***HOUSEKEEPING TO DO…***

***Tosca Lenci***

 Back from his latest especially harrying business trip, he set down his carry-on with a relieved sigh. *Home!--*but he braced himself before crossing the hallway to the bedroom. As *always, ‘Home’* would have had little attention in his absence--s*o much to do…. Never enough time....*

He turned first to the closet to hang his jacket, trying not to see the clothing strewn casually on bed and floor…*and there was that curtain, still awry on its loose rod!*

 Such things, he knew, were unimportant in the cosmological sense. Yet, for him, each was of infinite personal significance. Leaving them undone only meant tomorrow would be worse, the next day more so; and he would be the one straightening up. But it ever had been that way: his mate’s moods, desires, and happiness always his first concern….

He entered the living room. His mate, feet up with the television on, barely glanced ‘round. “Oh.., you’re back. How’d it go?”

 “Pretty well-- I think we nailed the account.”

The other abruptly stood up, switched off the television and without a direct look said, “I’m going out for a while.”

The home-comer felt a little clutch at his heart. *Going out?* He moved toward his spouse. With the lighthearted tone of voice to which the other was accustomed, he offered small talk--little details about the trip. But would he later try to recall his words he would not be able, sure only that he had spoken matter-of-factly and lovingly. If the next normally-expected thing had happened, it would have been an embrace. However, when he lifted his arms his partner’s instead hung heavily at the sides, head only allowed to rest briefly against his shoulder.

Certain facts are impossible for Psyche fully to accept precisely in the moment of their occurrence. Feeling the detached touch on shoulder, Mind refused entry of what Self knew: *it was about again to take a hit….*

 Still not meeting his eyes, his spouse picked up a book from the end table and said, , “I need to return this.” The home-comer then heard some words--a little story, about a “chanced encounter with an interesting couple”--and a male name! *No ignoring intuition:*  the person named had caught his spouse’s fancy. And he knew, too, that the man was as unlike anything that he, himself, could be.

They—his spouse and the new “acquaintance”-- his spouse continued, enjoyed some “mutual interests:” subjects of the book that the spouse then proceeded to leaf through. Home-comer glanced at, but quickly away from some graphic illustrations, as a familiar feeling sunk deeper in him. But he never had allowed himself to be the “clinging” type. Thus he treated the present circumstances as he was wont: repressing senses, feigning interest. …

Then his spouse was out the door, and he was alone once again in the midst of distracting litter. He turned to the kitchen. Although hungry, naturally he first began to clear sink and working surfaces.

The back door was open to its screen, and from beyond there came a small commotion. Looking out, he saw that his spouse (ever at loose ends for something amusing) had trapped a small bird in a large pan with a transparent lid. The pan, on the top stair with the bird flittering helplessly within, was on the verge of toppling down.

*Poor bird!* It deserved to be made to feel that it, too, was cared for!

Just before the pan slid off the stair edge he caught it and pulled off the lid; and he was comforted, as the bird flew easily to the nearby tree. He wished he could stroke the silkiness of its feathers. “You would have had a quite a tumble there!” He called up to it forcedly cheerful, as a sad parent hides distress from a child.

The telephone rang: a friend needing to vent his own relationship problems! …

He listened patiently to the pained details, conscious of holding apart his own mental vise that was threatening graceful response to the friend’s spoken need. Then, just as he replaced the telephone receiver, his spouse reappeared and wordlessly tossed himself back into the same easy chair previously left.

Harshness was not the home-comer’s way. No! He hated it with passion. Now, however, *forethought—*the formerly never-absent restrainer of Ego--became a sudden deserter. *How long had he tried, prayed for that love which one believed could be?* And how *surprising*, the forceful tone of voice of Self freed from Psyche’s pitiably silent control!

He raised his arm and pointed to the ceiling. “If there is such thing as *God,* then I witness before Him!” And there followed all the hurts small and large that Self had received over the course of their marriage: the things missed, because the other had refused common pursuit of *his* interests; spoiled times, because the other with good faith and caring willingness never had contributed even the smallest of personal ‘sacrifices’…”while **I** *always* joined with *you*!”

Toward the end his voice, inevitably, faltered. Not just that the other stopped listening; there came instead the sound of one last closing of the door. The process had reached end-point; transcendence allowed to dawn only when, like a planet around the sun, a certain cycle had been completed. But day, too, was ending; and he was wasting time…

*Alone…. But lots of housekeeping to do….*