Dignity

The howl ricocheted from one end of the house to ours. The blood froze in my veins for one brief moment before I took off at a dash. The not knowing anytime in life is the heart stopper.

From a distance I noticed the discretionary glances. He was trying so hard to disguise his nervousness as he shifted from foot to foot, hiding his continual peeking at the door, and I imagined the many thoughts thumbing through the Rolodex of his mind, the fear of the unknown captivating.

As she stood before the judge, waiting for the gavel and his words to fall, she held her breath, her future passing before her eyes like an old-fashioned film. Even jail time would be better than the ambiguity and unascertained consternation of what tomorrow might not bring.

The seconds ticked by as gentle strains of music played in the background. On occasion, the automated nasally voice broke in, warning of impinging delays due to the catastrophic storm raging in the region. Forgotten pleas she once whispered with passion came to mind as she began mumbling a prayer, tapping her toe to the recording as she waited on hold.

For every unknown, dignity hides in the shadow, head bowed, heart pounding. Will character step forward? Will honor stay behind when the curtain falls? Who responds when dignity opens his mouth, when respect speaks? Virtue runs her fingers through the tangles of life and grace combs out the snarls as painlessly as possible when traumatic experiences beset each of us.

We were so grateful nothing was broken, except perhaps pride and the strains of fear. She is frail now and every day is a gift that we try not to take for granted. We are reminded of that when mishaps befall us, when things go bump in the night. It crossed my mind that life is just that way. We stand at the edge of the crib, terrified that tiny being we brought into this world won't remember to breathe. We hold our own breath as they run headlong down the sidewalk and through life; as they climb on a bike or behind the wheel of a car; as they trip through the door on the first day of kindergarten or the last day of high school. We remember to hold our dignity together while theirs fall apart when bad things happen, and before we know it, we stand at the edge of their baby's crib, pride and our heartbeats busting the silence.

And before we know it, we tuck the curl of gray hair behind her ear, handing her the steadiness of our arm or her cane, and hoping as we tuck her in, that she will breathe soundly all night long. And by God's grace, another day will dawn with her and dignity in it.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He has made everything beautiful and appropriate in its time. He has also planted eternity [a sense of divine purpose] in the human heart [a mysterious longing which nothing under the sun can satisfy, except God]—yet man cannot find out (comprehend, grasp) what God has done (His overall plan) from the beginning to the end." (AMP)