



Lionhearted

Kate Kusiak

Worked in public service with multidisciplinary city-building teams on infrastructure projects - from stormwater facilities to bike lanes to new transit routes; mother to twin daughters who were born extremely premature and continue to thrive from the care they receive across multiple hospitals and community programs

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The man inside the coffee bar
looks out onto the street life, pleased with himself.
He winces with the first sip,
puts the napkin in his pocket, for later, in case,
turns and leans his back against the high table,
and checks his watch with a plain-faced smile.

Above the door, the sign aggressively flashes "open".
The handle is pulled
and pulled.
Her body's movements jerky and exaggerated,
she can't see his scowl as she howls,
formally registering her frustration at the glass and metal architects,
structural gods, her lifelong antagonists, who have shaped the world against her
before they could even fathom her, nevermind regard her.

She is ten, her frame slender for her height;
eyes dark as the new moon.
He opens the door for her
muttering about the 17-seconds of escalation
from civility to emotional chaos.

"I demand... I demand... I dem-"
And she takes off her glasses,
wiping off her own spit and tears
on a ketchup-stained sweatshirt
and stomps to the end of the bar.

That means it's time for me to go, he might think.

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*Not even a 'Thank you' from her, he might think.
Ungrateful, useless child, he might spit out.
Generation of entitled brats!*

I'll try the new coffee shop that just opened, he might decide to himself later in bed.

"Did you see that? That door didn't cooperate. I hate you, Door!"
The barista agrees and welcomes her by name.
He's 21 and works here part-time during his studies
to be a history teacher.
She insists to pay him without his help today.
She is confident in knowing the difference between a quarter, a dime and a nickel.

Two minutes and 13 seconds to complete the payment.
Thank you they say to each other as she takes the apple juice and cookie
and brings out her school notebook next to me
to finish the last few lines of her story.

The story she wrote that day doesn't matter
as I wipe my eyes later and try to fall to sleep.
Her letters stayed between the lines.
Her sentences and grammar were satisfactory.
Her grasp the dynamic tripod.
Her level of satisfaction complete.

At 28 weeks, my dad told me to never underestimate her.
She outlives her birthright,
and those doctors at 26 weeks will never witness
Divine Strength.
Only the lucky ones will know her as Astrid.

Poet's note: My daughter, Astrid, was the inspiration for this poem. She is visually impaired, autistic (and pragmatic communication disorder) and has low muscle tone/coordination. As the doctors were giving us their expectations of her outcome, I gave her the name without knowing its origins, which is an ancient Norse name for divine / godly / strength / beauty / impulsivity.