

we ourselves break? We do not know that we are right since none of us is in God's position. We have no business trying these eight men for violating OUR code. They adhered to theirs. How, I then wonder, have we dared to assume the role of judges?"

## Out of the Park, Happy

Sharon Sperry

I WALKED to the edge of the sidewalk. He was standing across the street with his back turned to me so that all I could see was a bulky, black rain coat and two brown trousered legs with an umbrella resting against them. His head was round and small for the size of his frame, and his hair was beginning to thin so that a shiny spot at the crown reflected the sun. I called out, but when he didn't turn, I ran across the street to him. I was panting when I reached his side. He glanced at me and frowned. I smiled, but he only softened the frown and directed his gaze to the bush in front of us. Moments pass while I waited for some word of recognition. Abruptly he turned and walked to a nearby bench. I followed and felt vaguely like a small child tagging after him. When he had sat down, he glanced up at me, standing before him, and his face once again became the warmth I had remembered.

"You are excited about something?"

I nodded my head, unable to say what I felt. He motioned to the seat beside him. I put my books on the ground and sat down. He had picked up a stick from the sidewalk. It was about two inches long and the diameter of a finger. He carefully removed the scaly bark while he spoke.

"I did not think it wise for you to speak too soon. Happiness is enriched by proper telling, but not in a panting voice with run-on words. Now you have caught your breath. Tell me what makes you so happy."

"I got the job!"

He nodded his head and smiled.

We talked on, and he told me about a group of children he'd seen in the park. The nursemaid would stop their game if she thought it was being played badly and then would start it over by her own rules. One child, when he was stopped, had cried and run off. He had seen the child on the other side of the park, where, together, they had played a game about the birds and animals. They were happy until the nursemaid found them. He said that there were tears in the eyes of the child, but that the nursemaid had only glared and shaken her fist at him. It was sad, the way he told it, and I didn't say anything, just listened to the breeze as it rustled the leaves. He smiled at me and then asked, "Are you happy with yourself, with this life?"

I didn't pass it off. His mouth smiled, but his eyes were strangely serious. I only looked at him and then at the ground and my feet.

"That's not too easy to answer."

He nodded his head.

"I expected you to say that. You're not entirely happy then?"

"No, I guess not. I'm sort of bitter about things around me. And, I get angry at myself for giving in to it too easily."

He looked at the puffy clouds overhead. He had to blink and squint against the brightness. His face was a frown.

"What would you say if I were to give you the chance to be anyone else except yourself in another time when those things you hate were not present?"

Perhaps it was the tone of his voice. Perhaps I only imagined a change. I laughed.

"You mean an age when people were less hypocritical, more humane? A time without all the mess of today's world?"

He nodded his head. The stick had fallen to the ground, and he stopped to pick it up again.

"I have the power to transport you to any time, any place, even to a non-existent world, a utopia."

I could think of nothing to say, so I sat looking at him and he at me. Finally he spoke.

"What do you say to that?"

It was as if he had asked me to give him all my blood. In the midst of a simple conversation I found myself confronted with the darkest of questions. I looked at my hands to gain time.

"It would be hard to say. I don't know."

He turned in his seat to face me directly.

"I can give it to you; believe that. Depending on your choice, you will never have another worry, because you will have escaped what you hate and fear. There is but one thing you must do."

I had the impulse to stop him or to run away. I wanted to turn the conversation back to the children, to talk about jobs or animals. I was unprepared for this.

"I couldn't guess what it is."

"You must give up those personality traits that you call yourself. Let me explain. You were placed in this time and given these traits. In another time you must be changed because you exist here and now only. It is an impossibility for you to be yourself any other time than the present. Do you understand?"

He had stopped speaking as if he knew I would need time to think about it. Before I could find the words to say what I thought, he spoke again.

"When you make up your mind, I'll be waiting. If you want it, I'll be here. Just look for me."

I stared. I could not have answered if I had wanted to. Suddenly I felt that I would be given no choice in the matter, that my very presence with him, my knowledge of what he had said would commit me. He seemed to understand my thoughts. He stood to go, but turned back to me.

"After the choice is made, you will be happy, you know."

I couldn't sleep that night. The wind was blowing loudly, and the trees outside my window shook violently. The limbs were bare of leaves, and in the patterns they formed on the wall I could see his face, his back as he walked down the path. Finally I slept. The alarm went off early.

Outside, the morning was crisp. I didn't go to school, but walked to the park. I strolled around, watching the children play. I spotted the nursemaid with the kids. One boy was sitting on the bench while the others played. I watched him for a long time. He reminded me of my older brother when he was young, and I wanted to go talk to him, as if he somehow might have my solution. But the nursemaid would not leave, and I didn't want to talk to anyone.

I turned from the play area and walked to the fish pond. I was staring at the black minnows swimming near the top of the pool when something caught my eye. I looked up and saw him standing on the other side of the pond. His umbrella was resting between his feet, and he held the top in both hands, like some grotesque softshoe dancer. I looked at him, but we just stood without moving.

"You don't have much longer. If you don't make up your mind soon, it will be too late. What will it be?"

I looked back at the boy on the bench, and all the thoughts of injustice and evil and ugliness crowded in on my mind. It suddenly occurred to me that I was facing the paradox of the Garden of Eden. I could choose the garden and be blissfully ignorant ever after. Indeed, I could cease to exist, and in my place, another would fulfill my life span. Or I could stay in the midst of so much that I hated and partake of the apple of knowledge. What's more, I had the chance to give up the rat race without sacrificing a life—a dignified sort of suicide. Which one?

He had lifted his umbrella under his arm and turned to go. I started to call to him to tell him what I had decided, but he spoke before I found the words.

"I was afraid you'd decide that. You will be sorry someday, and I am disappointed in you. This was your only chance."

He turned and walked down the path. As I watched him go, I could hear the nursemaid scolding the boy. I picked up a dirty piece of paper. Making a paper airplane of it. I turned to face the nurse and sailed it high in the air. It circled twice and came down softly to hit her in the back of the neck. If I had aimed, I could have done no better. She rubbed the spot and spun around to find who had thrown it, surprise and anger in her face. I laughed aloud and walked out of the park, happy.