

Fish

by Ann Bogle

I was always a writer, but I became one, deliberately, as an adult, to express pain. I believed that I could reach the anonymous ears of God that way and give courage to people who loved truth.

I met people who were not afraid. Some of them loved me more than I could tolerate. Some taught me with more pain. Love and pain overlapped. I ran from both toward a future of writing and arrival. I moved slowly but eventually. I lost a child, rode twice to its funeral on my bicycle, paid in cash. I lost a husband, a father, and more friends than I had ever dreamed of knowing. When I lost writing, as I was losing it, I fought with all my ingenuity for as long as I could -- longer. I sat outside the hospital for hours, reading signs in every movement around me, until nothing was left but fear.

Losing writing broke my spirit. I had been consciously arguing for spirit at that time, noticing it missing in many of the writers around me. Their lack of spirit challenged me. It was a serious and beautiful offense, but I didn't imagine then as I do now that some of them also lacked soul.

The price of fighting for spirit and soul has sometimes been sanity. I want sanity, but I believe in spirit and soul. The sanity we live by is worth less without them.

A woman with spirit appeals to men who fish because she is still alive. If they hook her, they despise her. They never fear dying themselves. They watch remotely as she gropes and sinks, nothing stirring them to love or remorse or even pity. They are bored but fortified by her death to want another.

I have lost will and found it in refusing to accept that men are incapable of equality. I have believed that they are able but

unwilling. I have risked my life pulling men's doubles from drowning water, while the men themselves sat comfortably on shore. I have died of this illusion many times -- for humanity, for writing, for my own man, globally and locally. I have lost humor, too, the humor women share when they do not dive to save imaginary men from drowning.

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