

# Dapplegrey (Where He Lived)

*by* Devorah Ducklet

A short time ago, a man who lived near me got angry. He woke up one morning and torched his house, with his wife and stepdaughter still inside. They ran out screaming. He then drove up I-35 to the Georgetown airport, got in his plane, and flew it into the Echelon Building in Austin, killing both himself and another man. His name was Joe. He lived on a street near me called Dapplegrey, and this piece is about that street.

## **Dapplegrey (Where He Lived)**

Dapplegrey (where he lived) is where I write. It's where the playground is and I lie on my back on the slide and soak up the sun. It's where I tote my tiny laptop and curl up on the playscape to type.

Dapplegrey is where girls learn to rollerskate and boys tack playing cards to the spokes of their bicycle wheels. Children in search of treasures find pennies and marbles and polished rocks. On Dapplegrey I pinch off rosemary leaves and breathe in their sweet scent for as long as it lasts. On Dapplegrey I take long walks; I think and create and write.

Thursday evening after he did it, I walked past the shameful skeleton of his burned down house. The sunset was unusually spectacular, an embarrassment of brilliance and incongruity. Against the melon and dusty rose background there were deep grey fibers from three large paintbrush strokes, extending coarsely from a cornflower blue cloud. It looked like God had wiped off his paintbrush against the surface of the sky before leaving the scene. He had definitely left the scene.

The neighbors stood quietly and somberly in groups of three and four. They were thinking aloud and offering conjectures, grateful just to not be alone. Smells of turpentine and plastic and charred desperation filled the air where a relentless fire, fueled by gasoline

and rage, had consumed the family's belongings, their photographs, their instruments, their love.

Police, firefighters, FBI, and detectives buzzed around like yellow jackets invading a hive. Dressed in uniforms and dark suits, they performed their prescribed routines with the display of detachment. Reporters prowled the streets teasing us with bits of intelligence in order to elicit a response, any kind of response.

A Great Blue Heron caught my eye. It flew majestically above us in a northward direction with deliberate, graceful, powerful strokes. I wondered where it was going.

Bill Marshall approached me and spoke softly as if revealing a secret. "He never intended to harm Sheryl and Margaux. No one would ever hurt them. Sheryl played at our wedding, you know?"

"Really?" I said, turning to face him.

"She was so happy. We were so happy for her. She had been a single mom to Margaux for so long and then she and Joe fell passionately in love. He wouldn't have hurt her. He never meant to hurt anyone. He was just angry at an idea, institution, you know — not a person."

Bill and I both turned to gaze on the expressionless house, naked and ravaged — wasted. "It was just another asset that the IRS would've gone after," Bill offered in explanation.

I looked hard into Bill's faded blue eyes, ravenously searching for meaning in his words, but his eyes offered nothing. There was no reason and no conviction, not even despair. He turned and walked away, forgetting to say good-bye.

Friday on Dapplegrey was pleasant and mild, and people walked their dogs and jogged and biked. Two girls sat cross-legged on the sidewalk singing Patty cake. Smells of dinner time filled the street. One home smelled of Indian curry and another of Chinese stir fry. Down the street something smelled of fresh funnel cakes like those sold at festivals — the full plate-sized treasures delectably sprinkled with confectioner's sugar.

Friday on Dapplegrey, I walked past neatly landscaped yards with wrought iron benches and gazing balls and ceramic animals who

peered back at me. The smell of juniper filled the air. As I walked through the park past Frisbee games and picnic dinners, I thought of Sheryl. The day was beautiful, the evening, glorious. Was she longing to share it with him, imagining he'd made a different choice, wishing he had stayed for one more sunset? An old man with an old dog walked in my direction. The dog, whose grey matted hair matched that of his master's, stopped to rest. The old man called to him but the dog refused to budge. It watched me through droopy eyes as if looking for someone to understand its plight. It was tired; it was just so tired. The man grew impatient and pulled the dog along, but the dog turned back to look at me one last time. I watched the two of them until they faded into a damp blurry cloud. I hadn't realized I was crying.

