

The Rocking House

by Jule Kucera

*For Melissa, who left her rocking house,
And For Elaine, who helped me leave mine.*

Once upon a time there was a little girl who lived in a Rocking House. From the outside it looked normal. But inside, it rocked. The walls moved and the floor shifted and if the little girl was not careful, she would fall over. She tried to quiet the Rocking House by being quiet herself. She said to herself, "If I am quiet, maybe the house will stop." So she was very quiet and she asked for nothing but the house kept rocking. (So badly that some days it was quite impossible to walk upstairs.)

Since being quiet did not stop the rocking she said to herself, "I will be quiet and I will be still and then maybe the house will stop." So she was quiet and she asked for nothing and she was still, so still that sometimes she thought she was frozen. But the house did not stop rocking.

Next she thought, "I will be quiet and I will be still and I will stand in the middle of the floor (for balance) and then maybe the house will stop." So she was quiet and she asked for nothing and she was still and she did not move and she stood in the middle of the floor (even though sometimes things crashed into her) but still the house did not stop.

And that is how it went. Some days when the rocking was bad and she fell on the floor and bloodied her knees she would go outside (for

Refuge). She would walk among the trees and feel the sun on her back and know that the World Was Not Crazy. (But she still had to go home for dinner.)

One day when she was in the Rocking House (standing in a corner, trying to stay out of the way of the dresser) a Special Messenger came to the door. She could see him through the window, in a bright blue uniform with gold lapels. The messenger rang the bell but the little girl couldn't answer the door because of the dresser. So she stood in the corner as the door bell rang and rang. And then the doorbell stopped.

She was so intent on the door that she almost didn't see the dresser, coming right at her! She ran and jumped on top of the table. This confused the dresser, and it started to spin in circles. The little girl took a chance and ran to the door—perhaps she could still catch the Special Messenger!

As she closed the door quickly behind her, a loud CRASH told her that the dresser had tried to follow. She looked up the street, and down, but there was no sign of the Special Messenger. Disappointed, she sat on the stoop, hung her head, and began to cry. Her first tear fell with a loud PLOP but she didn't notice. When she heard the second PLOP, she opened her eyes to see a shiny, gold, tear-stained envelope addressed to HER. She quickly tucked it inside her shirt, not wanting anyone to see, and headed to the Outdoors where it would be safe.

Taking a seat under a giant tree, she carefully opened the envelope and unfolded the letter (it was gold, too). It said:

“IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO LEAVE THE ROCKING HOUSE.”

The little girl said to herself, “How can I leave?” For after all this time, she and the Rocking House had become quite familiar with each other. She knew when the rocking would be strongest and how to bend her knees so she usually wouldn’t fall over. She even knew how to stand in the corner to stay out of the way of the dresser (most of the time).

She thought and thought and thought. It was almost dark when she finally decided and she said to herself (aloud, to be certain), “No, I won’t go.” And she headed home for dinner. She walked quickly, and then started running. (If she got home late it could be quite dangerous.)

Out of breath, she ran up the steps. When she opened the door she could see it was already too late. The table was against the wall, the chairs were sliding across the floor, and she had to dodge the dresser just to get inside.

The little girl tried to run up the stairs, but they collapsed, and turned into a slide. She grabbed on to the banister and held on as the table slid and the chairs screeched and the dresser crashed and the house rocked. It rocked as the sun went down and the sky went dark and the moon came out.

Now, some say that the little girl somehow managed to fall asleep in the middle of all this and some say she hit her head on the banister. What we do know is that she had a dream.

She dreamt she was outside, the sun was on her back, the trees were overhead, and the World Was Not Crazy. She saw a rabbit and a turtle and a bird. Now, the rabbit and the turtle were ordinary animals. The bird, however, was extraordinary. The bird stretched its wings wide and sang to her in a song with words:

Lay down, lay down
All those Oughts and Shoulds and Have Tos.
Lay down, lay down
The mask you wear for a face.
And go,
Out there,
Where there are no lines or boundaries,
Where you thought there were no maps,
But you were wrong.
There is a brilliant, blazing map,
And it's laid out on your heart,
And it shows you the way every time.
It's never wrong
Or missing,
It's good in all locations,
All you have to do
Is listen and make choices.
So feel what you feel,
Do not be afraid,
Your heart will not betray you,
Even though it's been betrayed.
And it wants to take you out there,
And it wants to lead you upward,

And it wants to take you to the sun.

So go,

Go to the clouds, the sky.

Go,

To the light in your lover's eyes,

Go,

Go to the moon, the stars,

Go,

Be well,

Go.”

In the morning, when the sun came up and the house was too tired to rock any more (for the moment) the little girl let go of the banister and ran upstairs. She grabbed her sweater (for when it was cold) and her slicker (for when it rained). She couldn't think of anything else to take when she noticed Buddy, her stuffed rabbit, one ear sticking out from under her bed. She had him since forever, ever since she had asked for a dog and got Buddy instead.

She put on her sweater and her slicker (which made her arms stick out at little), grabbed Buddy and headed down the stairs. Before she closed the door behind her, the little girl touched the envelope inside her shirt (just to make sure it was still there). And as she walked down the street, she could be heard humming a song she learned in a dream.