

The Lady at the Desk

By Glenn Currier

I am tired and worried.
Will they evict me or not?
They want legal papers from the internet
a place where I am lost and confused.
I have to print and sign them, they insist.
My clothes are old, I've no lipstick, and my hair is stringy.
I am ashamed to even be in this public place.
But there she is in front of me,
that lady at the desk
who looks up and says, "Hello there, may I help you?"
I tell her my plight -
that I have no money for copies.
She looks as wounded as I feel.
She speaks to me with the respect and tenderness
a king or a president would expect.
She reaches under the desk for an envelope
retrieving two dollars from her special stash
and hands it to me.
I am overjoyed and try reaching across to touch her.
She says, "I'm sorry, there are no hugs across this desk."
She comes around and hugs me
and I hug her with all my might,
my tears absorbed by her red hair.

I am nine. My parents are gone,
and me and my sis and brother are staying with my uncle.
The library is a cool place.
I run around nervous and scattered
and the lady at the desk calls me over
and says smiling "Hi little boy, how are you?"
I'm not used to people being nice to me
they are always telling me:
"Control yourself, shut up, slow down."
I rain my story on her non-stop.
She listens and then she shows me a book,
pats me on the shoulder and asks me if I will read it.
I smile and sink to the floor and lose myself in it.
She says, "Books are your friends."
I am happy to find a friend
who I can touch and be quiet with.

The lady at the desk listens to me
telling her about my stories, my poetry
and says, "On Monday nights poets meet here,
you ought to come."
"But I am not a fancy poet," I tell her.
"I just love to let my images, my people take shape in words."

She asks me if I enjoy poetry. "I love poetry!"
"Well, that group is for you, meet me here."
Monday night I go and find a home with kind people
who clap and smile when I read my poems.
And I am grateful for the lady at the desk,
that encourager
and, by the way, her poems lift me.
They sound simply true to me.

The lady at the desk
said with a lilt, "What can I do to help?"
And with such ease she became a founder
a nurturer, a star in the small firmament
of poets who once a month
reach down through the clouds
and plant their creations
in the soil of imagination.
What fun it has been to be lassoed
with her lines and startled
by her bright soul.

What a void there will be
when I enter that place
and that smile, that peaceful presence,
that encourager, that respecter,
that centurion of common sense
is no longer behind that desk.

In some communities there are a few people
who seem to possess a special glue
an ingredient of kindness
a love of people
that connects them,
that draws them from their darkness
inviting them to join the flow of life,
lighting them
with a keen, indefinable radiance.

Elizabeth Hobbs is just such a person.
And for her and her gift of light
we are profoundly
and happily
grateful.

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