**Re-Vision Techniques**

Maggie Showalter

*Men will hurt you.*

The warning whispers at the fringes of my consciousness; I can’t shut it up. In my defense, it’s not untrue. Watch the news; look at the statistics.

My first stop when I left him was a home for battered women and children. Naively, I was shocked by the sheer number who’d beaten me out to claim one of the insufficient number of rooms the house had available. And it was a big house. There were children crying, women with bruised faces. A pretty teenage girl sat curled into a ball with her back against the wall. To her chest, she clutched a teddy bear that she was way too old for, and she rocked back and forth, back and forth, ceaselessly.

As my fear was temporarily displaced by fury, I thought, *Men did this*. *They did all of this.* And then the fury slipped over a cliff into a pit of hopelessness from which it took a long, long time to extricate myself.

After I was turned away from the women’s home, it took three more tries, but I eventually got out. I left in the middle of one of his rages, in the middle of the night, in the middle of my life. I took my dog and one laundry basket of my belongings. I moved into a stark one-room apartment, and each night before bed I dead-bolted the door and strung pots to it so that I would be alerted to any slight jostling. It seems insane now when I look back on it. It didn’t then.

And as the years of living with him have begun to unspool behind me, have begun to clarify in the way that events do once they begin to detach from pure emotion, I’ve started to tell myself other stories—to replace the “men will hurt you” refrain with words and images that have the power to eclipse it, or at least to challenge it.

I now carry with me a photograph of my father that was taken when I was a little girl. In it, he is holding a ragged-looking cat that I clearly remember as feral. I’m not even sure where he found the cat (or where she found him), but he tended to her around the clock, fed her tuna and cream until she grew fat and shiny. She remained skeptical of the rest of us, but from the day he brought her home, she spent the whole of her life within the borders of his shadow.

A few weeks ago, I was sitting in a coffee shop when I noticed a young woman struggling to navigate between tables while using the walker that she needed to support herself. As I began to stand to help her, two men about her age from a table across the room rose and moved toward her, quietly and efficiently moving tables and chairs out of her way to clear a path. They didn’t make a big deal out of it.

These are small things, but they are real things. They are snapshots of men who are gentle, and honest, and kind. There are lots of such men.

The new stories I tell myself are about seeking and finding the good, about not giving into fear and anger and hopelessness. In this story I am the heroine; I am the one who, when everyone else is screaming and ranting and tossing their hands in despair, whispers, *This isn’t over yet. There are places you haven’t looked; there are things you haven’t seen.* I remind myself that defaulting to stock characters is cheap, and that not all stories become German fairy tales.

And then I keep going. I’m not reckless. I have flashlights and water bottles, blankets and signal flares. I pick my way carefully over rocks, through thickets, over rivers, into caves. All the while I am looking, noticing details, finding gratitude, and grace, and redemption.