

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

July 31, 2015

Column #42



FAREWELL TO POOH AND THE FOUR-LEGGED BUTTERFLY

Final File Notes

By Wanda Sue Parrott

File Note

Tues., July 21, 2015

This morning I received an e-mail from the Seaside Police Department advising they had not picked up the black bags containing Pooh and an assortment of clothes and other items I'd reported finding in my yard. Nor had the Department of Public Works taken them. They vanished Sunday night.

Late this afternoon I was leaving for the Central Coast Writers meeting when someone knocked on my door. The peephole revealed a wispy white woman with bare shoulders who ignored my No Trespassing sign. I opened the door and asked, "Did you leave stuff in my yard on Saturday?"

"Yes. I left a note with it."

"I found only a feather. . ."

"The note must have blown away."

"Well, you can't leave things here. I moved your stuff to the alley--and it disappeared."

"I came and got it."

"Hallelujah!" I exclaimed. "Your life-sized Pooh bear got wet. Did you dry him out?"

"He's still in the bag. . ."

"Where is he now?"

She waved a broken lavender acrylic nail toward the corner. "In your driveway."

"You brought Pooh back to my house?"

"Yes."

I gave her my reporter's 30-second flash scan. She was fifty-something with short brown hair. Her little dog was on his leash by her ankle. She carried no purse, so how could she have written a note if she had neither paper nor pencil?

She wore a black mini-skirt and black strapless tube top covered by a filmy leopard-spotted scarf, slip-on sandals and a several rings on her wedding

finger. She looked theatrical. Her jewelry looked real.

"I don't know your name."

"It's Jill."

"How did you move all those sacks?"

"On my bike."

"Show me!"

I followed, noting her tattooed right arm and neck. "What's that body art?"

"Names of my grandkids and daughter."

"How'd you get those cuts on your leg?"

"I fell off my bike."

"You juggled all those bags and your dog on a bike?"

"I lost my balance." She spoke through gaping black spaces between teeth.

The same trash sacks I'd left on Saturday at the north end of my yard were now piled beside the south-end trash containers, along with an additional canvas tote bag. I spotted Pooh's bare pate in its third day of pre-mold garbage-sack incubation. It was like helplessly witnessing a beloved dead pet disintegrate.

"Do you sleep on him?"

"We've cuddled."

"Where did you get Pooh?"

"The same way I get everything. By diving in dumpsters."

"Disney and Sears make life-size bears like Pooh. Do you know his retail value?"

"Oh, um, about twenty bucks?"

"With tax and shipping, \$399.95."

"Oh," she shrugged. "Do you have an old jacket I can have?"

I knew she had two jackets in the black sacks.

"No," I lied. "Where is your bicycle?"

She pointed to the 6-foot-high fence. "In your neighbor's driveway. I told him to watch it while I carry my stuff on foot."

"He doesn't speak English," I said. "How far do you have to haul this stuff?"

"Only about a half mile, but it's tricky getting there."

"Where?"

"The Holiday Inn Express on Del Monte. . ."

"You're staying in the Holiday Inn?"

Jill grinned. "I wish. . ."

"Well, you have to get your stuff off this property. I'll bring the car around and drive you there."



While I started the car, Jill shoved Charlie the dog into her tote bag, so his head and forepaws stuck out like a small stuffed animal.

"Is he a chihuahua mix?" I asked as Jill heaved her sacks into the trunk with powerful athletic grace.

"He's a Papillon,"

"That means butterfly in French."

Jill piled a few more sacks into the backseat and got into the car. I had a flash vision of her astride a bike, bags puffing out, so she looked like the Pillsbury Dough Boy on wheels.

We turned left at Canyon Del Rey Road and Del Monte Blvd. "How long have you been homeless, Jill?"

"Oh, uh, about eight months, I guess."

"What happened?"

"I found my husband in bed with another woman. For thirty-four years I was a faithful wife. . . he was abusive."

"Were you in Monterey?"

"Greenfield. I've spent my whole life in Monterey County. Turn left here and left again."

We passed behind the Holiday Inn Express, dead ending at a brushy grotto near the lake in Laguna Grande Park. I popped the trunk and watched Jill heft her worldly possessions into the brush. "No one will bother it here."

We returned to my house with the tote containing Jill's real treasure, her four-legged butterfly named Charlie. "My daughter was going to pick me up."

"Why didn't she?"

"She has troubles of her own."

"Did you call her?"

"I lost my cell phone. I'll buy one when I get my SSI check."

"Do you rent a post office box for mail?"

"Yes."

"How do you and Charlie eat?"

"Last night Panda Express gave us food it was going to throw out at closing time."

Jill retrieved her bike, slung Charlie's tote over her shoulder, and spontaneously reached out and hugged me. "What, uh, day is this? It's Sunday, isn't it?"

"It's Tuesday."

File Note

Wed., July 22, 2015

A night custodian at the Salvation Army saw Jill return at dusk and reported it to me at 9 p.m., "They were hauling those same sacks. When she saw you weren't home, they left."

"They?"

"Yeah. She was with a well-known meth head. What'll you do if she dumps her stuff at your house again?"

"I don't really know, since the Seaside police didn't pick it up like they said they would last time."

File Note

Fri., July 24, 2015

When I got home at 5 p.m., I found a paisley top with broken shoulder strap under the mailbox. A thatch of black mold on Pooh's golden head flashed through my reporter's mind as calmness, like the fabled love that passeth all understanding, inspired me what to do next.

I will leave it on the steps of City Hall.

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