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The Road of Life

by Alissa Harris

The homeless girl is a disease wrapped in a coverlet of isolation
 She strides down the street faster than most, eager to reach her hole in the city bulwark
 The itinerant walks on, eye and heart downcast,
 gripping the folds of her many tattered shirts between grimy hands
 her rugged calluses covering angst and despair,
 emotions kept in check for as long as she can remember.
 She passes by an old shark, clad in a drab overcoat
 who taps his cane onto the dead sidewalk
 He knows with each small, uncertain step he makes
 that he walks further and further from *this* world
 He has seen much, known much
 but the only thing that his latter years seem to have taught
 is to move out of the path of the next generation
 who trample those of burden underfoot
 He skateboards on by, dubious of those who could be caught in his wake
 those who are mere blurs of flesh, like the old man
 His stereo gnaws at his ears but he has become numb to the sensation
 Immoral lyrics and degradation lull him
 How many times has he been told he's a problem
 no nail and hammer can fix? lost cause
 So he drinks his problems away by night
 nursed on schnapps and put to comfort by a heroin-adorned teddy bear, his first playmate
 and swears to that old cliché, that excuse
 his parents are responsible for the character he is today
 She notices him as he whizzes past
 but quickly diminishes further rumination on the matter
 far too busy with her cell phone
 which has rung nonstop throughout her hectic day
 On her strawberry suit a spot of ketchup
 will be the only thing her thoughts account for
 when she sees the third client of the day
 who will survey her like a bird of prey
 for deceitful actions and curt manner
 Radiantly she will smile and chat, all the while

wishing she were at home with her children, her adorable offspring
who as cute as they are cannot match the beauty of the blond curly top
leisuring by in a hand-me-down stroller
A moment of confusion startles the babe; he lets out a loud bawl
Inexperienced hands struggle to bring him comfort
Her eyes are raccoon like and puffy from the previous night's feeding
She wonders for the briefest of moments, what does the community think of her now
Her young hands caress her baby's curls as she holds him like a doll in her arms
The curls, so much like his father's--or are they?--she can't hardly remember anymore
She rushes home to meet her mother's clock
which has been set by fretful and anxious hands
She strolls by a park bench where an army recruiter sits
watching people walk by; like a vulture he eyes the masses
Yet he's more concerned with the next possible soldier than with the carnage they may create
Yet a vulture is the only thing his gaunt face resembles
He asks, "Which one is a potential soldier, which one is the next big promotion?"
A jackal-like grin stretches across his plastic thin face
The itinerant will become a phoenix raised from the ashes
She will be the next linguistic operator, and the credit
for making something out of a nobody will be all his,
and on the road of life the beginning meets the end, for all lives are intertwined.

