

# The Quill

## Flotsam, Jetsam

To Ray Bradbury

There was once a little girl who did not speak or smile. She was like that for a very long while, but no one noticed that she was strange. Oh, you mustn't think that she did not speak at all or smile at all, she did. But as some people who are considered wise and learned say -- her smiles and speech were not significant, they appeared only when required by external stimuli. That is to say, of course, that she smiled and spoke only when she was expected to do so.

Her parents were at first worried, but not overly so -- a quiet child, after all, is a welcome novelty in our days and times. And, since she threw no tantrums, they were satisfied in their child. After a while they became convinced that they were singled out by Lady Luck, and given a quiet child to succour them as they grew old. And, as you know, proud parents nowadays always share their pride with their children, so the little girl soon knew what was expected of her.

The child grew and lived out her quiet life, serene and silent. No one, not the other children in kindergarten, nor her school-mates knew her to speak or smile out of turn. But when she smiled, she did so at the clouds or at birds or at people on the street. Sometimes she smiled at the air. But these smiles were rare.

Yet this child had another, secret life. Sometimes, when no one who knew her could see, when no one who did not know her could tell to those who did, she took to the air and flew.

At first, her flights were very brief and close to the ground, for she did not wish to be noticed. But, as the time passed, the flights became longer and their height became greater. And as her flights became longer and higher, she allowed herself to smile for no other reason than to smile, to sing for no other reason than to hear her own voice, to look down at the hills only to see their rolling greenness. But whenever she came back to her home or school, she again assumed her quiet, serene life, with no one the wiser.

During her flights she might meet people like her, or slightly like her. As you all know, not all that flies is a swan, and some are very far from what those people who obfuscate call *Cygnus Olor* or *Cygnus Atrata*. To her fellow fliers she gave a brief, shy smile and banked away, to remain alone above the sand dunes of the beach or alongside the stumpy olive trees of the mountains.

When she was very certain of her ability to fly, she sometimes ventured into city suburbs, though only during the late evening, and flew around, looking into windows and onto balconies. She especially liked the summer nights, when many people's inhibitions disappear and some of them, those that might have been like the girl had

they an opportunity, danced naked on the roofs and let moonlight cast fleeting shadows around them. If these people, if these might-have-been fliers had children she would sometimes alight on their window, and whisper of the flight, of the hidden meetings with the hawks and the albatross. And if, visiting one of the lonely spots where she first practiced her flights, she met one of these children, she would sit awhile and watch them or even fly a short while with them.

You mustn't assume that this girl or young woman lived only in her flights. In her mundane, her regular life she painted nature-morts in browns and greens and yellows. When she was somewhat older, these sold modestly enough to put some red wine and goulash soup on her table, and a small Piaggio scooter near her apartment.

If she chanced to meet one of the fellow fliers on the street, she would smile at him or her, or even wave her hand, and continue on her business. The other flier would also smile, and also wave, and, sometimes, follow her with his eyes. And when they would meet during one of their flights, they would, laughing, tell each other how they excused knowing someone very alien and strange to their parents or acquaintances or spouses.

But one day, when she was on her way home, there was a traffic accident and the young woman was killed. And as she died, she screamed. It is now no longer known whether this scream was short or long, but it was hoarse and demanding, quite unlike her life. It quivered and rose, very unlike her polite smile. It was savage and raw, so unlike her quiet speech. It was and was gone.

- Marc A. Volovic, Jerusalem, Israel