

The Impending Fall Of Space Junk

by Kevin Army

bark

Lew walks around the lake twice a day, slowly, aided by a cane in each hand. I'd guess he's about 85, and he hasn't bought a new piece of clothing since 1969. It's kind of hard to describe what he wears, it's an odd mix of preppy hippie. Old and impeccably clean. You can tell the clothes used to be colorful, which stands interestingly against the constant scowl on Lew's weathered face.

He was explaining the duck family to his daughter Mel. "They're domesticated ducks someone abandoned here. There were four babies, now they're all gone." Mel had a worried twitchy look on her face, worried about her father and troubled that she'd never been able to get his approval.

I see Lew again a few days later. He acts like he'd never met me, I can tell he just wants to be on his walk and be left alone. I don't see the ducks that day. The world is always changing, even if it's in several eras at once.

orange peel in wood

I wonder what it's like to be Mel. Was he always this distant, this gruff, this old and unpleasant? I get the feeling the constant edginess of Lew has worn her down, broken a lot of her spirit. Mel seems shakier than Lew. Even though his hair is still black, her's is half brown, half gray. Her eyes look more defeated than his. Maybe it's just when she's with him. Some parents have an unempowering affect on their adult children. The defeat of knowing the parent will never change, will never understand what the child still needs.

texture1

There's these missing things we long for. Lew misses his late wife. She passed 20 years ago, and life has never been right since. Mel misses things she never had. I know it sounds stupid, I'm missing the ducks, some days they are all I have left of my cheering section.

Space junk is supposed to land somewhere today. Even NASA doesn't know exactly where. We all have a one in 3400 chance of being hit. I've been feeling an emptiness this week. A misalignment of everything, of lost things, of a prevailing brokenness lurking throughout and within.

Until I met Lew, I thought the ducks were my secret. I thought I owned them. Now I realize they belong to everyone who passes by, they follow everyone around, they've won everyone's hearts. And I thought I was the person who struggles the most to walk around that lake everyday, taking my scarred and recovering body out there even when it protests. One look at Lew, and I knew it's tougher for him. He can barely walk.

Our lives are all hard in their own ways. The last time I saw the ducks, the awkward threesome was standing on the shore, looking out at the water, waiting for the last duckling to come back. If it's possible, if I'm not just projecting, they looked worried and distraught.

I stand still and watch the water gently ripple. A couple of kids are swimming out past the markers, the sky is blue. We're in the middle of a short heat wave. The sun feels good on my face. I see Lew walking up the hill, away from the park, back to his home up the street.

vine

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