

mutual admiration

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Today, after what seems endless days of rain in Maine, the sun is shining at last and everyone's flowers are lifting their heads as if to bask in it.



Except my peonies, which are in full bloom but have pretty much quit trying to use good posture and are sprawled now, looking like women who got all dressed up, strutted briefly around, then drank too much and fell over and are lying there, bruised, past their prime, but still wearing their gaudy finery, smeared eye shadow, and too much perfume.

There is a garden that I admire, in this small town (I don't know whose garden it is but it's next door to the house that has two Clumber spaniels behind a picket fence) in which all the flowers are blues and purples. Everything so carefully chosen and arranged.

I admire it, like looking at it, without envying it. It is always amusing to use the phrase peony-envy but in truth I think most people simply enjoy looking at other people's gardens without feeling an iota of envy. It's like going to a wonderful pot-luck dinner to which everyone has brought something special. You don't think, on tasting something, "Rats. I wish I'd made that," but instead just take pleasure in that fact that everyone brought their best creation.

I've been thinking these thoughts for two reasons. One, I watched the Tony Awards last night.

Of course, everyone nominated wanted to win. Why wouldn't they? And yet there seemed such genuine admiration and joy as each winner was announced. People in the same profession were taking pride in the accomplishments of their peers.

And that brings me to the second reason for such thoughts. In the past couple of days I've heard from two well-known writers for young people - Richard Peck and Sharon Creech - I don't think they'd mind my using their names here. Each of them had liked my newest book and wrote and told me so: Richard, a technophobe, by a real letter; Sharon in an e-mail. In my experience over very many years, it has seemed that writers and illustrators of young people's literature do take genuine pleasure in each other's accomplishments. I've heard very little grousing or peony-envy ever. And in addition they (we) do what we can to encourage newer, younger writers of promise.

And why not? The world is certainly a better place if there is more good literature in it. And lots of exciting Broadway shows. And a fine selection of casseroles. And more great gardens.

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