

The Old Fisherman

Anonymous

5-6 minutes

Our house was across the street from the entrance of a famous hospital in the city. We lived downstairs and rented the upstairs rooms to outpatients at the clinic. As I was fixing supper one summer evening, there was a knock at the door. I opened it to see a truly awful-looking man.

“He’s hardly taller than my eight-year-old,” I thought as I stared at the stooped, shriveled body. But the appalling thing was his face—lopsided from swelling, red and raw. Yet his voice was pleasant as he said, “Good evening. I’ve come to see if you have a room for just one night. I came for treatment from the eastern shore this morning, and there’s no bus ’till the morning.”

He told me he’d been hunting for a room since noon, but he had no success as no one seemed to have a room. “I guess it’s my face. I know it looks terrible, but my doctor says with a few more treatments....”

For a moment, I hesitated, but his following words convinced me: “I could sleep in this rocking chair on the porch. My bus leaves early in the morning.” So I told him we would find him a bed but to rest on the porch.

I went inside and finished getting supper. When we were ready, I asked the old man if he would join us. "No, thank you. I have plenty." And he held up a brown paper bag. When I had finished the dishes, I went out on the porch to talk with him for a few minutes.

It didn't take long to see that this older man had a big heart crowded into that tiny body. He told me he fished for a living to support his daughter, her five children, and her husband, who was hopelessly crippled from a back injury.

He didn't tell it by way of complaint; in fact, every other sentence was prefaced with thanks to God for a blessing. He was grateful that no pain accompanied his disease, which was a form of skin cancer. He thanked God for giving him the strength to keep going.

At bedtime, we put a camp cot in the children's room for him. When I got up in the morning, the bed linens were neatly folded, and the little man was out on the porch. He refused breakfast, but just before he left for his bus, haltingly, as if asking a great favor, he said, "Could I please come back and stay the next time I have a treatment? I won't put you out a bit. I can sleep fine in a chair."

He paused a moment and then added, "Your children made me feel at home. Grownups are bothered by my face, but children don't seem to mind." I told him he was welcome to come again.

On his next trip, he arrived a little after seven in the morning. He brought a big fish and a quart of the largest oysters I had ever seen as a gift. He said he had shucked them that morning before he left so that they'd be nice and fresh. I knew his bus left at 4:00 a.m., and I wondered what time he had to get up to do this for us.

In the years he came to stay overnight with us, there was never a

time that he did not bring us fish or oysters or vegetables from his garden. Other times we received packages in the mail, always by special delivery; fish and oysters packed in a box of fresh young spinach or kale, every leaf carefully washed.

Knowing that he must walk three miles to mail these and knowing how little money he had made the gifts more precious. When I received these little remembrances, I often thought of a comment our next-door neighbor made after he left that first morning. “Did you keep that awful-looking man last night? I turned him away! You can lose roomers by putting up such people!”


Maybe we did lose roomers once or twice. But oh! If only they could have known him, perhaps their illnesses would have been easier to bear. I know our family will always be grateful to have known him; from him, we learned to accept the bad without complaint and the good with gratitude.

Recently I was visiting a friend who has a greenhouse. As she showed me her flowers, we came to the most beautiful one of all, a golden chrysanthemum, bursting with blooms. But to my great surprise, it was growing in an old, dented, rusty bucket. I thought to myself, “If this were my plant, I’d put it in the loveliest container I had!” My friend changed my mind.

“I ran short of pots,” she explained, “and knowing how beautiful this one would be, I thought it wouldn’t mind starting in this old pail. So it’s just for a little while till I can put it out in the garden.”

She must have wondered why I laughed so delightedly, but I imagined just such a scene in heaven. “Here’s a wonderful one,” God might have said when he came to the soul of the sweet old fisherman. “He won’t mind starting in this small body.”

-Author Unknown



*If only our eyes saw
souls instead of bodies,
How different our
ideals of beauty would
be.*

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