

Tracy Ann Johnson

## Neighbors on the Corner

### *Part I*

Every per annum the neighbors on the corner sat behind  
their beautifully carved door angrily  
lamenting a bare corner of grass that otherwise was  
picture perfect. Jewels of ladybugs and butterflies hung  
from anointed petals. Their hearts sat at an angle in their  
chests, trying to decide whether they wanted to remain  
neighbors on the corner whose grass was eaten away by  
footpaths of people too lazy to make a squared turn.

So, it was a pity that one day a moving truck would sit outside  
to remove our neighbors  
on the corner from their otherwise heavenly abode.  
We would miss their slightly bared corner of grass and  
the loveliness of their garden with its summer smell of  
honeysuckle that crept from their yard and lingered in our  
skins.

Now, the neighbors on the corner who took their place are  
crude and drink all night,  
tossing beer cans out the window with abandon and  
delight. By some mystery the flowers still remain intact  
while proprietors sit behind a battered door, screaming  
obscene things between guffaws and shrieking laughter.  
Not just one corner of the yard is bare. *All the grass is naked,*  
We must cover ourselves in grief. Profanity is a killer.

*Part II*

Joe and his mother (before she got saved) cussed each other up and down Kramer Street, ending that contest in a corner of their neglected yard surrounding their cornered house. If Joe fell drunk and naked into her flower bushes (survivors of beer puddles and drops of Jack Daniel), she cussed him and his dog. And Joe (before he got crippled) cussed his dog *and* his mother at the same time. It was a miraculous synchronization.

Now when the dog barked back, Joe knew that dog was being impudent, especially if it stood on the corner, tail stiff (before it got sick and died). Joe, being an expert on rebellion, knew dog-cuss words when he heard them. He threw his whole jug of Thunderbird like an Olympian champ, but it missed that mixed breed because it was part whippet and one-third greyhound. Joe cried when it died. From that day on, Joe developed a limp that no doctor could diagnose and he wound up in a wheelchair from somebody that lived around the corner.

So, I was glad when I came by one day to see my mother (who lived second house from the corner which was next door to Joe's) and saw that it was quiet. His yard was neatly arrayed with un-neglected flowers surrounded by healthy grass while he slept peacefully in his hand-me-down wheelchair. My mother disclosed in soft low tones how his mother, Ms. Mamie, was gone to church around the corner. In sacred octave, she let me know that Ms. Mamie went to prayer meeting *every* Wednesday and that she had transplanted a honeysuckle bush from her yard to my mother's yard. *As the time passed, Mama told me how Joe had gone to church last Sunday and gotten saved. She whispered reverently.*

*She did not want to wake Joe.*

Tracy Ann Johnson, born and raised in Washington, DC, is a wife, mother, grandmother, and semi-retired educator. She has published poetry in church and college literary magazines as well as online. Her most recent book is a devotional written in haiku: *Land Sea Earth Sky*.