

## ENDINGS AND BEGININGS

by Carolyn North

My favorite exercise these days, during this time of quarantine, is going on walkabout in the neighborhood, all gloved and masked like a bandit with a basket of books on my arm destined for the Little Free Library kiosks on every other block.

Much of my time at home is spent going through our many bookshelves, culling from a lifetime those books I will probably never read again, since I will soon be moving from our family home to a renovated old garage at the Wild and Radish Farm half an hour north of here. I will be the Eco-Village's first live-in elder, a working member of this urban/rural visionary farm community. I consider myself more than lucky.

And so will end one era in my life before the beginning of the next. The transition, I confess, is not easy as I am dismantling everything I am familiar with and moving on to a life with multiple unknowns – new landscape, new people, new tasks, new visions. Fortunately, I chose this shift of place and perspective and am willing to do the work to make it happen but unlike myself, most folks are *not* choosing to face a major change in their lives right now, and are understandably terrified.

But the Coronavirus has not asked any of us for our approval. A way of life is ending whether we like it or not, and the question may be not “if things change” but “*when* they change and what are we going to do about it?”

Meanwhile, holed up in our houses – those of us who are not homeless - we have the time day after day to dream up a new world and figure out how to be part of the big shift. For me, it is an opportunity I have been waiting for much of my life, and I am thankful to have lived long enough to see it coming.

Even though nobody ever said it would be easy.

My little garage apartment ought to be ready in a few weeks' time, and we're down to choosing paint colors for the walls and bamboo flooring for the 600 square-foot floor. We have to work in secret because of the moratorium on construction right now, but watching my new community hunker down to the work behind blinds while I try not to get in their way moves me to tears.

They are my people.

Here at home in the old brown-shingle where Herb and I spent all our adult years and raised our three children – plus generations of cats – I take apart rooms ringing with memories. Bit by bit I let go of the past, re-telling myself the stories that went with that sweater, those pictures, that forgotten letter tucked into a book not taken off the shelf in decades. I get lost reading my old journals, soon to be consigned to the fire, where I blush over old shames and triumphs and remember how hard it was to grow into a real woman. How many mistakes I would give a lot to correct!

Too late, but to all of you who I may have hurt, and who have hurt me, please let us share forgiveness with a deep bow of mutual respect.

I gaze out my bedroom window at the familiar garden, where the roses and nasturtiums are now blooming by the big old cedar tree. Very soon I will gaze out at the farm, where young fruit trees are already producing decent harvests and the goats are offering creamy milk and adorable babies - despite every attempt to fence in the Billy! Soon we will be planning the big garden in the Eco-Village, dreaming of fruiting vines over shade arbors and spiraling forms for flowing fountains and a dozen raised beds for all the greens and tomatoes, onions and potatoes we can eat. The greater bounty will come from our 13-acre hillside farm and will hopefully feed the larger community surrounding us.

But not yet. We are not quite ready – none of us is, neither in our home place nor in the world at large. This painful ‘gift’ of time, I believe, may be our opportunity to deal with those deep-seated fears we all walk around with, the real life-traumas of our individual pasts and the even more ancient ones we share from long-gone times of cataclysm on the earth.

Could this be a time of transition for all of us and the earth itself, like the transition a caterpillar makes inside a cocoon as it dissolves its form into a murky goo before emerging one day in an entirely different form? From a lowly worm to a magnificent work of art in butterfly form! It is hard to be patient, I know, but I think we have no choice. We are in the murky goo right now, like it or not.

Like the butterflies, we have to do the hard work of struggling out of our constricting skins, whatever it takes, because the struggle is what gives us the strength to fly once we emerge into the air!

Complaining will not help, nor will blaming someone else, nor will childish spit-in-your-eye politics. Our best option may be to stay calm, go deep and tend to our own souls while we prepare for what comes next. I expect that when it is time to make our next moves, we will know it.

But I do not think it is quite time.

We are still sitting on a steep wall like Humpty Dumpty, unbalanced and threatening to topple over, which would make a great mess of things. We have to stay focused and as balanced as possible because all the King’s horses and all the King’s men will not be able to put us together again if we are in pieces on the ground, bleeding and blaming, all of us too terrified to think.

That’s an old story. Terrified people are controllable people; now it is time to start telling the new story.

So how do we help one another down from that precipitous wall safely? How might we learn that we can creatively transform rather than messily break apart? It has taken a pandemic to get us to finally stop in our tracks, go inside literally and figuratively, and take stock of who and where on earth we are.

In this next phase of our world, heart, mind and soul will work in concert, and relationships will be guided by gratitude more than competition. The natural world will be honored and loved well, and the children and elders of all species will be protected and adored. We will fascinate one another rather than pick fights, we will celebrate the world and laugh and cry easily in one another's arms.

Our economies will honor the natural world and be based in equitable sharing; our education will teach the young how to love every minute of learning about themselves and the world; our healers will focus in healing body, mind and spirit and our eyes and hearts will love being amongst others of every variation of human being.

We will have a much more stimulating time than arguing about who is right and who is wrong.

I think I'll go make some frothy hot cocoa, offer a cup to a someone walking by my house in a mask, and relax in my favorite chair under the tree with a good book.

Today I went through the shelf of fantasy novels for young people and I'm deep into one I read years ago with my kids. I'll be letting go of two bags full of these novels tomorrow. I've got dozens of good ones ready to give away and you are welcome to browse and take one or two home with you.

One by one, my books are changing hands, and once they have all moved out there into the world, I will be ready to follow them.

Come visit the Wild and Radish Farm in El Sobrante - I'd love to see you there!

(El Sobrante means "the leftovers." Very appropriate, indeed.)