



The Gift of Gratitude

By Jenny Dee

The morning was cold; that brisk chill that fights to stay alive as the sun pops up at dawn to begin a new day. It delights my forearms with goosebumps of glory, feeling the power of the invisible yet whimsical wind. It is my most favorite touch in the whole world, as I let the Santa Ana-amped up air whip my hair around and boldly stroke my cheek in greeting.

Donning a favorite old gray sweatshirt and black yoga pants, I set out for my daily walk along the main road of my neighborhood—the one that graciously gives a view of the green rolling canyon hills and hint of snow-capped mountains in the distance.

Oh, the irony of seeing those as the glorious globe of light brings its warmth to the mix, winning over the waning wind and star-faded sky. The horizon teased of yellows, oranges and reds, like those of the leaves in an East Coast town long ago. That dance of colors can only be seen now with the rising and setting of the sun, making those whitened peaks even more curious.

All around are still very much alive blossoms of orange, white and green, refusing to give in to the timing that is autumn. Yes, fall has arrived, evidenced by the descended needles and pinecones that grace my path, but not all have succumbed to the call of Mother Nature.

I can still smell them—the blossoms. The pungent perfume of a honeysuckle bush. The bold bouquet of the rainbow of roses. And what do we have here? My nose wrinkles in horror as it catches an owner scooping up its puppy pug's new mess. Not all smells are welcome at this hour of the morning, but thankfully the olfactories are rescued by the nearby bakery and its plethora of bread and coffee aromas. I am liberated and back to my walking observations.

It's quiet on a normally busy street. The hustle of walking school children and car drop-offs are suspended indefinitely, and I can hear the world around me that cried in silence under the human busyness that bullied its way to earshot every morning.

Yes, the crowd of crows can caw their say now, in lyrical back and forths, without interruption. Are they in unison or are they in argument? No, only humans could exist in that depth of dichotomy; I chose to hear the crows wonder about the world.

“It’s a beautiful new day, don’t you think?” one would ask.

“Undoubtedly,” agrees its cohort.

Other birds join the chorus in a melody that is more sublime than expected. Only a few passing cars can break the spell, and I remember where I am.

Civilization.

My tongue yearns for the taste of its favorite hot vanilla chai latte, but on a day like today, when all the purest of senses are stirred, I choose the freshly squeezed orange juice, made from the owner’s very own grove this very morning. I absorb nature into my system with the most delicious imbibement of nectar-like sweetness.

Yes, I am blessed. I feel the fire of gratitude ignite within me, as I recognize all that the quiet of the morning affords me.

I stepped out into the forces of the wind and felt the transition to warmth that only a sunrise could birth.

I witnessed the diversity of nature, in all its seasons in one place: scented blooms of spring, a summery rise of the sun, the crestfallen pine trees and the distant lure of winter-topped mountains. How incredible to experience it all within a single view.

I listened to the calls of other species, admiring their musical mouthing that created a symphony much more peaceful and inviting than that of another voice.

I tasted the best from the Earth, invigorating my body with health and love.

As I walked back towards my home, I took it all in—every last bit of the 30-minute experience. I thought of everything that awaited me in that home, aside from its obvious shelter: its safe placement within a kind community; the healthy and loving children who schooled inside; the plethora of food, clothing and nonsensical things we tell ourselves we cannot live without. Things that so many people *do* live without.

But in truth, what we really could not live without is what the Earth itself provides us; the very essences we ignore or take for granted in the rush of our daily lives. Being forced to slow down, re-evaluate what's important and overcome the obstinate obstacles of a pandemic, I've come to realize this:

Of all that 2020 bestowed upon us, the most important was the gift of gratitude.

May we all see the gifts within the grinds, and find our way out of any darkness with the light that shines in the sky every day for us. Let nature touch your senses, and surrender to all that is good in this world—even when the world itself no longer seems as good.