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The Old Professor Discovers the Sweet Egg of Discontent

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Odd Exchange: From Ascension Day to Pentecost

Bob De Smith

Our Flesh Ascends,
Breathes Air
From who knows where,

While Spirit,
Unearthly Breath,
Falls and Speaks
Without Diminishing,
Here or There.

The Old Professor Discovers the Sweet Egg of Discontent

Dave Schelhaas

A small boat moves across his line of sight,
one fisherman in the stern, one in the bow,
each holding a fishing rod.
They are working the weed line—as he has done
a hundred times—trolling so slowly
they seem hardly to be moving at all,
so quiet, powered by an electric motor,
they seem almost unreal, ethereal as a cloud.

“What contentment they must feel on this
perfect summer day,” the old professor
said to himself, but then he recalled
what it felt like to be fishing—the restless
anticipation, the subtle discontent that
sat in the heart until, wham, a walleye
hit your bait, then the blood-rush of excitement
as you reeled it in and finally, perhaps, contentment,
but more likely only an almost frenzied

hurry to get the fish in the well and your
line baited and into the water again. He
realized suddenly that contentment and fishing
had nothing to do with each other. “If it is
contentment they are after,” he mused,
“I should tell them to reel in their lines and enjoy
this perfect summer day,” but he had
hardly thought this when he realized
that not fishing in a barely moving boat on
a perfect summer day would only magnify their discontent.

The old professor smiled, remembering
Twain’s famous observation about “golf
being a good walk spoiled,” knowing
that for a golfer even a bad round is
better than a walk in a field
without a golf bag on the shoulder.

He sat in his chair sipping his drink,
watching a flock of ibis grazing on the lawn,
thinking how he might make a poem
about the men in the fishing boat.
He envied those slightly restless anglers
and realized that sitting there doing nothing
had not made him content and wondered
whether contentment was even possible—or desirable.
Suddenly he stood up with an “Aha!” and said,
“Discontent is more to be desired than contentment.”

Pleased with his insight, he sat down and continued
the thought: “Contentment results in apathy and stasis but
discontent produces hope and hope ignites action.
When one ceases to hope—for a fish or a birdie
or the just-right metaphor to come along—
one’s life becomes static, meaningless.”

He paused for a moment then said,
“Discontent is the egg that hatches the bird of hope,”
smiled, muttered an apology to Miss Dickinson,
took up his pen and began to write:
“A small boat moved across his line of sight”