

Endings

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No, I am not going to talk about THE GIVER'S ending. I've done it more often than I want to, and I've done it on this blog, so you can scroll back to one posting titled "Perhaps it was only an echo.." plus the one that precedes it...

But as for endings in general:

Summer is ending. Tomorrow I pack up my car and my puppy and head home after three glorious months on the farm. I've had two women friends here this week—one of them Middy Thomas, who lives in Maine and illustrates the Gooney Bird Greene books for me, the other my friend Nancy, from Boston. Here's a picture of Nancy packing up her car, with Alfie wondering whether he can go along. And one of me enjoying a last few moments on the lawn.

Both Nancy and Middy have been widowed. I listened to them talking about how they make a point of lining up things to look forward to—Middy's headed to California to see a grandchild; Nancy goes next week to Long Island to visit a friend— so that loneliness doesn't take over. The loss of their husbands was of course the end of one part of their lives, but also a transition into the next part.

And though leaving the farm tomorrow is kind of sad, but also it moves me into a fall of projects and travels and work. Yesterday I mailed off the first draft of the theatrical adaptation of GOSSAMER. I worked on it off and on all summer and now it is done and on its way, at least for now. But is the ending of that project? No. After the theater directors have gone over it I expect to hear about certain scenes: "Can't be done"... "This won't work"... etc. etc and then I will go back and revise, working on what is for me a completely new genre, and with the benefit of collaboration.

The play, of course, which follows the book closely, has an ending. It seems to me that a good ending should always leave the reader or the audience feeling both satisfied and also curious.

You should know enough, by the ending, about the character and the situation, to be able to predict what will happen next. Not every prediction will necessarily correspond to mine, because you (the reader, the audience) will have made that character your own and will have developed your own thoughts about what will happen to him or her tomorrow. You should be interested and curious about the what-next but also feel that the page has turned and the book closed on the part of the experience that the author was investigating. You should feel: "Oh yes. Of course."

Middy and I were talking about the Gooney Bird books. The second one, GOONEY BIRD AND THE ROOM MOTHER, has a little surprise at the ending. But it isn't a "Omigod, how could THAT be true?" surprise but rather an "Oh yes, of course" type of thing. Same with the third (not yet published) one in the series. In the third book, one of the second graders has a problem...clearly a problem, but the reader isn't quite certain what it is. Gooney Bird (of course) identifies and solves it. I hope readers will respond with: "Oh, of course" and then be able to close the book with a satisfied chuckle and some curiosity about what will happen in this classroom next.

I am closing the book on summer with a sense of satisfaction—I finished the first draft of the play; I got a new dog*; My friend Deborah got a new heart**—and a lot of interest and curiosity about what comes next, in those three realms and in many others.

* Alfie is five months old today. Three cheers for the Invisible Fence which encloses several acres of this property. I am writing this early in the morning in my studio off the barn, with the door open to the dawn. Alfie is outside, puttering about, and every now and then when something catches his interest, he dashes to...but never crosses... the boundary. Tomorrow he leaves this farm and this boundary and will have to learn a new place. But he is filled with energy and curiosity and he has a happy life in store.

** Deborah is ten days out from her heart transplant. The heart is beating strongly and she has named it Mariah, for her grandmother. But she is still in the ICU because her kidneys haven't adjusted to the change yet, almost as if they are teenagers who don't like it that grandma has moved in and set up housekeeping. All of us who know Deb feel quite certain that her determination will whip everything into shape. This summer has been the ending of her diminished life and the beginning of a new adventure.

And now I must clean the refrigerator. It is definitely THE END for the cucumber with the soggy

skin and the carton of milk dated July.



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