

GRANITE FRIENDS

The wind caressed the icy twigs of the trees that lined the city walks, causing an eternal music which filled the air, soft, heard only by those who listened carefully. The clouds nestled high, white and flimsy, barely moving. They were painted with an artistic hand by the Author of originality, always amazing those who could see their theme.

She moved up the walk slowly. How she despaired to think that she shuffled, but sometimes it was very difficult to lift her feet off of the ground. Too high and she might slip, fall. A dislocated arm, a fractured hip, a hospital room and sterile, meaningless faces. Not now, not for her. She looked up again and a slight smile touched a thin and faded mouth. So beautiful, the sky. Always changing but nearly unalterable, timeless and consistent, His palate alone.

Of course, she remembered the occasional stroke left by the trailing engines of the jets of the late twentieth century, back when the ozone was in trouble and hair spray in aerosol cans was still legal. Now the sun shined as it always had, bright and sure, singularly without threat as it warmed the soil and left the world alive. They had compensated by artificially manufacturing the oxygen which would have been produced by the lost jungles of the Amazon. Bandages slapped upon creation by the hands of children.

She pushed the correct sequence of her lock combination and the door to her home swung open before her. The front hall light came on immediately, leaving the remainder of the house to light as she moved from room to room. Shrugging out of her coat, she spoke for water and the filter tap in the kitchen whirred momentarily before filling the waiting glass. She tossed the coat across the chair and made her way into the kitchen. As the light came on, she noted with some dismay that yesterday's dinner dishes were unwashed, and as always she was loathe to do those daily cleaning chores. Perhaps she should have someone come in every day instead of once a week.

Oh well. The sky was not the only constant in her life, she acknowledged with a wry twist of her lips. She didn't expect the people from House Beautiful to knock her door down for photos any time soon.

She sipped her water carefully then carried it into the living room. The small room was dominated by the sofa, the wide-screen television and the holoimager. Sinking into the comfortable cushions, she picked up the remote and turned on the television. Tonight she would watch an old Star Trek, one of the originals. Made long before the somewhat successful Next Generation and the other, failed remake attempt. Sure, those carefully selected actors had resembled the first ones. They could have been their clones! But, that elusive, magical bonding between characters and audience had never solidified. In a world of substitutions and generics, some things just could not be imitated or duplicated. Some people were just too unique...

Amok Time. That was an enjoyable episode, and she used the remote to key the VDP to select and play her choice. The machine used an arm much like the ones in antique jukeboxes to select the correct video disc and insert it into the player. As the show began, she snuggled back, ignoring the twinges of pain within her old muscles. Once upon a time, in a girl far away, her limbs had been limber, her muscles taut, her walk a dance to distant music. Now, she had turned with time. She was an old woman. So very old.

What was it they used to say? You are only as old as you feel? Decades upon decades she had felt young. Now, she was as old as she felt. And, she felt ancient...

The sound of the gong brought her attention back to the television screen. Had she been dozing, to have missed so much? There Spock stood, garbed in ritual clothing, his face riddled with racial agony. Kirk, too, concerned as he would always be. How strange to think that they were all dead. Long ago dead. Like everyone she loved...

She spoke to the holoimager then, recalling the image of her friend. The other woman materialized, as she always did, sitting within a high-backed armchair. Her friend's skin was lined and weathered, though not as much as it would be if she were still alive. The image leaned forward and waved then eased back and smiled at her.

It hadn't been at her, of course, but at the holocam which had been used to make the animated, life-size photograph. But, at times like this, her friend seemed to be smiling right at her. It was almost as if she was getting ready to tell her an amusing story. Or, perhaps they were going to reminisce. Would they talk about one of their many trips to the Red Granite quarry before it was sold off and commercialized? Would they remember lazing on that old rubber boat in the heat of the summer sun or fighting over possession of a black tire tube in water so deep that it could consume them in the space of a few heartbeats?

Would they talk about work, those days of temporal import? Or would they remember husbands and children, and children's children? Would they recall the faded memories of parents and other friends? Or perhaps they would just talk, maybe share a thought or a joke or just a hug...

She choked on a sudden welling of tears. Sometimes it was too hard to remember. Sometimes it was just impossible. The image continued to smile and she experienced a sudden rush of confusion. How long ago was it, the last time they had touched the granite?

She spoke the image away and arose from the sofa. The window in the living room was darkened with a smoky tint that faded when she touched the button on the window sill. Outside, the yard lay still and unmoving beneath a solid, frigid coat of snow and ice. The sun sparkled across the white, sending a harsh glare against her weary eyes.

She lifted her eyes to the sky and smiled. No matter how alone she felt, she knew that He would never leave her. They were with Him, even now, happy, eternal, no more pain, no more time...

Soon, very soon, she would be there too. Her body young again, her spirit forever wrapped in the joys of heaven. Perhaps her friend would join her right away. Or maybe she would spy her on the streets of gold and they would run into each others arms as if they had never been apart.

She heard the strains of Star Trek's ending theme song and nodded thoughtfully. Surely they had touched the granite only yesterday.

Dedicated with love to my friend
Gen, on December 16, 1989
God bless you, now and always!

"Live Long and Prosper"
Marilyn