

Flight of a New Dawn

By Arielle Haughee

A lawn service truck whipped around the corner, almost taking out Marcella with its swinging trailer. Jon tugged the leash pulling the Maltese toward the curb.

“You alright, Marci?” The small dog glanced up at him with adoring eyes, always a ray of sunshine. “People fly through this neighborhood without even watching.”

He directed her around a parked sedan, continuing their stroll under the towering oaks, boughs crisscrossing into a woven canopy above. Clouds brushed purple in the gray sky. The sun would be up soon.

This used to be their special time alone together, their break away from the perpetual grind Jon’s life had become the last two years. It started with taking his brother to endless appointments and a rotation of prescriptions, then it shifted to feeding him, bathing him, explaining about the myeloma over and over once the infection set in.

Marci turned down the gravel path and sat, waiting for her favorite part of their morning stroll. Jon unhooked the leash and she tore through the grass, chasing off a flock of egrets with a determined bark. Patrick always loved birds, said they were messengers between the earth and sky. Jon had no idea what messages they were supposed to bring. News of the clouds? He sighed and headed toward the water that opened up at the end of the park.

They didn’t have to rush home anymore to start the morning meds routine. Even though it had been months since the adjustable bed left, Jon still hadn’t rearranged the furniture. An empty void took up most of the space in what used to be his office and his life. Jon found himself getting off the couch only to sit back down again, scrolling through the channel guide for an hour without watching anything.

A train blared in the distance.

What did he do before taking care of Patrick? Jon vaguely recollected enjoying his retirement—rounds of golf with friends, volunteering with the men’s club at church, even trying one of those over fifty dating apps. He didn’t know who he was now.

Marci sidled up next to him, panting from her efforts. Jon leaned against a tree and looked out over the water. So many beautiful homes hugging the shore. The sun peeked over the horizon, stippling the water with orange. He wished for some beauty in his life, like those houses, the gentle water.

A white heron ambled up from behind the tree. Jon froze, his eyes shooting down to Marci. That bird was a goner. The Maltese cocked her head to the side and sat down.

The heron took another step closer. Jon could have reached out and touched the feathers. He’d never been so close to a bird before. It stood still and looked right at him, blinking, waiting. A vision of Patrick came to him. He was healthy and a warmth glowed in his eyes—*Be happy*. Jon gasped. The heron took off.

A grin tugged on Jon’s lips as he leashed Marci. He pulled out his phone and opened a familiar app. His profile needed some updating. Maybe the guys at the men’s club could help him. The heron glided over the water and into the orange glow of a new day.