



OOPS!!...MISHAPS...& HAPPY OUTCOMES!

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I first had the pleasure of performing at the Connecticut Storytelling Festival in 1996. I was telling one of my favorite stories called “The Man Who Had Nothing” in Evans Hall. Being a relatively new teller, I was a little nervous. But the audience was very kind, giving me their rapt attention. The story was about a poor young man who goes on a journey led by a goddess. On the way he meets many people, with whom he exchanges kindness, and he becomes a wealthy man at the end.

I was telling a part in the story where a group of merchants the main character befriended were leaving the scene. “Then they hurried away,” I said, flinging both my arms to my left to indicate the direction the merchants went. Just that moment, I saw, about 15 feet beyond my fingertips, one of the flower arrangements decorating the stage topple over as if on cue. It was a large vase full of long-stemmed forsythias and water.

Everyone gasped! I mean, it was a pure accident. I did not touch the flowers. They were too far away. Yet I guess it looked to the audience as if I had caused it to fall. On the audience’s faces I saw a mixture of surprise, confusion, and amazement. But I was right in the middle of the story! Do I get to finish my tale, or do I need to go over there to wipe the floor?

You may think that I got flustered and panicked. I thought I would, too, except a strange thing happened instead. I heard a voice from deep inside me say, “Relax. You have all the time in the world.” Then I felt as if time had slowed down. An absolute calm swept over me.

The voice said, “Now, assess the situation.” So I took a moment to look at the mess. The yellow flowers and branches were scattered on the floor, and the water was dripping down the front of the stage. But the water was not reaching the sound system or any of the cords. I looked at the audience. They were all looking at me, waiting for me to say something. So I took



another glance at the mess, and said, “The power of a story!” Everyone burst out laughing, and relaxed. I was able to carry the story to the end.

Much later I learned that there is a metaphor in Sufism that compares a human to a tree with two birds living in it. One of the birds eats, sings, and poops, while the other bird just sits back and watches. That second bird is our inner voice, an awareness that makes us feel truly safe and free. That morning at the Festival I discovered my second bird, and it has been with me ever since.

The Festival, over the years, has given me many fond memories. Its dedicated staff and loving audience have made countless stories blossom. Ten years later, I feel not unlike the young man in my story. In my journey led by the Storytelling Goddess, I have become quite wealthy in friends, colleagues, and mentors. The joy of storytelling connects us all.