Beyond the Bloom of Spring

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Kitty Stamen had never known a moment like this before. It was absolutely celestial. What are you to do if you are getting your husband's breakfast and suddenly, without reason, are overwhelmed with a feeling of absolute ecstasy; a little heavenly comet suddenly takes up quarters in your heart, sending divinely warmed blood spilling through your body! The egg yolks, so round and yellow, smooth as satin, seemed to dance in their little white seas. Even the bacon crinkled as though smiling at her. It was a gliding waltz step she did to the refrigerator to get the oranges. Their firm skins peeled off easily under her quick sure fingers, but it was all she could do to keep from throwing them up in the air and catching them. She felt her face glow warmly as Paul walked in on her unexpectedly.

"Good morning, Kitten," he said, and kissed her on the forehead automatically as he had for the past ten years.

"Good morning, Daddy!"

Now what had made her call him "Daddy?" She had never called him anything but Paul. Quickly Kitty went to the stove and began dishing up his breakfast. She sighed with relief when he made no comment, and she could hear the rustle of the morning paper behind her. She fussed with the eggs, placing each one just so on his plate, ruffling them with the crisp bacon.

"Mummie," Morrie called from the bedroom.

Kitty flew to his side. He was sitting up in bed rubbing his eyes with the back of his hands. His little faded blue pajamas were unbuttoned half way down; his dark, curly hair was tossled. She sat down on the bed beside him and enfolded him in her arms. He cuddled against her bosom. Oh, God! Tears danced in her eyes, and she bent down and through pursed lips made a bubbling sound on his warm exquisite little neck. This overwhelming warmth of feeling was like a miracle to her. She stood up and whirled him around. And in the bathroom another miracle took place: Morrie never let out a whimper as she washed him.

It was so cozy at the kitchen table. Kitty ate each bite as if each morsel was a new discovery. She didn't even mind Paul's being buried behind the morning paper. What made her so sensitive this morning? The odor of Paul's aftershave lotion added to her exquisite feeling of--what she didn't know? She hardly noticed that Morrie was spilling some of his
oatmeal around the edge of his plate.

"Morrie!" Paul cried. "Look what you're doing!"

"Oh! Let him go, Paul," she said, patting Morrie's warm little hand. "It won't take a second to clean it up."

Paul looked at her, his eyes widened perceptibly.

"But you always--"

Kitty was too full of happiness--yes, that's what it was, happiness--it just had to be--to let anything mar it. She smiled at him, murmured: "I know, I know..." Paul shrugged his shoulders and went back behind his paper.

At the door for her usual goodbye kiss, Kitty's feelings burst through her self-imposed defenses. Instead of the usual little peck she gave Paul, for some unexplainable reason, she seized him in her arms and gave him an eager, warm comet-born kiss. He was completely awkward when she released him. She took his arm and gently turned him around and pushed him out the door.

"You better hurry, Daddy, or you'll be late!"

Kitty leaned against the closed door, holding her breath. She was afraid to breathe for fear the little fireball lodged in her breast would be fanned into an all consuming and unbearable flame. She whirled in ballet fashion to the couch and fell on it warm and dizzy. It was almost too much for her--this heavenly enchantment! A movement in the tree outside the window caught her eye. The tree's long slender branches were prickly with new little green and white buds. Two squirrels were scampering playfully among the branches. Their movements were so quick, so sure, that Kitty forgot to be fearful when one missed a branch and went tumbling down through the tree to the ground. His playmate met him half way down as he was coming back up and scolded him, only to be chased back up to the topmost part of the tree. A curious cold wave swept her momentarily as the neighbors' black and brown spotted dog ran around the base of the tree barking noisily at the squirrels.

"The little beast!" she thought; but the squirrels paid no attention
to him, and she fled to the kitchen at Morrie’s call.

She wiped Morrie’s mouth with his bib and lifted him out of his highchair, held him close to her for a moment, and then set him down on the floor as her joy threatened to suffocate her. She loved him very much—this precious little bundle, who looked so much like a little blue Teddy Bear. And as the blue bear ran out of the kitchen, the little heavenly body within her heart throbbed. Heavenly—simply heavenly!

Her hands flew through the dishes with a new found energy and her mind probed to find the answer. What had she to be so happy about? Absolutely nothing. Nothing at all. They didn't have any money. They were in debt—even her engagement ring was in the pawn shop. Paul was on WPA and in a couple of months, he'd be laid off because of some silly rule about not being able to work continuously longer than 18 months. They never went out—there wasn't enough money for hardly anything but rent and food—necessities only.

It had been hard on her, once the banker’s daughter and the wife of an up and coming mining engineer, to come down to being just another relief client. The bank failure had started it all, leaving her father a broken man, afraid to face the world without his financial confidence. Then the mine closed. Paul was laid off and their house was lost. Kitty had never been the same since. She had drawn into a shell, and like an angry turtle, only emerged to take out her bitterness on Paul and Morrie. But Paul had lived up to her father’s predictions. He was steady, kind, gentle, and it was his reliable, calculating engineer mind that held them together.

Kitty became quite dizzy while throwing crumbs to the birds. It was such a heady feeling that she was absolutely intoxicated. The morning was beautiful to her mood. Were early spring mornings always like this? Cool, crisp breezes chattered as they played it through the bushes and tree tops; forecasting the possibility of a late snow. But this was Easter time, she thought. Easter time...He is Risen...new clothes...new life. Could it be Spring?

That Morrie didn’t share her bloom of heaven, was obvious when she began dressing him. He was now being his usual aggravating self, and was having difficulty in standing still as Kitty tried to get him into his suit.

"Morrie Stamen! Will you, please, stand still!" she cried, as he wiggled and twisted around to get a better view of a picture of a Bunny
Rabbit on the front of a magazine.

Kitty picked up the magazine, put it up on the mantel by her vase, out of temptation's way. She ran her hand tenderly over the vase. It was so tall, so white and slender; a treasure house of memories. It had stood for many years by her bed at home. It had been the depository of her many youthful secrets. For months before she let her parents know she and Paul were engaged, she had hid her ring in it. Once while in college, it had held a boy's frat pin.

"Are we going to see the Easter Bunny?" Morrie asked for the fifteenth time that morning.

"Yes, yes, only for heaven's sake, stand still." She cuddled him to her when she finished dressing him. "Now, young man, sit on that chair, and don't you get off until I get dressed."

In the bedroom Kitty couldn't make up her mind what dress to wear. Her pink one was her best; but if it became any colder, she might wish she had worn her last year's wool dress. She wished Paul could find another job before his lay-off came. Perhaps, she found herself hoping, the mines will be reopening with the threat of war coming closer. If they didn't open, maybe he could go to Milwaukee or Detroit and get a National Defense job. I'm in a regular little tizzy, she thought. The future and hope were a new line of thought to Kitty; and the future now flooded her body amorously.

As Kitty turned to straighten out her dress in front of the mirror--it gave her back a beaming young woman in her early thirties, her face flushed, her dark eyes flashing vivaciously. She put her hands up under the back of her hair and fluffed it out, pulled one side down over the front of her face, and pushed down the shoulder of her dress, baring a soft white shoulder. She put on her best come-hither look and then burst into laughter. Honestly, Kitty Stamen, I think you're drunk. Are you sure you didn't put something in that coffee this morning? Oh, you're absurd! Most delightfully absurd! She spun around till her skirt flowed out revealing her slip, stopped suddenly and hugged herself. Oh, what a heavenly sensation!

A loud crash broke into her reverie, her comet sputtered, and she ran into the living room. Morrie was standing on the arm of the chair, the magazine in his hand, looking anxiously at bits of white fragments on the floor--the shattered remains of her lovely vase.
"I didn't mean to, Mummie," he bawled. "I was just trying to get the magazine to see the Easter Bunny!"

Kitty stood absolutely frozen, her hot comet became a paltry, pitiful snowball watering down her arteries. Her beautiful vase! It was the only thing she had salvaged from the clutches of the depression; there had been many opportunities to sell but she had clung to it tenaciously. Paul had been appalled at her suggestion they pawn her engagement ring instead of selling her antique vase.

"You mean to tell me you'd rather pawn your engagement ring rather than part with that little monstrosity," he had said.

It was too much to expect of a man to understand how she felt about it, and she didn't try to explain.

"That's what I said."

He looked at her for a long time. Finally he said, "Our ring doesn't mean as much to you as the vase? Is that what you're trying to say."

"I'm not trying to say anything of the kind." If they sold the vase, she knew it was gone for good, but if they pawned her ring he'd find some way to redeem it. It irritated her to think he had always called her vase a "little monstrosity" but wasn't beyond selling it when he found out it was valuable. She wasn't going to let him. He stormed out of the house. But when he returned an hour later, he was contrite.

"Kitten, darling."

"Yes."

"Are you really serious?"

She took off her engagement ring and laid it carefully on the table. "I thought we decided that. Take the ring but leave my vase alone."

She had then run off and locked herself in the bedroom. She hated to part with her ring, but she couldn't bring herself to sell her vase. And now to see it shattered...utterly broken into tiny bits, brought a lump as large as the vase to her throat.
"Please, Mummie, I didn't---" Morrie wailed.

"Oh, shut up!" she screamed at him.

Morrie ran from the room shrieking at the top of his voice. Kitty ignored his outburst. Tears flooded her face, and sobbing she knelt down and lovingly began gathering up each tiny piece of her lovely vase. She placed the pieces in a small package of tissue paper. Her empty jewel case became its coffin. Glancing into the mirror, she saw the ravages her tears had left. She looked older. No hot comet stirred in her breast. She felt now her normal deluded and hopeless self. No hope. No future. What was the use? As she wiped her eyes, the sobbing of Morrie rushed into her consciousness. He was stretched across the bed, his face buried in his arms, deep sobs shaking his tiny body.

She impulsively started to scold him, but he rolled over on his back, looked up at her with little blurry brown eyes, and her returned bitterness diminished.

"Hush, now, honey. Mother's sorry," Kitty soothed gently. "I didn't mean to scare you, it's just that I---" She snuggled him to her breast, patted him gently on the back until his sobbing subsided.

She finally set him on the floor with a gentle smack on the buttocks, and said:

"Put on your shoes, like a good boy, while mother gets ready and I'll take you to see the Easter Bunny."

Before the mirror, repairing her face, Kitty realized that her wool dress was the only sensible one to wear. She quickly slipped it over her head and while buttoning it up, Paul's picture smiling at her from the dressing table sent a warm ripple surging through her body. I do love you, darling, she thought, even though I'm as cold as an icicle. When they were first married it had almost worried her sick. Dr. Hunt had told her there was nothing organically wrong with her, and had half way promised she'd warm up after her first child was born. Paul had been wonderful about it; he had said, "Don't worry about it, Kitten, Take it easy, honey, just relax." But she hadn't warmed up after Morrie was born, and she couldn't seem to relax. The minute Paul touched her she coiled up like a watch spring; her insides became granite, heavy and marbled with fear. She merely couldn't help it, and felt miserable about it... sometimes felt she was only half a woman. Poor Paul.
Huge colored cardboard images of the Easter Bunny lined the walls of the Five & Ten Store. Long strings of multicolored eggs danced on strings from the ceiling. Little purple and yellow baskets filled with fluffy green, sparkling imitation grass and candy eggs decorated the top of the cash registers; and at every counter they stopped Morrie had to point them out to Kitty eagerly.

"Is the Easter Bunny here, Mummie? When are we going to see him?" Questioned little Morrie, his eyes beaming as they darted constantly trying to take in everything at once.

"Mother'll take you to see him in a minute. He's at the other end of the store." Kitty stopped to look at some costume jewelry. It only reminded her of her missing engagement ring. Oh, where was her hot little comet of the morning? She moved on, before the lump in her throat choked her.

"Let's hurry, Mummie, the Easter Bunny might go before I see him."

"Shush, dear, he won't leave."

"Mummie, my feet hurt."

"Oh, Morrie, hush!"

"But they do, Mummie."

"Morrie, please, I said, hush!" Kitty really hadn't heard what he said. Her eyes were captives of two tall, slender white candles that shut out all her other senses. They were perfectly matched, the purest white, unblemished as new fallen snow, standing so rigidly straight as though reaching toward heaven. Kitty felt pierced to the heart. She had to have them! Before she realized what was happening the saleslady was wrapping them up for her. She took them in her hand and pressed the package to her bosom passionately. A distant wailing sound began penetrating the inner reaches of her mind, finally exploding into Morrie's voice.

Left to his own resources, Morrie had quickly discovered a red fire truck and was sitting behind the wheel wailing like a siren.

Kitty jerked him bodily out of the truck.
"How many times have I told you not to touch things in stores?"

"I forgot."

"Well, you better remember it," Kitty snapped.

"I only wanted to play in---"

"Never mind what you wanted to do, don't touch anything else."

Morrie started to cry. She jerked him along with her.

"Now hush up that crying!!"

His tears disappeared as quickly as they had started at the sight of a huge mechanical Easter Bunny nibbling on a carrot. Below it was a wired section of a counter filled with live white pink-eyed rabbits, their little noses twitching as they hopped around.

"Oh, look, Mummie---look at the Easter Bunny, and all his little bunnies!" Morrie screamed joyously.

"Don't get so excited," Kitty cautioned.

Morrie danced around the counter as if he were on hot coals. His little brown eyes bulged, and he cooed and wooed them through the wire mesh.

"Look at that one, Mummie,"---he giggled---"he winked at me. He likes me, Mummie, Can I take him home? Can I, Mummie, can I?"

"We haven't any place to keep him, you know that."

"I want him, I want him, Mummie, Can't I, Mummie? Please, Mummie, say I can have him!" Morrie whined, his little voice choking with tears. "Please, Mummie!"

Kitty knelt down beside him, put her arm around him affectionately, and explained: "Honey, we can't take him with us. He'd only die. You wouldn't want him to die, would you?"

The little rabbit had his nose close to the wire; Morris reached out a finger tentatively and withdrew it quickly as the rabbit nibbled at it.
The rabbit hopped over to a fruit jar lid full of water and started to drink.

"Why do they make their noses go like that, Mummie?" Morrie asked between sobs.

"I don't know."

"Mummie, I'm thirsty, too. I want a drink, too."

"Well you'll just have to wait until we get home. There's no place here to get a drink."

"But I can't, Mummie."

"Yes you can---"

"May I help you, Madame?" a clerk interrupted.

"No, thank you, I was merely showing my little boy the rabbits."

"Mummie."

"What is it now?"

"My feet hurt."

"Never mind, we'll be going home soon." Oh, Lord, if it wasn't one thing it was another. She would never have time to---

Kitty felt a soft tapping on her shoulder. She turned to meet the smiling face of an elderly woman, her grey hair peeking out from under a flowery bonnet.

"I hope you won't be offended by my telling you, young lady, but your little boy has his shoes on wrong."

Kitty's face burned as she glanced down at Morrie's feet. Sure enough, he had his shoes on the wrong feet!

"Thank you," she stammered.

"You're quite welcome."
"Can't you ever do anything right, Morrie Stamen!" she whispered fiercely, her breath coming in short and gasping gulps. Always. Every time---without failure---something had to come up to mortify her. Paul always said it was her imagination. If he were only here---she could prove her point. Her hands were moist as she grabbed Morrie by the hand and hurried him to the nearest restroom. She felt as though every eye in the store was on her progress. She just knew it! And it wasn't imagination, either! She could picture that old gossip going all over the store pointing her out as the woman whose little boy had his shoes on wrong. Pointing her out; saying, "That one! The one over there with last winter's dress and coat!"

Now her day was normal! She knew there wasn't any use in trying to get any sympathy by telling Paul...no use at all in telling him about it. He'd only laugh and say: "Oh, Kitten, you have the most fertile imagination of any one I know. She was probably just being kind. I'll bet she wouldn't know you again if she saw you. Don't be silly!" Yes, she'd heard that tale before. It was all right for him to feel that way. Nothing ever happened like that when he was with them. But he always laughed at her mishaps with Morrie. The time Morrie had dumped over a display of cans in the grocery, he thought it quite funny. "You're over-sensitive, Kitten, that's all. Don't take things so seriously. He's a little boy yet. Use your sense of humor for God's sake!"

"I didn't know, Mummie," Morrie cried.

"Oh, all right, but the next time you pull off a stunt like this I'll tan you good---right on the spot."

"Can I have a drink, now?" He had spotted a drinking fountain in the rest room.

Kitty started to correct him, but stopped with a sigh, and murmured: "All right."

She finished lacing his shoes, and he ran to the fountain. She looked at herself in the mirror; touched up her lipstick and smoothed out her powder.

"Oh, God!" she moaned. "Morrieee!"

Morrie had half his face in the stream of water and was twitching his nose like a rabbit as he drank big mouthfuls of water. He looked up at her.
with a big innocent smile on his face.

"See. I can drink like the bunny did."

Her lungs felt bulged with live steam ready to explode. She let her breath out slowly. Oh, where is that sense of humor? Paul Stamen, you should live so long to take Morrie to town by yourself! She fought down the explosive feeling; forced herself to smile at him.

"Yes, so I see. But we're not rabbits are we. We are people, and people don't drink like that," Kitty said, as she wiped his face with her handkerchief.

On their way out of the store they passed by gray hair with the flowery bonnet, and although Kitty's face warmed at the second meeting, gray hair gave no sign of recognition. Perhaps Paul was right. Perhaps my imagination is too active. She looked straight at me and didn't even smile. Kitty shrugged her shoulders and walked out feeling much better.

III

The earlier clean odor of snow had become a reality with a much brisker wind blowing. The snowflakes were melting as fast as they hit the pavement, but in the grass around the courthouse they were laying a mantle of white. Thin sheets of ice were beginning to form on small pools of water at the curb. Winter was having his last fling before reluctantly giving in to Spring. The cool air lifted Kitty's spirits and she buttoned her coat up tight around her neck.

"Mumme, I have to go to the toilet," Morrie announced as they were crossing the courthouse square.

"Why in the world didn't you think of it when we were in the store rest room?"

"I didn't have to go then."

"Well, you'll have to wait until we get home, now."

"But I can't, Mumme." He began to dance around, "I got to go real bad. Honest, I have."

Dear God! she murmured to herself, isn't there any end to it! Aloud she asked: "What do you have to do? Number one? Or two?"
"Number one."

"See that little sign over there." Kitty pointed to a sign reading MEN over the door at the side of the courthouse.

"That one where the man is coming out?" Morrie twisted around nervously.

"Yes." Her face flamed as she thought the man in question glanced at them. "You go over there and mother will wait for you here. Now hurry!"

Morrie ran to the door quickly. Kitty turned around with her hot face to the cooling wind. She watched two squirrels, their little sure quick movements bursting with energy, chasing and twisting through the branches of a tree. Her little comet re-inhabited her heart, sent a shower of heavenly sparks tingling through her body. She seemed almost suffocated with its sudden surge again claiming residence within her. Her hands felt so warm she was afraid she'd melt her lovely candles. Am I being hysterical? Surely there must be a reason for this ecstasy...this heavenly bliss. She must tell Paul of these sudden hot flashes. He always came up with a scientific reason for everything. That's what she'd do. Tonight when they were snuggled so secure in their warm bed she'd ask him...he'd know...tonight... Her heart began to thump violently, pumping a million little comets through her body, until every bone and nerve ached ardently. Her bed had never felt secure and warm before. Oh, I feel absolutely wicked--positively wanton! Her mind raced through last night's events. She couldn't think what had made her relax last night. Suddenly she felt no longer a half woman, but a whole, loving, desirous woman. For the first time in her life Kitty had known satisfaction and warmth with her husband.

Her little comet no longer puzzled her, and she felt like running in the snowy grass, or perhaps climbing the tree and chasing with the squirrels. Almost as if predestined, a hole in the cloud let the sunshine fall upon her, and Spring stirred deeply in her breast; her eyes visualized the trees arrayed in their green splendor, their branches filled with the sweet twittering of Spring's visitors from the south. Her heart fluttered deliciously within her breast, its wings beating with mothlike tenderness against her rib cage. Her eyes were moist with happiness.

Through blurred vision she saw Morrie running towards her. As her eyes cleared, she could see the front of his new pants were wet and beginning to freeze in the cold air.
Kitty was in no mood to scold him. His little tense, chubby figure running toward her only added fuel to the consuming bliss raging within her.

"Don't whip me, Mummie. Please, don't. I didn't mean to," he bawled. "They were all full, an' I couldn't wait. I couldn't, honest, Mum-mie. I tried."

"It's all right, son, I understand."

And for once Kitty really felt she did understand. She took his hand, threw her head back to feel the full force of the clean sweeping gusts of wind and snow. And if anyone commented or noticed Morrie's pants on the way home, Kitty never knew it, nor did she imagine any such thing.

###

WISDOM/ Pete Cooper

Spring simply is.
  suddenly in myself,
  whispering slowly outward,
  tick'ling lamb-like greening sighs

Memory said it would come.
  reason, sense, faith, and all
  the great vain tools toward wisdom
  promised it would come,
  but Winter was:
  one snowy moment loomed now
  like the glacier, and all time
  was a fit of shivering.

Now is the whisper forever.
  no promise, but eternal
  buds and mud;
  for wisdom is the weather's:
  as for me,
      Spring simply is.