

"A Silent Crossing"

by Tom Boyce

Perhaps, the ending is much like approaching the gates of eternity.

Your lifting of a wooden plank, of a weathered wooden gate, of a weathered wooden fence.

Once on the other side, your smile widens as your journey continues within

A silent crossing of a flowery meadow, abstractly painted by one long ago.

A whispering in your mind breaks the silence. "Is this the answer to one's forever question?"

"Is this a portal into God's dimension that appears before you?"

Paralyzed by unimaginable beauty, comes with a bonus of its aroma as you deeply breathe.

All the while, an abundance of sunlight shines about within the bluest of blue sky.

Your smile widens by its surroundings of hummingbirds, butterflies, bumble bees and dragonflies that

Hover the landscape, all swarming the abundance of the flowery nectar.

They all will later be joined by fireflies that will lend a visual path at the sunset, to those not ready to leave.

Behold!

What sets before you is painted what you've always believed and you know, that this will never end ~~as you~~

Again, you deeply breathe, only this time, a sigh of relief knowing within you, your eternity awaits... before you!



Sharyn Smith

SUNSET

During my 15 years of driving I saw many sunrises, sunsets, moon rises and moon sets.

Sunrises started off with a faint, pale light on the horizon. Colors would shift to pastel pink, yellow and orange drifting into a soft blue. The blue would darken as the sun rose higher. If there were clouds the colors would become deeper and brighter. Sunrises also had a peculiar phenomenon. It looked like the tree and hill tops were suspended in mid air. There was open space between the ground and the tops of the landscape. I know it was a mirage but it was still a little spooky at 6 in the morning when I had been driving all night!

Moon rises were spectacular. You see the moon drifting up from the edge of Earth, the sky is usually dark at that time. The Harvest Moon is a huge, bright silvery white globe. It is so large you can see details without binoculars or a telescope. Other moon rises gave a different show of nature. The Strawberry Moon, Flower Moon, Wolf Moon, etc. Each has its' own story of why it is named like that.

Moon sets were fun. Depending on which direction I was driving, I would see the moon set ahead of me and the sunrise in my rear view mirror at the same time or vice versa.

One sunset stayed imprinted on my memory. I don't remember the date but I do know the location.

I was westbound on I-40 coming into Kingman, Arizona. It had been a sunny day with light clouds coming in from the west. These clouds weren't the huge cumulus, puffy shapes ripe for your imagination. You couldn't turn them into dragons, flowers or wherever your mind would take you. The clouds were a soft layer with ridges. They looked like a stitched quilt or a lake rippled by a light breeze.

As I topped the ridge east of town the sunset was beginning to affect the clouds. There were shades of apricot, pink, light blues. During the drive time from the far east side and through the city it turned into a wonderful display of colors. There were vivid oranges, yellows and vermilion with the shadows taking on hues of gray, lavender, blues and purple.

For those who haven't been to Kingman, AZ, I-40 was cut through a narrow ridge to even out the highway. There was a slight curve – compliments of the engineers. As I drove through that cut in the ridge, I lost sight of the sunset.

The surprise came I came out the other side. The sky had continued to intensify in colors.

A window had opened in the clouds. I have never seen such a phenomenon before. Shining through this new window was a patch of bright turquoise. The window was open for only a couple of minutes. It was stunning to behold.

Perhaps God was watching me for a few minutes. He might have been checking in with my Guardian Angel to see how I was doing. I suspect he was told I was doing just fine. Content with my life. Happy with my decision to become a truck driver.

I like to think that was the purpose of my sunset vision.

Sharyn P. Smith

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SUNNIE BELL

SCS WRITER'S WORKSHOP

To Kill or Not To Kill? That is the question!

Will it? He? ...leave a smudge?

I am in charge here.

Should I leave him to live?

What if he gets in the house?

Will he awaken me at night?

Could it be a girl?

Is she a buzzer?

Maybe just buzz around?

Will she bring in germs?

Maybe land on my face?

Perhaps my nose while I'm sleeping?

Or on an eyelid?

Is it true what they say about a lifespan of twenty-four hours?

Will she die a natural death?

If so, how soon?

I don't know how old she is now.

Does she represent life?

Does she serve a purpose?

Is that purpose only to be outside munching on other life forms?

To help clean up rotting vegetables?

Droppings of wild animals?

Or other flies?

Or is her main job to reproduce?

Should I try to return her to the wild?

One time here at home, enjoying freedom and quiet and warmth of my patio, a particularly large fly landed. He perched on the tip of one corner, at my side of a small square table, cocked his head, looked at me from a bulging eye on his right side, situating tiny legs to hang out for a while. He was unusually large for a fly. I stared back at him. He cocked his head to observe with the other eye. Then he stretched his body, just a little to reposition. For comfort? Somehow he exuded an aura of a level of intelligence. Possibly her? I was strangely connected. She stared on. This went on much more than ten minutes. I studied him. She studied me.

It began to feel a bit unnerving. I was communicating with a fly?!

I was next to make a move. Like him... her... I needed to adjust my position. I shifted slowly, not wanting to scare him. The outdoor space was her territory, not mine. She stayed. I wasn't quite sure how to continue. Yes, he was outside the house, so it wasn't necessary to kill him. Plus, I didn't have a weapon. Even so, at that point of our friendship I wouldn't want to do it. I could shoo her away with a hand, but it didn't seem she wanted that. Neither did I. It did appear that he wanted to connect. It seems that so did I. This was a pleasant encounter which I had never anticipated. She would cock her little head back and forth, looking at me from different angles. I was doing the same toward her. The only difference was that I spoke to him a bit. If he said anything to me, the decibels were too tiny for my ears.

After ten or fifteen minutes, maybe twenty, I carefully stood up, then stepped into the house for only a moment to obtain a beverage... for myself. After all, this is Las Vegas. I was thirsty. Was she?

I moved ever so slowly, actually wanting to continue this unusual communication. When I returned, oh, no, he was gone. I waited a while, but he... she... didn't come back. It was an encounter, strange indeed. I felt a little sad. But even though it makes me sound a bit off balance, I think we shared something. I am not quick to swat a fly anymore.

Note: I checked as to whether there are both male and female sexes of flies. I didn't request AI, but AI answered. There are both, it said flatly. It was a nice piece of information to have, but I would have preferred to be told by a fly.

Why do People Love Dogs

Why do people love their dogs so much? Is it because they're so cute? Is it because of their adoring **unconditional love**. The answer is yes... and yes.

Which is why, **67% of all households** in the U.S. have at least one dog. That's about 68 million dogs, cuddling with their owners daily, which actually **builds an emotional bond** - comparable to a mother holding her baby.

Why does such an emotional bond occur **between pet and owner**?

Well, our bodies produce a natural hormone (Oxy-toe-sin) called the love hormone, that is released into our system during **positive social interactions**... such as when hugging a loved one.

Interestingly, the bodies of canines **include the same hormone**. And just like in humans, their levels increase during positive interactions - when (for instance) owners and dogs **look at each other, or are in contact with one another**.

In addition, those **dog and handler interactions**, are amplified by a **dog's remarkable ability** - to read and **respond** to our emotions.

Dogs excel at interpreting **facial expressions, body language, and changes in tone of voice** - skills further **enhanced** by their **superior sense of smell**.

Dogs can actually detect **stress in their owner**, from the level of **volatile organic compounds** within one's **breath and sweat**. Stress (which by the way) that doggie love helps reduce.

In fact, multiple studies have found that **daily canine companionship**, actually helps lower one's blood pressure. In addition, of course, **dogs can be trained** to provide a wide range of assistance.

Service dogs, with their acute awareness and smell, **can detect and signal medical conditions within their handler** such as **low blood sugar**, an **allergic reaction**, even those elusive signals, that their handler is about to **have a seizure**.

Guide dogs, can be trained to **stop their handlers** at curbs, stairs, and pathway obstacles and can even be trained to **actually signal** - when it is **safe to cross a street**. They can be trained to **bring things to their handler**, **turn on lights** - even **punch elevator buttons**.

Numerous studies have shown that a **bonded relationship** with a dog, provides **comfort and emotion enjoyment** - at a level **not routinely experienced** throughout daily routines and even social activities.

Studies have shown that children with pets (especially dogs) show improved social skills, greater **daily responsibility**, and **higher self-esteem**.

The fact is, the **loving and inter-active bond** between dogs and their owners, fulfills that most important **primal human need** - for **connection and companionship**. **Companionship** dogs excel in communicating through **loving transfixed eye contact**, tails held high - **wagging excitedly**, affectionate **cuddling and pawing their owner**, with **licks to their face and sentimental body movements** that signal love and appreciation.

Which is probably why, people with dogs may sometimes shy away from extensive social involvement. Perhaps because dogs, **constantly beaming with excitement and love** - are simply **more fun to be with**.

PRINCE ALBERT AND PAGLIACCI

Dorothy Hill Baroch

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The smell of Prince Albert tobacco wafted from my Sicilian grandfather's well-used pipe, as he settled into his comfortable recliner and I pulled my little stool up to the old-fashioned, floor model radio.

"Turn it on, Dotty. It's time."

That request was the clue that Pop Pop was ready to listen to the Italian Hour. I watched him put fresh tobacco into the bowl of his pipe, tap the tobacco down with his finger, and light up. As the delicious fragrance from his pipe filled the room, he told me to move the radio dial to the right station, and together we would listen to Italian opera stars sing in his native language.

This ritual happened on the Sundays that my mother and I travelled from the country to visit her Sicilian parents in Baltimore city. Mom and her mother worked in the tiny kitchen, preparing a meal or making home-made spaghetti sauce, using tomatoes from the small garden plot in the back yard. Pop Pop and I shared the living room. It was a special time for me; the only time my grandfather and I spent alone.

The Italian Hour began, with the sound of Pop Pop's beloved classical music filling the room. I had no idea what the Italian words meant, but that wasn't important. I was transported, along with my grandfather, to another time and place, as we both remembered the stories of his youth in Palermo, Sicily, the stories he had shared with me.

Sal's father had paid a barber in Palermo \$.50 a day to teach his youngest son the trade, in the hope that Sal's wages would help to stabilize the family's income. For a time, the young man honored his father's wishes, working at a local barber shop and contributing a portion of his earnings to his parents. But—rather than spend the remainder of his hard-earned cash at the local tavern like his friends did—he used some of his money to purchase tickets to the opera. The rest was

secretly tucked away for his dream adventure—a move to the United States to live with his brother, Francisco, where he would make his fortune. On those special nights, Sal would dress in his best outfit, travel from his home in the village of Carini to the big city, and with his mother-of-pearl-handled cane, he would strut in elegant fashion to the Palermo Opera House.

As we listened to the Italian Hour in my grandparents' living room on the East Coast of the United States, I often wondered where his imagination took him. Did he see himself on the stage of the Met, costumed and singing the lead role in *Pagliacci* or *Figaro*? He never complained about his simple lifestyle as a barber; the two of us just relished our time together on those long-ago Sunday afternoons—a little girl and an Italian immigrant who might have been another Caruso.



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The Key

I found the key beside a palm tree outside a fast-food place. I shaded my eyes from the blazing desert sun and examined the thing. From some car, I figured. But no logo. Well worn, much of the brass showed through the silver. I looked around. Nobody. It didn't make sense. If someone dropped the key, you'd think it would be on the asphalt, not at the base of a tree three feet off to the side. Had someone thrown it there? Gotten disgusted with the crappy car and trashed it? Been angry at the abusive boyfriend and dumped him? Told someone you won't need that anymore where you're going? There had to be a story. But what was it? I frowned and wiped my forehead.

And then I heard footsteps. I turned around, and my mouth slid open, for I saw this tall, elegant woman striding toward me. Fast. Closer and closer. Wearing a tutu and ballet slippers, sweating, and swinging a keychain in one hand.

Lorin Lee Cary