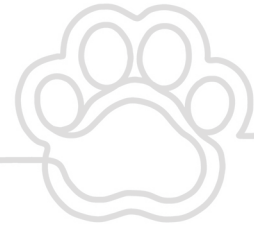


# The Woman and Her Dog

love



by Antionette Duck

I stared at them through my car window. Stared far past the point of politeness, but, I could not tear my eyes away. The moment held me captive, compelled me to behold it, and then, in the most remarkable sleight-of-hand, the moment held up a mirror and asked me what I saw.

Earlier that evening, realizing I needed to work late, I ordered Italian take-out for dinner. The little restaurant was an office favorite, and I found myself anticipating the delightful flavors of roasted garlic and tangy marinara. As I waited for the food to arrive, I decided to move my car closer to the building and was soon driving around the block, pulling up to a stoplight. I glanced over to see a woman standing at the corner, holding a sign, wanting money.

She was a young woman with long, red hair, and I noted sores up and down her arms. She stood quiet, still, the wind blowing her red hair about her; and next to the woman, a dog sat, quiet, still, held by a leash.

The light flashed green, and I turned left, feeling an impatient press. "I have work to finish," I told myself. "I don't have time to help her."

As I walked back to my desk, the press increased, but not from impatience.

"Oh... what, what?"

I let out a sigh, my conscience all aflutter, conviction in full force.

"Are you really going to leave her down at the corner with nothing? Really? Nothing to see here. Move along."

My guilt compounded as I had to admit, my impatience had been driven, in part, because my dinner might have arrived. I shook my head.

Our office building held a makeshift store on the first floor, and it offered a variety of snack foods: chips, cookies, crackers. I quickly walked down to the store and added several packages to a bag, suddenly eager to reach the woman, concerned she might leave.

Driving up to the corner again, I gave the woman a soft smile. She hesitated to look me in the eye. She seemed ashamed, and looked down, looked away, but she walked toward the car and slowly accepted the bag I offered her. The woman then stepped away from the corner, and to my amazement, she opened a package of cookies, poured them into a little bowl, and fed them to her dog.

A gasp caught in my throat. She fed her dog first. I stared at them through the window, an array of emotions coursing through me. Curious how time seemed to slow down, the weight of the moment hanging in the air, my impatience vanished. I turned the wheel slowly and rounded the corner.

When I walked back into the office, my dinner greeted me. It was sumptuous Italian, served hot, made fresh, and altogether delicious. Glancing down at the meal, I thought of the woman, thought of her dog. There I sat, ready to feast, and all the woman really had was an assortment of chips and crackers. Visions of the rich man and Lazarus paraded through my head. Can you imagine who I reminded myself of?

I stood up, determined to give the woman more food. Out to the car and back around the block, but this time as I drove up to the corner, the woman and her dog were gone.

Ugh.

Regret gnawed at me.

“She fed her dog first.”

“They really were hungry.”

I kept rewatching the moment as it played over and over and over again.

That moment.

It lingered with me, and it was as if the moment drew back a curtain, held up a mirror, and showed me myself.

I’ve spoken on human value countless times, taught one audience after another about the intrinsic worth of the human being. Yet somehow, when I first saw the woman and her dog, those words, so sure and true, seemed to slip through my fingers. Somehow, the woman was not worth my time and attention.

I stared back into the mirror.

Do I really believe the human being was made in the image of the LORD?

Do I really see the person next to me as the property of GOD?

Because she was.

She is.

And it did not matter what had led her to the corner that day.

Thank you, dear lady, you and your dog. You will never know what a gift you gave to me.