The Road of Life

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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 cliche, 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
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
leisurely 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.
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