



ISSUE 8

SUBURBAN
WITCHCRAFT

between these pages you will find

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Content

"It is not in the pursuit of happiness that we find fulfillment, it is in the happiness of pursuit."

Denis Waitley

I sit on my favorite porch chair this sunny November afternoon, enjoying the soft breeze, being kept awake by the eager cries of birds that do battle over the last few seeds left in the feeder. It is the weekend and human noises are largely absent; only the muted voices of strollers walking on the path across the river disturb my apparent solitude. I have had lunch, drank my coffee, and am taking a break before returning to the new story I am writing.

Living has become difficult for me. I am feeble, arthritic, with an erratic heart and almost deaf. Most activities I had enjoyed in earlier years are now beyond my reach. Driving long distances is too tiring, and my daily five-mile runs have needed to be scaled down to short strolls. Soon I will be relegated to one of those human warehouses where the elderly are stored awaiting for Nature to take its course.

Having well surpassed the eighty-year milestone, I measure time by the number of friends, relatives, and public figures I once knew who are now deceased. Staring at the pictures in my electronic photo album, I am often saddened by the realization that most, or even all, of the people in a family portrait are already gone. And it is not just my ancestors. Many people in my generation, and even younger, have also exited the stage, leaving me increasingly isolated.

I feel enervated and fight the urge to get up from my chair and go inside to continue working. What is the use? Why do I need to do so? And I start a debate with myself.

"You are well over the age of retirement. Don't you deserve to take it a bit easier on yourself?"

And I respond: *"I have commitments to fulfill, promises to keep, personal goals to achieve. Can't afford to get lazy at this point."*

My inner self shrugs its invisible shoulders: *"Haven't you worked hard for over six decades already?"*

"Yes" I reply sheepishly. "But the past does not count. There is still a lot left to do."

"Aren't you satisfied with what you have accomplished over all those years?"

"Well, for one thing I have traveled a lot, visited wonderful places, seen beautiful things, feasted my senses in many ways. But that is not enough."

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My alter ego insists: *“True. Your achievements as a tourist and gourmand don’t count for much. But how about your interactions with people?”*

I inadvertently wring my hands. *“I have many memories of those – the kisses and caresses, the tender words I exchanged with my wife, the lifetime of small and big pleasures and emotions we shared. The affection of my relatives, the sparring and bantering and drinking with my friends, the games I played or watched in the company of others. I have met many people, made a few friends, hopefully even fewer enemies. I’m not looking forward to meeting many more people.”*

“How about love?”

“There is always room for more love, but I do not feel lacking in that department. I have loved deeply, and been loved back, and lost my one true love. I am still enjoying the love of my daughter, family, friends, and loyal pets.”

“Are you seeking more material things?”

“I have made money, and spent most of it. Over time, I have owned five houses, and ultimately sold all but the last. I own only a few things and at this point require even fewer.”

“How about reputation, fame, self-esteem?”

I find that question harder to answer. I finally reply to my internal inquisitor: *“Fame is evanescent, like the bright colors on the leaves of the trees down the ravine. Minutes or days after I am gone, I expect I will be forgotten. I care about my legacy, but not that much.”*

“Then, why do you persist in writing your novels and your tales and wasting the little time you have left?”

I would rather not answer, but my inner self is implacable. I breathe deeply and reply: *“Honestly, I do not know. To fill the time. To satisfy my own ego. Or it is just something I feel I need to do to prove that I am still alive. Or, to be honest, because I just cannot help it.”*

I sense my inner self chortle with glee. *“I told you. You have no good excuse for wasting a beautiful November afternoon. Life is too short. Stay on the porch and enjoy yourself watching the birds fight and the breeze blow the colorful leaves away.”*

I give up. I must admit it to myself: I am reasonably content with my life the way it has

been so far. My hours of pleasure have been limited, but my pains have been relatively few. There are no more mountains to climb, obstacles to overcome, challenges to meet, foes to defeat. Suddenly I recall an argument a dear friend and I once had over a second or third beer. Filled with alcoholic exuberance, I posed a question:

“If, on leaving this restaurant, you were about to be run over by a speeding bus, what would your last thought be?”

His immediate answer was: “This ain’t fair! I’m too young to die!”

My own answer, at the time, was similar: “Oh, crap, no! There’s much I still have to do!”

Today, I would change my answer to just say: “Oh, well...,” and perhaps sigh.

I fear that someday, perhaps soon, I will have to make amends for the contentment I feel this perfect Fall afternoon. My hubris will be punished in some horrible way, and I will need to atone through grief and suffering for the moments of serenity with which I have been blessed. Perhaps. For the moment, I will give up any thoughts of working and stay with the birds and the glorious autumn afternoon.

Or, more likely than not, I will go back to do battle with my writing.

Matias Travieso-Diaz