

Postcard

by Kevin Myrick

The only mail Walter enjoyed delivering were the postcards. It was his natural curiosity to flip them over and read the messages. In this block's stack he saw a postcard for Mrs. Skaggs up the street from her grandchildren. They missed her on their trip in San Antonio, and wished she could be there with them on their visit to the Alamo. Walter noticed their mother had written the message in her flowing meticulous cursive; the youngsters signed "Pablo" and "Liz" in their sloppy, unpracticed signatures. He'd seen many of these postcards every summer for the past 20 years. The only thing that changed were the names.

A happy family writing from a fantastic place was something Walter never had. His wife died young from cancer that hit hard and fast. His family was all dead or in prison for one thing or another. All he ever got in the mail were bills, credit card offers and the red envelopes from Netflix. Walter never looked forward to walking up to his own mailbox and making a delivery to his own house. It was in times when the routine of his life ate away at him as he drifted without purpose; he thought himself as a real nowhere man. This world would not miss the news if he left it prematurely on his own terms.

The postcards also gave him escape. He liked to imagine himself going to the exotic places on the fronts of the postcards he delivered, mostly in the summer. He walked and imagined his toes being filled with sand on the beautiful Hawaiian beaches he sometimes saw. He liked to think when walking up the hills he was on the Appalachian trail in the thick forest, his nostrils filled with the sweet clean smell of the place after a hard summer rain.

One afternoon Walter saw a woman he recognized from his route drop a postcard in the mailbox as she walked her dachshund. The

dog barked his head off as he walked by; He tipped his cap and wished her a good afternoon. "Special delivery for a friend?" he asked. "Postcards are a wonderful thing. All people want to do nowadays is send e-mails. But what's better than putting a postcard on the fridge?"

"A baby photo," the woman said as she rubbed her belly. "Those look good on the fridge, don't they?"

Walter let his head drop as he told the woman the reason he never had children, a deep wound that he rarely shared with anyone. "I'm sorry," she said.

After he finished work for the day he went home and got drunk and grabbed his pistol. He thought about the postcards he saw from faceless people to those he knew on his route. It reminded him there were families that lived and loved for one another; even if he didn't have a family, other families needed him to deliver those postcards. It was this thought that kept him from pulling the trigger. When he put the gun down on the coffee table in front of him, he pushed his palms against his eyes and cried for an hour. His neighbor upstairs banged against the floor to get him to quiet down.

The postcards kept coming from all over the world. He read each one and smiled before dropping it in the box. A few weeks later as he was going through his satchel, Walter found a plain looking postcard of a painting from a museum. It was tiny print of The Birth of Venus. The sender left nothing more than a phone number and the lipstick imprint of a woman's delicate final touch. He looked over the handwriting a second time and saw it was for Mr. Forrester. It was something Mrs. Forrester was likely to be unhappy about when she saw it in the mail. He was just the messenger; he slipped it silently into the slot in the front door and went onto the next box.

At home that night, he wondered aloud as his cat Duke rubbed

against the back of his legs if he' done the right thing delivering that postcard. He told himself that Mrs. Forrester would have found out about the affair the mister of the house was having sooner or later. It wasn't his fault if he couldn't keep his zipper up. He asked Duke what he would have done, but got nothing more than a meow in response. Walter turned up his stereo and sat in the darkness for hours sipping beer and smoking cigarettes.

As he walked down Maple Street the next day, he saw the results of the postcard. Mrs. Forrester screamed at Mr. Forrester and threw his clothing from the second story window. He pleaded he didn't understand what was wrong, that he hadn't slept with any other women.

"Then why was a woman sending you a postcard with a lipstick kiss on it and a phone number?" she shouted.

"What are you talking about?"

"This!" she screamed and tossed the postcard out the window. Walter watched as it sailed to the ground at Mr. Forrester's feet. The man picked it up and a looked it over. "This is nothing."

"Nothing? It has a kiss on it!"

Walter was statue still and watched for a moment, unsure of what to do next. He didn't want to get entangled in the argument but he had to deliver the mail. Rain, sleet, snow or shine he still had to deliver the mail. The couple finally noticed him and stared him down as he passed by on the sidewalk. He slid a stack of bills and magazines in the slot in the door. He walked away off to the next house to deliver more mail without a word. When he passed they started in again with one another, not caring about what their neighbors might be thinking.

"Do you see what you're doing?"

"He has nothing to do with this, he's the mail man," Mrs. Forrester said.

Mr. Forrester asked him to stop, to explain what the hell his wife was raving about. "I don't have a clue, sir," Walter said.

He rounded the block and looked over his next stack to deliver. On the top there was a fresh postcard for Mrs. Skaggs, this time from the Grand Canyon. The children said it was amazing. Maybe he would go there someday.

