a once
pristine home
now greeted
family members
wishing to
shed memories
that choked like
cheap perfume
as they departed
unobserved with
no regret or reminder
of their roots
leaving only
a mail address
for the auctioneer.

The Lazarus Legacy
- Darrell Petska

Each summer he draws me back
into his muddy world of laterals,
sluice gates and irrigation canals –
what hold on another can anyone have
60 years deep in the grave?

An old-time ditch rider, along he came
each summer's morning, his pickup
jouncing atop the canal banks,
rakes and shovels clattering in back,
on his mercy missions to parched fields.

Farmers greeted him like an emissary
of the water gods, though in appearance
he was overalled, capped, and as muddied
as those he served – a chaw of tobacco
and hip waders his only trademarks.

To a child, he towered atop the canals,
sun silhouetting his body, his face
becoming the sun's, akin
to the man in the moon, mythical
yet grounded, workaday but timeless.

Something more than memory is at play
which calls him up, parades him before me
squelching in his boots, spitting tobacco,
meting out liquid beneficence
to loft skyward broad fields of grain.

I think of Lazarus, as well a common man
who trod again fields of love and loss,
reveling in the dazzle of sunlight –
legacies ascend, irrespective of time,
a homage to life's purpose and glories.

Japanese Nature vs. Nurture

- Joseph Glaser

Joy
- Carol Casey

The Elders say, Hummingbirds bring joy.
Where do they carry it?

In their oversized hearts, invisible wings,
ruby throats, green bodies?

There was one in a bucket
of water in the garage.

What made me stop,
turn around, find it still alive?

Pure joy, a bit soggy, but grasped gently,
let go, for joy can’t be caged, called,

enticed, seduced, implored
or even deserved.

It’s just here, then gone as if some rare,
vagrant song pops it out of

the fabric. A brief jewel, yes, but one that
stores itself in some hidden, oddly

sunlit region. All you can do
is not wait for it.

Just getting there
- David E. Howerton

Small chance dream
silly little escapes
under hundred year old oaks
long books and naps.

And in between watch ants
gathering for long winter
one seed at a time.

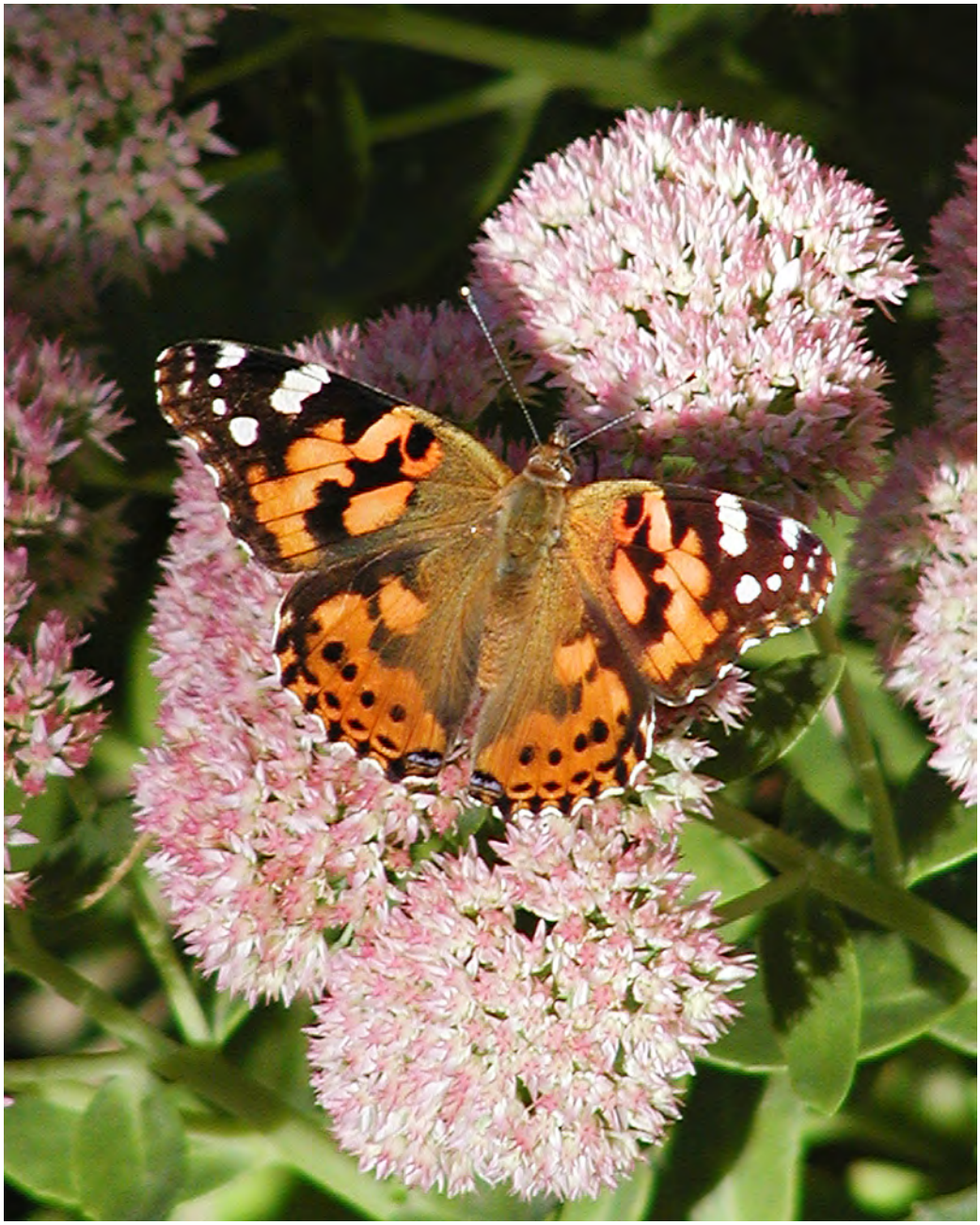
Just another way spending
long June afternoon
trying to make it to night.

But seems like sun sets
slower when one wants
a change. Cooler air
clear constellations hanging
out of reach.

What's in a Name

- Len Kazmer

Zebra



Painted Lady

Red Postman

Locket
- Zebulon Huset

I keep a memory in my fish tank
surrounded by suspended algae
and fake olive pebbles, uniform in shape.

Subtle currents course through,
oblivious to the lodestone they circumnavigate
in their fifteen second round trip to the filter.

Outside, history is deteriorating,
coming apart in my hands
like ancient mortar mixed too thin.

Clothes no longer fit me just right,
sleeves, too short for my reach.
So, I shorten my reach.

The tank's practically opaque now,
but I'm afraid to reach in
and disrupt these new life forms

only to disrupt the vision of old ones.
Afraid that from the saturation it's changed,
afraid it's too deep for my shortened reach.

Natural Flapper

- Lois Wagner

Onions
- Lois Greene Stone

Why can't people form Friendship Circles as the ones done in sleep-away summer camps? We all think, feel, love, need, want. We all bleed when cut, cry when sadness overwhelms, attempt to accept that life is finite. No matter what deity we worship, or language we speak, or complexion, our DNA is passed, we are human.

Why are we so sensitive to being politically correct as regards that humanity? Might that current catch-phrase be doing more harm than good? Should we get rid of Black Friday, White Sales, the song Yellow Submarine, Red onions, and dessert Brownies? Have I left out any skin tones? Should we consider what is represented on flags; change both the Red/ White in the United States as that is inconsiderate of the population who are neither Caucasian nor American Indian?

Weren't libraries told to put *Little House on the Prairie* where few could find it because a common-then-word for a minority is offensive circa 21st century? Would any high school promote the play *Our Hearts were Young and Gay* as gay no longer means carefree?

Maybe the phrase 'open your hearts', when fundraising, ought to go since cardio-surgeons really do open-heart procedures. Sounds rather ghoulish to pressure people for money when many might have either undergone or have family who've had such. And 'I love you heart and soul' also has the wrong reference re heart, and soul is definitely a religious concept and discriminatory. Professing deep feeling ought to be available to atheists.

Down with Greek olives, Spanish onions, Roma tomatoes, Thousand Islands/ French/ Italian/ Russian salad dressing, German Potato salad, English breakfast tea, Brazil nuts, Mexican jumping beans. Not socially acceptable. Unless every country can have equal representation, these, and others, should be just 'olives', 'onions', and so forth.

Interesting that a Jewish composer wrote *I'm dreaming of a white Christmas* but this popular seasonal song might need to be changed to *I'm dreaming of a snowy Christmas*; oh, not right, Christmas is not a universal holy day.

Language has changed. They or their is now acceptable with a singular subject. No longer does a writer have to type he/she or state the use of the universal him. A sentence can now read "Anyone can do their thing" and be okay. When I taught college English, I'd mark that grammatically incorrect. But, then, I grew up when gender was identified on a birth certificate, college dorms were only male or only female, women didn't fight fires nor box in a ring, and many universities would not accept women.

As I've watched changes, some, personally, good and some seemingly far out, I've thought about the old-fashioned mechanism of a clock with a swinging pendulum. It would be difficult to return to the weight that governed the movement, and not many would even want to wind a wristwatch anymore; but, maybe, maybe, we can agree that a White Sale or Black Friday are not meant to offend.

The summer-camp circle's song began with "Friends, friends, friends, we will always be." Couldn't that be our entire planet's politically correct statement!

Reminders

- Melissa Patterson

This Empty Table
- Beatriz Dujovne

Our ten-foot dining table, once the hearth of
four generations sitting elbow-to-elbow
sharing favorite family dishes, eagerly talking
over each other like the rowdy doves of my Buenos Aires.

Adorable grandchildren scattering spinach across the floor
crying their way out of a highchair's captivity.
These little girls hungry to dress up in grandma's
clothes, pose for yet another silly photograph.

Today, a bouquet of orange gerbera daisies and silence
are my sole company. I hardly hear my own breathing,
my bare feet pacing. I confess that laughing out loud
now gives me the briefest illusion of family.

To calm my anxious heart, I tell myself that children
grow up, flee our embrace. That family ties unknot.
All heartbreak comes and goes. Maybe next Sunday
I'll remember to forget, to set only one plate at this empty table.

Morning Visit
- Tom Harrington

Come visit me friend
tell me the names of birds in
the thick Melaleuca branches
out front
while we sit together
on the bench
and listen to
songbirds sing the day into light.

Thank you for the virtual visit —
I mean — the thought of you
the warmth
of you, as if here beside me
like the fog might pretend
to be rain.

King Seattle Green

- Keith Moul

Resting in Place
- George Korolog

for me it is the stillness, the total lack of movement
run amok,
a dark scab of quiet holding the world in place,
        it is the anchoring
        hush
planting hours into the day
with an intention
of belonging, like the solid refuge of old stones
        flush with history,
pulling the water back into its proper place,
even as it struggles to flee.
For me it is the uncertainty of looming,
        thrashing with the desire
for company, but it is the lack,
the most certain thing of all,
where my books melt into the room
like warm butter,
        softening the space.

Sunday Walk, San Simeon Creek Road
- Mary Anne Anderson

Verdant green velvet
baptism of Spring,
wild abandon lurks
just over the ridge.

Hills so calm they silence the wind,
tuck sorrow away into their
crevasses,
patiently abide the brook.

I do not see my feet,
hear their tread,
my eyes adrift in a sea of reverie.

Thickets ripe with essence
adorn the palette,
tickle my joy-thirsty bones.

The Trouble with Dragons
- Adam Restinow

"I'll tell you a story. That will make us both feel and sleep better. OK?" Then, staring at the belligerent eyes of Tess, her eleven-year-old daughter, Rebecca, in her pajamas, slowly sat on the side of the child's bed. The girl's indifference, the death knell to love, permeated the air, a whisper felt more than heard.

Tess responded by pulling her quilt up to her chin and gazing away from her mother at the squirrel scratching at the window. The creature, a best friend, was always there at this time of night, always willing to listen to Tess vent about the trials and tribulations of being an only child subservient to ill-suited parents. Indeed, the squirrel, Tess had named it Brenda, was her personal diary containing scores of dreams and damnations. Knowing her mother was not going to leave, Tess turned her head and answered, "Whatever."

Rebecca patted the quilt. "Well, in this story there are two dragons, not the usual one dragon guarding a chest filled with gold coins and emeralds. Who else should be in it?"

Still distant, Tess said, "I don't care. It's your story. Put in whoever you want."

Rebecca breathed deeply and unclenched her fist. "Of course. Well, there'll be a princess, there's always a princess. And how about a fairy godmother?"

"Absolutely not! Fairy godmothers are for babies."

"Fine, fine. So, once upon a time, there were two dragons. Let's call them Eric and Isabel; those are good names. Not as nice as yours but good. Eric was bright blue, the color of the sky, and Isabel was dark green, the color of fresh grass. Both were enormous, the size of this house, and each was remarkable. Eric was thoughtlessly brave, would save anyone in danger without regard for his own safety. Definitely the strong, silent type who avoided conflict, was sensitive to others but whose feelings were easily hurt. Isabel could carry on a conversation with any living thing but too often spoke her mind when she should have been silent. Also, she was anxious. You wouldn't think of a dragon as anxious, but she was – got very upset when things went wrong. As a result, she wasn't very good at problem solving."

"What about the princess?"

"Like most princesses she lived in a castle, had parents who loved her, and had a horse she adored, called her Sam. Of course, the princess had blond, naturally curly hair. Every princess worth talking about has blond, naturally curly hair. She was fifteen, curious about boys and, like most teenagers, her rebellious streak grew stronger with each passing day. She wore what all princesses wear, no more, no less. Her name was Claire, and she smelled of lavender."

Semi-interested, Tess said, "Tell me about Sam."

"As horses go, Sam was average: brown, ate whatever the princess fed her, didn't mind being saddled, couldn't gallop that well, but," Rebecca glanced at the ceiling, "she really enjoyed being brushed. You know, sort of like how you used to like me brushing your hair."

Tess caught herself smiling but quickly clamped her lips together. Rebecca saw but did not comment. "The dragons lived in a cave near and above the castle. Not so close as to be easily visited by the townspeople who lived in houses surrounding the castle but close enough so that the pair could observe comings and goings. As you know, dragons have especially good eyesight, better than a hawk's, can hear a heartbeat, and can smell emotions such as fear. The

people knew about the dragons but, unlike most humans, didn't bother them – prided themselves on being good neighbors."

Tess was intrigued. This was a mother she had never encountered. "But did the dragons breathe fire? Did they hurt people?"

"Not at first but then this wouldn't be a very good story if only good things happened."

"I suppose."

"One day, an hour after dawn, the princess was riding through the forest. Now she wasn't supposed to be doing that. It would have been OK if she had told her parents or one of the servants. But she purposely hadn't told anyone because then she wouldn't have been alone – some sort of knight would have been right behind her, protecting her from harm. Claire relished aloneness.

"You know, being alone is sometimes the most valuable time in your life. You can think about what's important to you or who's important to you. You can regret mistakes and ask for forgiveness. When you're alone you can imagine all sorts of things, like always having chocolate ice cream in the freezer or always having a best friend, and hope that some imaginings come true. Course hope isn't enough; you have to work for what's important – nothing, absolutely nothing, is for free."

Then, lost in the moment, unconscious of her audience, Rebecca confessed, "I was never alone, not really alone. I don't think I ever imagined a great future for myself and exactly what that would require. Now, so many regrets, so little forgiveness. Hell, I can't imagine a life any different than my own."

"Mom, what are you talking about? And you used a bad word."

"Oh, sorry, honey. Let's get back to the story."

Tess's hand emerged from under the quilt and touched Rebecca's arm. "You don't have to, mom. I don't mind; it's getting late."

"No, I need to tell this story."

Tess sighed.

"Claire reined in Sam at a small pond; the day was hot, and she and her horse were thirsty. Unfortunately, just as she was dismounting, Eric emerged from the trees opposite them. He was irritated. The only food he was bringing home for dinner was an old cow, hardly enough for the two of them. A quick rinse in the pond would feel good."

Rebecca paused for dramatic effect and gripped Tess's hand. "Claire shrieked. Sam bucked, almost threw the girl to the ground, then dashed through the trees. Claire, one foot in a stirrup, the other out, tried to rein in the horse but wasn't strong enough. She cried, "Help! Help me!"

"Our heroic dragon leapt into the air, circled, and spotted the horse and rider barreling through the trees. Like a hawk diving at a squirrel, he hurled through the trees, his massive body smashing trees to the ground as if they were toothpicks. Extending a claw, Eric plucked Claire from her saddle. Then, holding her around her waist as gently as possible, he flew to the castle and set her in the garden beneath a giant oak.

"Claire gasped. A minute ago, she had thought she was going to die; now she was looking up at a terrifying beast who had saved her life. Like all princesses, since birth she had been told that good manners, whatever the circumstances, matter. Kingdoms may rise and fall

but good manners are the salvation of humanity. So, despite his repulsive appearance and foul odor, Claire touched one of the dragon's talons, nodded and said, "Thank you."

Rebecca was pleased with Tess's reaction, "Wow! So, what happened next?"

"Well, it's not every day that a dragon recues a princess. Several of the townspeople saw Eric overhead and flying toward the castle. They told others, and now a crowd gathered at the castle gates, trying to see what was going on. The commotion aroused the sleeping guard who alerted the head butler in the middle of his breakfast who ran to the queen who wakened the king; together they hurried to the garden. They were just in time to see Eric leave. The princess, now fully composed and reverted to her teenage personality, said in her best bored voice, "Up so early? Nothing to worry about. Sam and I stopped for water in the woods. This ugly blue dragon scared Sam. She dashed through the trees, the dragon pulled me off the saddle and brought me here. Not a big deal. Could you send someone out to find Sam? I'd like some breakfast now. And, yes, mother, I thanked the dragon."

The queen said, "You're sure you're alright? Your clothes are a mess, and you shouldn't have been out there alone in the first place."

The king said, "Don't do that again. Something bad could have happened. You were lucky."

Claire stood and stomped toward the castle. "I am a princess. Bad things do not happen to princesses."

Rebecca's facial muscles tensed; her breath was uneven. "Claire was wrong. When Eric lifted Claire from her saddle, he scratched her ankle. Not much of a scratch, and Claire didn't even feel or notice it at the time. But a scratch from a dragon can be deadly. The following morning Claire's foot was swollen. Sharp, stabbing pain ran like a river the length of her leg and into her chest. Her breathing was erratic. Her voice, once a symphony, was now a squeal. Alarms rang! Death was knocking at the door."

Tess shouted, "Is she going to die!"

Again Rebecca forgot where she was and in the blandest of voices said, "We all die. In one way or another, we all die. Some of us die slowly and don't even know when we're dead."

"Mom! Did she die?!"

Snapping out of her trance, Rebecca touched her daughter's forehead, then her cheek and then her lips. "No, sweetheart, Claire didn't die. Luckily a wizard was staying at the castle, a friend of the king and queen. He was summoned to the girl's bedside, correctly diagnosed the cause of the pain and healed the wound with some gold dust and a touch of his wand. But, as I said, nothing is for free. The princess eventually married a prince, had a son and became a respected queen. But she was cursed with a slight limp for the rest of her life."

"And that's the story?"

"Actually that's just the first half. After leaving the princess, Eric returned to the pond, splashed for a few minutes, picked up the dead cow and flew to his cave. Isabel greeted him with harshness, 'That's our dinner? You couldn't do better than a cow?' Not exactly the welcome home speech Eric had expected."

"He replied. 'I might have brought more but I had to take time off to rescue a princess.'"

"She laughed. 'Sure. And I spent my day telling the emperor of China how to build a wall.'"

“Stung, Eric snapped, ‘Well, if you’d do more than talk, you’d learn something of value. Ask the birds what happened today.’ With that he stormed from the cave and came to rest in a meadow filled with sunflowers, about a mile away.”

“Isabel was not surprised by Eric’s reaction; they had always bickered with each other since the day they met on the rim of a canyon. Initially the bickering was playful, a pointing out of little differences that amused rather than annoyed. But over time the bickering became disagreeable, almost hateful. She used to say, ‘I like it when you…’ or ‘You did a great job of….’ She now said, ‘My life would be so much better if you would only…’ At first, Eric ignored her negative remarks thinking she regretted not having children but finally he developed an automatic response, ‘Why do you always find fault?’”

Tess’s squirrel, still scratching at the window, caused Rebecca to stop and turn toward the sound. The tear descending from her eye fell to the floor and glimmered, a world of its own. Shaking her head, she resumed. “Isabel did indeed talk to the sparrows who nested above the cave’s entrance. To her surprise they confirmed that Eric had saved a princess; in fact, he was being hailed as a hero. She was ashamed of what she had said.”

“Shame became anger when, the next day, the sparrows reported that the princess had almost died because Eric had scratched her in the rescue attempt. Furious, Isabel yelled in dragon tongue, ‘Come home immediately! We have a problem!’”

“A minute later Eric was at the cave’s entrance. ‘What’s wrong now?’”

“’You are a clumsy hero. Sure, you grabbed the princess before she fell and was trampled to death. But you also scratched her. Your germs entered her body, and she almost died. Luckily a visiting wizard saved her because I know there’s nothing you or I could have done.’”

“Eric was puzzled. ‘So, what’s the problem?’”

“’The problem, oaf, is that you damaged a human. Now those insignificant, weak objects who used to ignore us are going to wonder whether we’re truly harmless. Oh, it’ll will be a little thing at first. One of the king’s servants will pay us a visit – just passing by, seeing how we are, are we happy, any problems, perhaps a cave in the suburbs would be more to our liking.’”

“’Nonsense!’ Eric raised his voice, something he rarely did. ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about!’”

“Isabel, now standing so that her head touched the roof of the cave, glared. ‘I know what people are like. They scare easily. They don’t trust anything they don’t understand, and, even when they do, they are quick to punish anything or anyone who is different.’”

“’The princess seemed nice. She thanked me.’”

Again Rebecca lapsed into the real world. “’She won’t thank you when she’s dancing at her wedding on a wounded leg. So, here’s what else is going to happen. After that visiting servant reports on us to the king, he’ll tell anyone who’ll listen how brave he was. A week later we’ll have a small crowd of fat, dirty drunks peering into our home, proving to all that they’re just as brave. And then the one who had the most to drink will fall, roll down the hill, and break his leg on a tree stump. He’ll claim one of us pushed him.’”

“Eric gripped Isabel’s head and gently twisted it side to side. ‘None of that is going to happen. Relax, everything is fine.’”

“But Isabel would not be silent. ‘And then, and then, knights will come with their sharp lances and silver swords. And that will be the end of us. And you are a fool if you think

otherwise.' Eric smelled her fear and held her close."

Tess blurted, "Was she right? Did the knights kill the dragons?"

"No, honey, nothing happened like Isabel said it would. No servant, no crowd, no knights. Remember how I said that Isabel was always anxious? Well, that anxiety turned to fear for Eric's and her life, and then that fear made her say hurtful things. Isabel was like a child who screams in the night when she's afraid there's a monster under her bed. Even though there's nothing there, she thinks she's in danger."

"I used to do that." Tess said. "But now I know better."

"Of course you do. But sometimes fear is a good thing; like being afraid of fire. When you're an adult, you'll learn that the world is filled with things worth fearing. Anyway, I'm just about done with the story."

Rebecca stood, stretched her arms and legs, smoothed her pajama top, and returned to the bed. "The next day Eric decided that he would save Isabel. So, he flew to the castle to visit the king. They met in the garden where Eric had placed the princess. The king invited the wizard to be present, and the two of them stood on the castle wall so they could look Eric in the eye.

"Eric told them how worried Isabel was and that he would do anything to avoid problems. The king said there was nothing to be concerned about. Accidents happen, the princess was fine, life goes on. The wizard said he would be happy to talk to Isabel if that would help her. Eric returned home, brimming with the good news.

"But Isabel was not convinced. She was sure that the king and the princess would forever hold a grudge against the dragons and that if they did the least thing wrong, he would send his knights to slay them. Eric tried and tried to assure her that nothing bad was going to happen. But Isabel's fear would not be quenched. Day after day, week after week, she would tremble, causing the cave walls to vibrate. She would mumble, 'They're coming! Hide! Oh, no, they're coming!'"

"This went on for almost a year. Finally, on a night when the moon was full, just as it was last night, Eric encased Isabel with his wings and whispered, 'I can't save you. I can't save us.' He left in the morning. Isabel watched him until the blue of his skin blended perfectly with the blue of the sky. When she could no longer hear his heartbeat, she – I – shouted, "But I love you!' And that's the end."

"The end?! That can't be the end." Tess was angry. "I want a happy ending."

"I'm sorry, Tess. Not all endings are happy." Rebecca pushed aside Tess's bangs. So pretty, she thought. She remembered herself at the age: hopeful, naïve, athletic and imaginative. Yes, youth had its day but it was only a day. When Rebecca's sun came up, when she was an adult, she didn't get what she hoped for, naivete became cynicism, athleticism became fatigue and imagination became what might have been,

Rebecca sighed. "The trouble with dragons is that they become like people."

Tess asked, "What do mean? Dragons don't turn into people."

"You're right. They don't become actual men and women. But as they get older, they start to behave like humans. You know, humans love and fight one another. Humans smile. They cry. Dragons don't intend to behave like that but they do. Just like the princess, they become infected by the world they live in."

"I don't understand."

“Well,” staring at Tess’s hands so as to hide the sadness in her eyes, “when your father and I were young, we were like dragons. We believed we had magical powers, that nothing could harm us as long as we took care of one another. We were best friends who told each other everything. And then…”

Emotionally spent, Rebecca slid under her daughter’s quilt. As Tess turned toward her, Rebecca turned to face the wall. Insightful beyond her years, motherly, Tess touched Rebecca’s shoulder and said, “And then?”

“Like Eric and Isabel we began to see things differently. He thought the world was bright and happy. I thought the world was dark and sad. Of course, neither of us was right. The world is many things that neither of us truly understood. You just have to do your best. Try to do the right thing.”

Tess hugged Rebecca – not a daughter to mother hug, not a friend to friend hug; not that at all. It was a woman to woman hug, a primal gesture whose meaning is felt, not explained. Tess grasped her mother’s story and asked, “Will I ever see Dad again?”

Rebecca faced the girl. “Of course, you will! As much as he wants. We’re still your parents, and we’ll take care of you as best as we can. And thanks for listening. I know I talk a lot, probably more than I should. But I feel better now.”

Tess breathed, a cleansing breath, a commentary on her mother’s story, and collapsed onto her pillow. She dreamed of dragons; Rebecca dreamed of nothing.

Years later Tess’s father escorted her toward her future husband. As they neared the first pew, she reached and touched Rebecca’s hand. She nodded, silently accepting her mother’s love. She also saw that Rebecca’s other hand was firmly clasped by the caretaker her fiancé had provided so that Rebecca could be there today. She teared when her father lifted her veil, a final gesture of friendship. As she stepped toward the groom, she smelled of joy. So rapt was the congregation that no one noticed her limp.

Hawk Talk

- Wally P.

I'm tired of waiting.

I see our ride, and it's free!

UNION PACIFIC
UP 25408

Guidelines

We publish thoughtful, provocative fiction, poetry, essays and visual arts.

Submissions are accepted year-round.
· If accepted, submissions may appear in any quarterly issue.
· Biographical information will be requested for accepted submissions.
· If your submission was previously published, please cite the reference.
· Simultaneous submissions should be accompanied by a statement stating so.
· If your work is accepted elsewhere prior to our evaluation, please notify us.
· All work must be original and in English.

We do not publish novel excerpts, memoirs, genre material, flash fiction (less than 1000 words), book reviews, erotica or works which rely upon explicit language or gratuitous violence.

Fiction can be up to 5000 words. It should be relevant to a general audience, compelling and thought provoking. Finally, it should contain a protagonist with a positive, articulated, universal goal (e.g., freedom from oppression) who actively struggles to achieve that goal, overcoming emotional obstacles in the process. We expect the protagonist's values and beliefs to be reflected in his or her behavior, which behavior initiates conflict with other characters. Ideally, the protagonist is motivated by a past wound which he or she attempts to heal. By story's end the protagonist learns something significant about human behavior.

Essays can be up to 5000 words. We do not publish essays which are life stories. We do publish essays which express perspectives about topics of general, timeless interest. That is, we are not interested in essays about current events but are interested in essays about the vagaries of human behavior.

We are interested in poems which contain vivid images, resonating voice, rich language, discernible rhythm and thoughtful messaging. An example of these attributes is Mary Oliver's *Wild Geese*.

Visual arts which elicit the comment, "How interesting!" are desired. Submit visual arts as **.jpg** files; do not send **.tif** or **.bmp** files. Accepted visuals may be reduced to fit the available space.

Mac users, please be sure that your files are readable by Windows 10.

This magazine does not currently pay upon publication.

Accepted material will be edited. If changes are deemed significant, the contributor will be notified and given an opportunity to accept the changes or request that the piece be withdrawn from publication.

Send submissions to gphillips938@comcast.net Send 1 prose piece, 1-5 poems, or 1-4 photos at a time. For prose or poetry, type or paste your submission into the body of the email message.

We will not open any unsolicited print attachments. Photos, however, should be sent as attachments. Include your name and e-mail address.

Please expect to wait up to one month for a reply. Occasionally, with email, there are technical difficulties. We cannot be responsible for delay or loss of submissions. To check on the status of your submission after one month has passed, please send a message to gphillips938@comcast.net.

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