

Everyone Needs a Porpoise in Life by Jeanne Gulbranson

“Jen, please answer me. Did you really send five hundred dollars to some outfit trying to save porpoises? Please tell me you didn’t.” Bill’s second entreaty was again met with Jen’s silence as she continued to flip the pages of the morning paper. “So, what about the desert tortoises and the whales? Are we still supporting them too or did you already save them all? Jen—look at this.” Bill laid the bank statement over Jen’s newspaper. “Your causes are getting out of hand. Have you ever even seen a porpoise?”

“Of course, I’ve seen porpoises.” Jen’s response was curt, defiant. “We took the kids to Sea World every year when they were little, didn’t we?”

“Dolphins, Jen. They have dolphins at Sea World.” Jen didn’t bother to acknowledge or refute Bill’s comeback; she had already retreated to the newspaper.

“Jen, every endangered species out there doesn’t need our money and your help. You can’t save them all. Why are you doing this?”

Bill leaned back in surprise as Jen stood up too quickly, knocking over the chair in her haste. “That’s what you think, isn’t it! That’s what everyone thinks. I’m too old and I’m useless. No one needs my help anymore. Well, you’re wrong! They do! The tortoises, the whales, the porpoises, and maybe...I don’t know...maybe more animals that are endangered. Like me—they’re all disappearing—I’m disappearing—because people just don’t care anymore.”

“Jen, I care. You’re not disappearing, and I’ve never said that you’re useless. Of course, we all still need your help. I do, the kids...”

Jen cut off Bill’s calming attempt. “You don’t need me. You’ve never needed me. You’ve had your work and your golf and...I don’t know...all of your own things. And the kids?”

You think our kids need me? Have you noticed that they've both moved out? They have their own families now and their own..." Jen's crackling voice slurred her words. "I can contribute too, you know! Just because no one else believes that I...at least someone...some things need my help...I can do something...I deserve to have something...some meaning in my life! I. Am. Not. Useless!"

Jen's tears careened freely as she spun away from him and began to battle an invisible spot on the kitchen counter. "And by the way, I'm going to order a porpoise t-shirt too. So look for that on the next statement."

Bill picked up the bank statement and carefully folded it. His angry posture was stroked by velvet memories of 30 years of having been loved by and loving Jen: his wife, his best friend, the mother of his children. He grimaced as his body ached with her pain. He struggled to find words that would make her know that she was still his entire world—the one person he would always need.

"Jen, I think I may have put on a few pounds. When you make the order, maybe you should get me an extra-large?"