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Emma Codsworth, my next door neighbor for the past twenty years, lived in a faded two-story green house with climbing ivy that had for many years reached the long black shutters. Every morning Emma threw open the shutters on the second story, slightly crushing her ivy, while she breathed deeply the fresh morning air which brought a flush to her wrinkled face. She stood there grasping the window sill with her small crooked hands, gazing into the quiet street. Her dark brown eyes appeared solemn from behind her horn-rimmed spectacles. She nervously brushed through her short hair with trembling hands. The sunlight played with her hair making it first yellow, then brown and finally gray. Her hands were in constant motion, adjusting her spectacles, pulling at her faded cotton skirt, and finally moving to her arms, where they moved up and down bringing warmth to her shivering body. Then a concerned expression came across her face as she leaned over to check her silver watch. Abruptly she cocked her head in both directions and lunged her crooked hands outward to close the shutters, then disappeared from sight.

An hour later she strolled from the garage and rode her metallic green bicycle to her job as librarian in our public library. She was quite a spectacle propped up on her banana seat, pedalling wildly down the quiet suburban street, looking like a frumped scarecrow.

The children on our block were frightened by her appearance and her nasal rasp voice. They timidly approached her in the library, staring at her as if she were some sort of witch. Emma peered at them over the top of her spectacles and asked in her sharp voice "May I help you?" The children had a horrified look on their faces. They turned sharply, racing for the nearest exit, their footsteps echoing loudly in the silent library.

The children's parents described Emma as "that silly old woman who waters her flowers every night wearing a housecoat and sneakers," but I doubt if they knew what Emma was really like.

One morning on my way to work, I passed Emma's house and happened to see her bending over her flower patch. "Sweet flower, come on and grow big and strong," she coaxed softly. Then she stopped speaking as she saw me standing there. "Nice day," she said.

"A nice day, indeed... You have beautiful flowers," I murmured politely.

"I like Herbert the best," she said pointing at a distorted golden zinnia in the midst of a patch of lavender violets. "God made
him special. He looks and feels different than the other flowers. Even though he is different, he is beautiful because he is himself."

These words kept running through my mind as I walked along the sidewalk. My heart was touched by Emma's simple truths.

Rhonda Pennings
TO YOU

To you
the man I greet each morning with fresh bursts of joy
the man who causes my selfish anger to turn
to tender acceptance
the man who warms my lips and heart with giving
Christ-like love
the man whose patient silence shames
my irritable outbursts

To you
the man who shares the weaknesses, the tears without
restraint
the man who thrills me with his strengths, delights me with
his smile
the man who senses with me sudden moments of childlike
playfulness
the man who sweeps me from my feet in giggles of unexpected
thrills

To you
the man who warms in reverence with me in silent
prayer
the man whose longing for the sky, though hidden, still shows through
sometimes
the man whose clear and thoughtful words bring order to
the struggling times
the man who needs my words as well, when silence locks
his door

To you
the man who shows his humanness in "bad bad" days,
like mine
the man whose eyes tell silently some things
he cannot say
the man who shares the peace of quiet ponderings
the man whose strong firm hand upholds me
as the hand of Christ
To you
the man who asked one day the unbelievable question
the man whose plans have woven into those of mine
the man whose heart has mingled, spirit touched this lonely one
the man who dreams and longs and waits with me as days pass by
the man whose house and life and bed and future I will share someday,

To you
I give the all of me--
the deep-down secret thoughts as well, that only God has known before,
the life, the love now hidden there
the core of who and what and why I am . . .

Because He has chosen it to be
You and I
in Him.

Barb Romkema
THE TIMBER

Before the sun begins to set, the timber is alive with noise and color. The oak trees rustle with excitement with their brightly colored leaves. Squirrels run back and forth from the oak trees on top of the hill to the tall yellow corn in the valley. Birds fly from tree to tree against the blue sky with seemingly no reason. But as the sun begins to set, it turns to a bloody red ball resting on an orange and red field, yet there is no anger in the setting, only a graceful bowing out to the night. When the sun dies, so does the wind; and the leaves become silent. Then, the tans, browns and greens of the corn and trees fade into black and white, and long dark shadows fill the ravines and gullies now emptied of the chipmunks and rabbits that scampered minutes before. Now they are at the water hole to get a drink before going to bed. The only birds still flying are a few wood ducks trying to find a place to spend the night before they continue their long journey south. Darkness comes quickly to the timber. Stars begin to fill the sky as two owls hoot to the wild, with their silhouettes against a full moon.

Kurt Brugioni
The professor continued to ramble on, his right arm stroking periodically at a blackboard littered with stark white symbols arranged in an unorderly fashion as only persons of Ph.D. caliber can achieve. As his mouth surged, his arm ebbed and rested, still clutching the smallest eraser that had been available to his reach at the beginning of his feeble assault on the displayed, but indispensable information. As his well of creativity momentarily dried up, his mouth ceased, and once again his arm slowly accelerated to a semi-enthusiastic rate, only to be slowed to crawling as his train of thought shifted gears and his mouth was once more engaged. Bored by his incessant utterings, my attention fell to surveying his progress. Still pinned to the board, his eraser was for all practical purposes motionless, yet it continued to plod, lest it be accused of not aiding in his somewhat less than pressing cause of erasing the board. To the right of his outstretched arm was the section of blackboard that had been erased, although I could still read what had been written. In his apathy, he pressed the eraser to the board with minimal force, merely decreasing the intensity of each mark. His haphazard strokes left bits of words or letters untouched. Those small, insignificant, excluded areas seemed to scream for completeness, attracting every eye in the room, excepting the professor's. I found myself trying to inaudibly coax him to correct his mistake by glaring persistently at the deed with disapproval. Oblivious to the unsettling effect that his incompleteness had on his students, he droned on, now totally abandoning his effort to cleanse the board midway through a cluster of chalky sentences in order to devote full attention to his thoughts and words.

My mind took pictures of him, his body twisted awkwardly towards the board, but his face, radiant with zeal and open-mouthed, proclaimed his song of boredom. His oblivious attitude angered me, and I could think of nothing other than the blatant incompleteness of the mutant blackboard, and the ignorance of an incompetent eraser.

Despite his fervor, I received nothing that he had to offer. The mere technicality of his negligence toward the background clutter deterred my mind (the hardened criminal) from the justice of learning I deserved.

Evan Mortenson
RENEWAL

My heart is filled with joy
Father, because I feel your mighty presence,
    once again.
Oh Father, it's a grand feeling
to know you are always there.
It's good to be back with you
    Abba, Father,
I know you never left me.
The times when there was only
one set of footprints on the road
was when You, Father were carrying me.
Yes Lord, Thank you, because without you there
to help me along I would have fallen, long ago.
And now...we are side by side once again... 
It's a good feeling to know that you are by my side
    always.
And thank you Lord for those times you clear the way so
I don't stumble.

Connie Morrow
OUR LAST SUPPER

The overheads are on and everybody's left.
We thought it'd be forever.

This was it, life.
Everybody's arms wrapped around everybody,
the luscious sweat, the winks and puckers,
the throb and swing and rhythm, the soul.
You and you and you and me
we. Blushing bottoms, kissing noses,
singing tongues. Hellfire and brimstone
hilariously.

Now all of you gone.
To Shirley's bar
Fred's backseat
the Assembly of God.
I pay The Senders' saxophonist
lick the grounds of a slow screw
baptize the bible open on the linoleum.

Janine Calsbeek
THE BEAUTY OF A ROSE

The beauty of a rose is like that of love
It shines out bright, not leaving any darkness
For the beauty of the rose will soon die
But the Love of that rose shall live forever.

Kevin Woodward
THE OLD MAN ON THE HILL

"Just go up county road 19 until you hit the fork, take the left and follow it until you hit the trees. From there, you'll have to walk, but it isn't very far and you can't miss it."

With these instructions ringing in my ears, I decided that once and for all I was going to find the home of my uncle whom I had heard so much about since I was old enough to listen.

My Dad had been right. There was no way I could have missed that house. Its paint is cracked and there are patches where the paint is off totally, exposing the rotting boards underneath. The front window has a hole in it from some young man's new slingshot, and the front steps seem to cave in when you set foot on them. The whole home just tilts and sags to one side, as if it has had a very hard life and is just holding on until it can collapse into a giant heap of boards, nails, and glass.

Between the hours of 7 A.M. and 8 P.M., more than likely the owner will be sitting by a tree in the front yard. In rain, snow, or sunshine, you can count on him to be sitting there. Like the house, he too is rather old and sagging. He has a hole between his teeth, compliments of a man's fist, long hair that he puts up in a ponytail, and a bushy beard, both as white as lamb's wool. He wears a red flannel shirt, bibbed overalls, a hat that has lost most of its original shape, and big black boots with flapping soles.

As I approached the cabin that Saturday morning, I was greeted by a mumble, that was supposed to be a greeting, followed by a long stare. I sat down on the ground and waited for him to continue. Finally, a strong bass voice that was rough, but at the same time kind, asked me what my name was. Joy filled his face when I told him that I was Carol, Ray's youngest daughter. He then asked questions about the health of other members of my family and wanted to find out what was going on out in the world that he had left behind.

Dudley, the name of this person, is what is commonly referred to as a mountain man. He had spent most of his life living alone, his only company being various animals that had come and gone through the years. "Cricket, come out here and meet our new friend." I jumped as I felt something wet and warm nudge my neck and turned to stare eye to eye with a shaggy brown burro. "This here is Cricket," Dud stated proudly. "She's been with me an awful long time, a great listener too." He motioned with his hand and the burro turned and headed back to his previous position along the side of the house.
I thought of the stories that my Dad and others had told me about my Uncle Dudley. This sweet man was supposed to have been the town alcoholic, who killed his sweetheart the night before their wedding, and who, by all reports, chased trespassers away with a .22 if they got anywhere near his house. Yet, here he was talking and laughing with me like an old friend and introducing me to his burro!

As the sun started to get warmer and warmer, Dudley motioned me into his house which was surprisingly cool. He set me down in the best chair and started to make sandwiches in the corner. As I looked over his house, I saw a one-room house with a table and two chairs, a woodburning stove with heavy black pots and pans of various sizes and a pile of wood beside it. In the corner, there was an old cot which had carefully been covered with a tattered patchwork quilt.

With the sandwiches made, we were ready to go. After finding Cricket, the three of us walked down a well worn path, crossed a small stream on the stones that had been carefully placed there, and climbed a small hill. From the top, I looked down on one of the most beautiful clearings I had ever seen. The grass was rich and luscious and dotted with wildflowers. As I took off my shoes and ran through it, I felt it tickle the bottoms of my feet. I picked some of the flowers and wandered back to the tree where Dudley and Cricket were enjoying the shade. He seemed to enjoy watching my delight in this treasure of nature and with a big smile asked, "Do ya like it little girl?"

"Are you kidding!", I exclaimed. "I love it!" I handed the flowers to him with a mock curtsey and he gravely accepted them, only to start playfully feeding them to the burro. As the burro sniffed at them, and then returned to his grass, he laughed for the first time. It was a pleasant almost musical sound. I found myself wishing he would make this grand joyful sound come out of his mouth more often.

Then, it was lunchtime. Dudley pulled the sandwiches out of his handkerchief and handed one to me, homemade bread with lots of butter and apple slices, FANTASTIC! Dudley started to identify all of the flowers I had brought him and I marvelled at his knowledge of nature. As I lay back, using grass as my pillow, he told me stories. Stories about when he was younger, stories of what he had suffered in the war, and stories of his life since he had hidden himself from the rest of mankind and came to the hills. He still laughed as he told me the story of how he and his brother had decided to have a
horse race right down main street one Sunday morning. He even told me the true story of how his sweetheart had run away with another man the night before their wedding. After all these years, it still brought a tear to his bright blue eyes. It was right after that he had decided to take to the hills and he had remained there ever since.

As the sun started to set, Dudley pulled his Bible out of his front overall's pocket. "I always keep it with me", he explained, "That way, when I die, I can take it to the Lord personally." He handed it to me and asked me to read his favorite passage.

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed. For your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow will take thought for the things of itself. (Matt. 6:32-34 King James Version)

Tears filled my eyes for the second time that day as I looked up and saw him with closed eyes and a deep sense of inner peace reflected on his face. Here was a man who never owned a car, never saw a movie or television. Here was a man who was called crazy by most of the people who thought that they knew him. Yet, he was so happy that I found myself wondering if it wasn't everyone else who was crazy, running around and trying to get ahead as we did. He was content and we were not.

As I rose to leave, Dudley opened his eyes and smiled. "Well, I suppose we better be heading on back too." We walked together, the three of us, until we got to the old house with the peeling paint, the hole in the window and the caving front step. As I turned to say good-by to Cricket and Dudley, he gave me a bouquet of the wildflowers that I had found so beautiful. "It's not very often that folks venture up to see old Dudley anymore. I'm glad you did though."

"I'm glad too, Uncle Dud. I'm glad too."

Carol Van Brocklin
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