

I Knew It.

Well, I knew it would happen. The day had to come. My ride in the lap of uninterrupted ease had to reach a turning point. A crisis, if you will. I have lived here, with the Angels (you may remember the Angels from a previous column) for 18 months now. Eighteen months of the most beautiful days and nights and meals and laughs and trees and flowers. Well, it may be coming to an end. Man, I hope not, but it just might be curtain time.

I am writing to you from a small tree house in the woods. It's a good thing that Veronica installed wireless for the computers or I'd have to tell this story on a garage sale Smith Corona. The one where the "s" is ssssstuck.

The tree house is eight feet by eight feet and sits nineteen feet off the ground in one of the big white oaks on the property. The Angels said it would be a good idea if I built this tree house, as I might be needing new accommodations in the very near future. At least they gave me some advance notice. I'm from Chicago and I've seen the wreckage of many evictions. Not a pretty sight. Especially if it's your stuff in the street.

I was informed of their decision at the semi-annual meeting of our association. The group has three voting members and one non-voting guy. See where this is going? I kinda' knew this might happen all along but it was a bit of a cold shower when it finally did. Threw me off my feed, so to speak.

The reason for my current plight? I messed up. That's the only way to put it. I messed up. It was one of those days that should happen only to your worst enemies. On the same day I managed to transgress the sacred ground of each of the Angels. I crossed a line in the sand that each one had carefully drawn. And it's not that I didn't know the lines were there. Crossing one line happens sometimes, two lines would be a bad day but getting on the wrong side of all three was, heretofore, unthinkable. What a doof!

People have issues. I know that. I do, you do, we all do. As a rule I'm fairly adept at paying attention to who cares how much about what and can act accordingly. Not this time.

It started after breakfast. Veronica was washing some old plastic bags prior to recycling them. This is very important to her. She can actually sense a landfill choking with plastic in her sleep. I was doing something inane like checking the baseball standings. She asked me if I could take over for a minute while she counted the cans. Without thinking I said, "Why don't you just pitch the little buggers. I'll never tell." Well, you could have heard a kitten's tail brush a pile of feathers. Silence. Trouble. "What? What did I say, Hun?" She said that we would talk about it tomorrow.

About an hour later, in an effort to stay busy and appear positive, I proceeded to throw out all the leftovers in the fridge, every last ort. As I'm ramming the final bits of blanched cauliflower down the garbage disposal Pearl walks by, clutches her heart and says, "You're throwing out a possible lunch." "Lunch for a woodchuck, maybe." I said. Well, you could have heard an iris petal fall on a bent grass lawn. Silence. Trouble. Pearl says, "We'll talk about it tomorrow." Again with tomorrow. Why tomorrow?

Not ten minutes go by and I'm trying to TIVO "Lawrence of Arabia" so I can watch it for the umpteenth time. I even have Jose Ferrer's lines memorized. That's when I yelled to no one in particular. "Can I delete this basketball stuff? How many missed free-throws do we want to watch?" This is how my day was going. Who was walking by when I disparaged basketball? Ruby. Ruby is a big fan. I mean a BIG fan. She doesn't even stop but as she's walking past me she says, "We'll talk about it tomorrow."

Then it dawned on me. Tomorrow is the meeting. The four of us are meeting to talk about how things are going. Tomorrow we lay it all on the table and I pick today to mess up.

The meeting opens amicably enough. There's coffee and toast and jam and cats looking to be petted. We're sitting in the glorious sunroom with its views of the woods. Veronica, the love of my life, says, "You sit here hun", and offers me the comfy glider that I like so much. "Well, well" I said to myself. "I guess I dodged the proverbial bullet." In my case, buckshot.

As I'm launching into one of my 'I'm so smart' monologues about some useless (but fascinating) trivia, I notice that the Angels are looking at the big white oak that dominates the west woods. They are smiling, vaguely. They seem quite satisfied. "Looks good", says Ruby. "Just right", says Pearl. "It's a good thing he's little", says Veronica.

Yup, you guessed it; they're looking at the tree house of which I previously spoke.

There's no time wasted, no insincere sentiment. The Angels presented me with a beautifully wrapped package, a gift card on top. It has written in it "For your new, not necessarily permanent, home."

Inside there are three items. A beautiful needlepoint, framed and ready to hang, with the saying, "Mess Up in Small Doses". Next, there's one of those jute doormats. Heavy duty. Will last a long time. It says, "The Oaks". The third, in honor of my favorite collection of children's stories (Winnie-the-Pooh) is a wooden placard that will hang over the door, above the rope ladder, inscribed "Saunders".

Life could be worse. At least I still live here, just a little further into the woods.