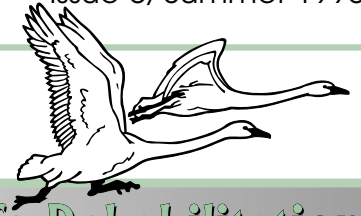


Fellow Mortals™

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Wildlife Rehabilitation

"...do not forget to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

—The Holy Bible, Hebrews 13:2

GIFTS & CURSES

BY YVONNE WALLACE BLANE

Terra spins, day and night, sun and rain, sublimely oblivious to her age, her thinning thread, her pock-marked face. She spins for her children—multiplying like ants, like rabbits, like humans—for each and every one who has ever come into being. But she is deaf to their laughter and their sobbing, blind to their joy and their tears. Terra spins for their lives and her own; trusting in her most talented and adaptable children, homo sapien, to be her eyes and ears and hands, she provides food, warmth and shelter to be shared equally by all who call her home.

There is a fawn, strange eyes lifted up toward the sun as it dapples the oak canopy above her. Her mother is nearby. It is warm. She is content. Long soft oat grass tickles her clean white belly and she kneels into its softness, but there is sudden terrible pain and, bleating, she cries for her mother—come, come, I am hurt—what animal has such hard, cold jaws on my leg! The fawn stumbles up frantically, the iron teeth tearing deep into her soft muscles as she staggers into the woods now afraid of the clearing and the beauty that concealed such terror.

Terra spins while the fawn's eyes roll and her bleating pierces the balmy air leaving the mother deer shivering in helpless anguish, able only to continue to feed her little one who now lives in constant agony, the direct result of a human who betrayed the fawn who wanted nothing more from the earth than to enjoy it.

The squirrel flicked its tail and started to run across the street, but saw the oncoming car and turned back, only to be hit by a human in another car who saw a squirrel but couldn't be bothered to slow down. The squirrel whose face is smashed in the road is one of millions—litter—never mind she was a nursing mother and that somewhere in their drey her babies will first stir restlessly, then cry, then fall silent and, finally, after a week or so, starve to death because a human "couldn't be bothered." So you hit a squirrel, so what?

In the gutter a hawk lay soaked with rain and blood; feathers tattered and legs broken and awry, it panted in terror as tires screamed by within inches of its intelligent eyes, specks of blood exhaled in delicate mist with each breath. In shock from fear and pain, it did not fight when it was picked up gently out of the street. It was only a matter of hours before she died, but, thanks to a human, when death came it was without fear and with dignity. The trap is cruel, but the automobile kills and orphans even more wildlife, it is just that humans find it a more acceptable way of killing.

The first blade of green grass is a wonder after the darkness of winter; it stands for all that spring and summer will be; by fall we do not see blades of grass, but lawns. The first soldier wounded in a battle signifies the futility of war; in the weeks and years to come, the wounded will become statistics. For this reason, it is easier and more expedient to think of wild animals in terms of their species.

Humans respond to overload by generalizing, justifying, rationalizing—anything that prevents introspection—that would be too stressful, too painful. Heaven forbid that we should be forced to feel a twinge of pain, or conscience.

Why is it important that human children not be hurt or orphaned but another creature's children can be frightened and starving? What is it that makes humans think their pain or loss or terror is any more than another creature's?

Awareness of injustice and suffering can be ignored given sufficient exposure to them. The incisive light of comprehension will pale in comparison with more pleasant things. Even mundanity is more acceptable among humans who, professing to be individuals and intellectual frontiersmen, lose faith and teeter on uncharted ground, afraid they may look around and find themselves alone.

Terra is blind and deaf and getting older with every rotation, but she is still speaking to us, each injury one of her children suffers a plea to preserve what life she can still sustain. She is spinning a lesson: what we cast forth on the wind will eventually return to us, whether it is kindness and charity or cruelty and injustice.

It is such a simple thing, really, to coexist. It requires only that we do unto other beings as we would have done unto us. And one thing more, that we recognize that each individual prepares their own ground, and each is solely responsible for the gifts or the curses which are yielded up. ♦

