**Catharsis**

Diane Raven

There are things I do, routinely, for peace of mind—oil my cast-iron frying pans, sharpen my knives, wash my windows, and align the books on my library shelves. For me, these seemingly mundane tasks create feelings of safety and order in an increasingly violent and unpredictable world. Friends argue that the world has always been dynamic and continually in a state of social, environmental, and political flux. But, I tell them, that lately, I feel personally threatened . . . fearful. I feel as helpless now as I did when I was a child. I’d awake each morning to darkness, in a state of alarm, and claw at the crusty matter that glued my eyes shut. When my cats’ eyes wept with yellow matter, my father muttered, “distemper” and drowned them. I felt akin to those cats. I imagined the scratchy burlap against my skin, the dead weight of my body, and my energy being whisked away in the fast current of the murky, green waters of the Fox River. Now, as an adult, the days’ political distemper causes me to wince with rage and spew invectively into the darkness while gunny sacking the current of injustices that foment that same fear I felt as a child. My reaction to that fear could save my life in the moment, but later leave me numb and disconnected while the outside world moved on without me.

 Like most liberal baby boomers, outside of voting in the midterms and general elections, I make posters and demonstrate, in front of the post office, against the latest sociopolitical injustice and regularly send emails to my local, state and federal representatives encouraging them to cast their votes in the interest of the environment, social welfare, and civil rights. Like I said, helpless. And discussing politics has become off limits anywhere with anyone. There’s no inner peace and little hope for change any time soon. Whatever beliefs I once held about personal liberty, a free press, democracy, and a recognizable world order have been challenged. I feel as though I’m in that burlap bag, again, about to be drowned.

 I remind myself that these feelings of helplessness need to be understood and responded to in a mature and conscious way; I’m no longer a frightened child reacting to my unconscious mind running roughshod over me. Nevertheless, I’m reminded daily that fear is promiscuous, knows no age, and takes advantage of a precious moment imbued with unknown consequences; it, insidiously, dwells in muscle and bone. I need to shore up my emotional stability, renew my spirit, and reaffirm my confidence in the world order that I was born into.

I set out for my cabin—a place of discovery and renewal. It sits solidly on a deposit of glacial till at the edge of a well-established woodland beaver pond. Thirty years ago, in early May, I named it Pond Grus, the genus for Sandhill Crane, after hearing a pairs’ loud mating call rattle through the reads, bounce off cattails, and echo over the untroubled water. Back then, when I was questioning my resolve about a serious personal issue, those vibrations penetrated the soul of the pond and assuaged my fears. It’s been a while since I circumnavigated the pond during a spring bird migration or even embraced the pond’s powerful pull. So, in the morning, as the sun warms the forest canopy and animates insects from their torpor, I’ll bird the pond’s edge.

 As the sun touches the canopy’s horizon, there are warblers moving through and casting shadows on the bright new leaves of the sugar maples. I pause in a two-hundred-year-old Hemlock grove, at the South end, to scan the breadth of the pond. I’m startled to see an adult sandhill crane sitting on a nest just ten feet from me. I’m quiet, but I sense, by its darting eyes, that it’s keenly aware of my presence. Alarmed and threatened it’s off its cattail island nest and running away, but not flying off. Now, nearly twenty feet from the nest, on the edge of the beaver canal, the bird opens it wings in a massive arc while kicking its prodigious feet out and upward in a grand defensive display. It hisses while pointing its red-crowned head and spear-shaped bill downward and shivers and shakes its feathers at the water’s edge where the bird with its dramatic reflection stands before me in its totality; my muscles relax, I smile, and back away, slowly, into the shadow of the grove, and watch the crane return to its nest . . . unfettered.