

Hill House

by Rick Marcou

The thing about their new house,
it sat atop a fairly steep hill.
They loved it for the view;
the far-off mountain peaks,
and the broad blue lake
like a soothing endless moat
for the majestic castle above.

The road up to their house
zigzagged to reach the peak
with minimal wasted real estate.
An interesting drive in the summer heat,
a nightmare in the rain and snow.
And not the best place for kids.

They installed one of those
retractable driveway fences
for when Tommy wanted to play.
He knew to set it up, and to try
to keep the ball from going over it.
Not always easy for a 7 year old.
Mom and Dad were often called
to chase the ball down the hill.

On this day it happened again.
Mommy was inside, Tommy called out.
No answer, again and again.
So Tommy went on the chase.
Slid open the fence, took one last look back,
and started running down the road.

Mary Wolde turned off Old Mill Road,
and started up the windy hill to her house.
She lived near the top,
a blessing and a curse,
saying that for 21 years now.
The sun in her eyes didn't help.

An interesting feature of this road,
many houses have landscape walls in front,
so the ball would angle towards a house,
only to hit the wall and bounce back
toward the road and the next houses down.

Tommy kept watching and running,
a mix of a smile and wonder across his face.
The ball was faster than him,
and had a good head start.
He could see it the whole time though,
he knew he'd catch up eventually.

Mary carefully made her way,
never driving too fast on this road
or really any other for that matter.
The sun was in her eyes
when the road angled to the left,
not so much when heading right.

All of a sudden she saw something
bouncing towards her car.
A ball of some sort, bright red,
like the kickballs her kids had.
It was coming fast, angling across.
She swerved just enough to avoid it,
luckily no sun in her eyes.

Tommy kept running, kept chasing.
He saw a car coming, it missed the ball.
He ran on the sidewalk on the right side,
just like his parents taught him.
He'd cross if he needed when he got to the ball.

Mary was even more nervous now,
there must be someone coming after the ball,
but she couldn't see anyone.
Damn sun.
Her house was just up on the left,
One more to go.

Tommy slowed a little,
the car getting closer.

Mary edged the car to the right,
to take a wide turn as always
into her narrow 1-car driveway.
As she turned back left
The sun again beamed into her eyes.

Tommy saw the car move to the left,
away from him, and continued running.
He looked ahead and watched
as the ball caromed off another wall
and continued down the road.

Mary proceeded slowly to her driveway,
but had to tap the gas a bit
to get up the sharp curb cut to the sidewalk.
Still driving blind.

Tommy saw the car's fender and light
at the last second, reaching his hand out
and cushioning the impact.
He bounced off the car and fell to the ground.

Mary slammed the brakes.
She screamed, fearing the worst.
She got out and ran around the car.
On the ground was a little boy,
couldn't be more than 8 years old.
Not moving.

Tommy opened his eyes,
he was looking at concrete,
his nose inhaling it,
his mouth tasting it.
He raised his head,
turned and saw an old woman
kneeling over him, saying
"Oh, thank God."

He just said one thing.
"Did you see my ball?"