



Knight Terra Press
littera manet sed lector oraculum

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“One Good Turn”

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Three Meals from Anarchy; One from Collapse

“I think we should have dinner out today,” Conrad suggested. He pushed his keyboard under the desk, piled up the papers in front of him to the left of the screen, and rubbed the pain of eight hours of staring at the monitor from his eyes.

Terri walked into Conrad’s home office. She put her hand on his right shoulder and slowly started making circles on the tensest part of his neck. “I’m *not* eager to go out tonight.”

Conrad closed his eyes and let the neck massage flow through his back, up into his brain, and down his arms. “How old is the chicken in the fridge?” he asked.

“Couple days?”

He stood up, hugged Terri, and said, “Then I’ll grill it. We can order in some beer, and we’re set. Sound like a plan?”

Within a few seconds, Terri replied, “Sounds like a plan.”

Conrad leaned down to the keyboard to lock his screen, and then headed down the hallway, to the right, and toward the balcony door. Once on the balcony, he pulled the cover off the grill and checked the gas level. There was enough gas to cook more than a few meals. A quick scrub of the steel brush on the grill later, he went into the kitchen, gathered a few plates, and opened the refrigerator door. After washing his hands thoroughly, he took out the chicken and started separating it. “How was your day?” he asked Terri around the corner.

Terri summarized her day for him in a varying tone. She sounded happy in general, but somewhat annoyed at a few particular events that came up during her day. Conrad knew not to dig too deeply when she had that tone of voice; she wanted to get it off her mind, to be heard, but had no intention of asking for any way to figure out how to make the situation better.

She always found a way to do that on her own. So, Conrad just listened and periodically added emphasis to what she was telling him about her day. Within a few minutes, the chicken was marinating. "It will be about an hour before I should grill it," he said.

The beer arrived at their door, and Conrad and Terri sat out on the balcony. It was August and the air was at a perfect temperature and the daylight they were afforded on the balcony was well bright enough to enjoy one another's company by. Conrad took stock in just how lucky he was to be with Terri: everything about her was pleasant and he did not take her presence in her life for granted. He wanted her to know the exact extent of how she made him feel to be with a true partner and companion, but the words always ended up falling short of this ambition when he'd tried to express this to her in the past.

"Have I told you lately," he began to say, "just how happy I am that we found one another?"

Terri brushed her bangs from her eyes, turned to face him, lifted her bottle can as if to toast him, and replied, "And have I done the same with you?" she asked. Once they'd touched bottles in the toast and taken a sip from their drinks, she added, "After all, one good turn deserves another."

Conrad leaned in for a kiss, and Terri responded in kind, and their lips touched. He felt it flow from his face to his feet within a few seconds. "Indeed," he replied.

When an hour had passed, Conrad grilled the chicken while Terri put together a salad, and they ate at the small table on the balcony. Out on the raw streets below, people talked, people argued, people shuffled about silently and alone. Conrad noticed them all as he leaned on the railing and tipped the ash of his joint into the wind. He handed it to Terri and she took it. Their cat, Chelsea, rubbed against that spot just above his right ankle and he leaned over to pet her.

"We're going to get through this, you know," Terri finally said before finishing what was left of her second beer. She reached over to hold his left hand with her right.

Conrad let out a long, sorrowful sigh.

"We *are*, you know," she added, as if she interpreted his sigh to mean that he didn't quite believe her.

"A lot has come about the last few years," he replied. "So much..."

Terri, still holding his hand, turned to face him, and with her left index finger, covered her mouth and whispered, "Shush."

He inhaled and stopped talking. After perhaps half a minute of staring into eyes, feeling the cat at his feet do circle-8's the way cats do, he replied, "We're going to get through this and..."

A few minutes had passed before Terri replied, "And? Finish your thought."

Conrad placed his left arm around Terri's waist and put his hand on her left hip as they stared out over the city. "... and we're going to come out of it stronger and more able to tackle life than when we went in," he eventually finished. "Though this is just a best guess."

"We have to," Terri affirmed. "We have to make it through this."

"We're fortunate," Conrad added. "I feel for those who don't have what we have as we weather this."

Terri shuffled to be closer to Conrad. Chelsea's purring was now audible even over the sound of the mild traffic below. "Maybe we should do something to share our privilege?" she finally suggested.

"Maybe we should," Conrad replied. "What do you think we might do?"

Terri inhaled very deeply and made slight sounds the way she did when she was processing something deeply. "Maybe we might donate to the foodbank for all those who've lost their jobs?" she finally put forth.

Conrad recalled the chicken and salad and beer that they'd just enjoyed together from their comfortable balcony. He straightened his back and then leaned down to Chelsea to pet her. It made a lot of sense to him.

"One good turn," Conrad finally replied, stroking Chelsea under her aging chin.

Terri leaned down so that she could also pet the cat. "Yes," she said. "One good turn."