

Eva Holbrook

James Hirst

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Three Acres of Revelation

Sometimes life is claustrophobic. You have work, you have school, you have house payments, car payments, phone payments and a plethora of other adult responsibilities that press on your chest and demand to be taken care of until your breath comes in smaller bursts and there is no more room to inhale. That is when you decide to take a walk. Which is just what I did last Sunday.

There is a quaint little suburban goat reservation in my neighborhood that has been overtaken by ducks and various geese. I drive by it occasionally, but rarely visit it. I finally decided to stop by, seeing as I needed some fresh air anyway.

The whole area is roughly 3 acres of well-groomed lawn with a creek on the west side that flows next to the road. It is fenced in, either to protect the animals, or to protect suburbia from fowl shenanigans. The creek looks manmade with smooth stones layered on top of each other and lined on the side to direct the flow of water.

When I stepped out of my car and shut the door, I was immediately struck by a cacophony of honking and screeching. There were hundreds of ducks swimming, playing, fighting and waiting for the sweet offering of free food. The moment they sensed that someone had come, the majority of the flock crowded themselves on my side of the bank, craning their necks for any morsel of bread that might be tossed. As I walked down the bank a little ways, the mass of ducks followed me as if magnetized to the heels of my shoes. I found a spot to my liking,

set my heels in the gravel and observed as the ducks pressed themselves against my side of the bank.

As I tossed crumbs to the water, the quaking and honking noises became momentarily louder as each duck scrambled over each other to catch that single piece of bread. I watched in fascination as they all converged and dissipated around the crumb of bread like a wave on a pond. There were other ducks on the far bank that seemed content to huddle close together and watch listlessly as their comrades squabbled and fought with one another.

I felt sad for them. There were just too many to fully satisfy and too many that went overlooked. They had all come here out of habit or need, conditioned to the fact that people would come and toss bread. And I was just another person continuing that conditioning. I was like a trickster god, humoring myself at throwing scraps at those begging for more, but denying full nourishment. I was just teasing and playing with them, using their need as an amusement.

It only took me a few minutes to go through my stash of bread. I looked on for a few minutes, observing the undying hope in those ducks that I would throw out more. When I got tired of watching their helpless bickering, I walked down the bank in search of new spot to enjoy. They followed me of course.

I came to a place by a tall, weathered tree. Its roots were exposed due to the erosion of the creek. The bank angled down and touched the water. It was here that I stopped and watched, amused, as the flock of ducks swam towards me. When they caught up, I watched in fascination as one single duck hopped up on the lower part of the bank and made her way cautiously towards me, desirous to be rewarded for her bravery.

I watched her, she watched me, both of us waiting for the other to react. I would have thrown bread if I had kept any. I decided to stop teasing her and walked away. She shuffled back a foot, watching me warily. I kept going and saw her rejoin her fellow ducks in the water.

Watching the behavior of that duck made me take a moment and think back to the reason I had originally come. I had come to observe, ponder and partake of the joy in nature. In so doing I found harsh comparisons to myself. I saw myself as one of those ducks. Like them, many people with similar goals and needs buffet me and make me feel lost and overlooked. We all have many of the same things that we desire, so how do any of us have a fighting chance to achieve our goals?

To answer that, I look back at the one solitary duck on the bank. Like her, I need to be brave enough to take that bold step forward. I need to discard my fear of the unknown, of the potential risk, and take what I want. Perhaps, like her, I won't always be rewarded for my attempts, but that should never stop me from the wisdom in trying.