

The Wandering Man

By: Logan D. Bates

Perhaps we have nothing, if not a dream.

It was a peculiar day. Not in the sense that the day itself held peculiar natures, or that events passed had been of a peculiar and out of the ordinary sort. No, it was simply a day that held a hidden and perplexed variation, the type that a man alone can sense. In such reference of mind, one could even say that the world through a man's eyes is but a reflection of his present intentions and beliefs. His own will and predisposition are all but strangling reality in a grimey struggle to see what is wanted, and not what is.

But alas, setting such obscured projections aside, the day in itself was magnificent and held grace within its season. The sun was as it always was, hot and heavy upon the valley, its loving embrace surrounding every cool shadow and deep pool with a heavenly light. The air itself seemed to perpetuate a brilliant white as the blue and cloudless sky opened out into nothingness. It was the type of sun one would nap beneath upon sheets of grass—though regrettably, in the present days, I have seen no man take such time out of his life for peace and quiet. Its rays would have stung like alcohol upon an open cut if your skin were to remain under the glare, and yet it still would have been a healing sense amidst the red burns, welcomed, and worth every moment.

Beneath this crisp sky lay a great mirage of autumn leaves, who clung ever so delicately to the tree tops, golden reds and yellows complimenting each other into a great evanescent glow of warmth and security. The dark and coarse bark alongside the blotches of remaining greenery set the stage for the leaves to dance, the lovely lady of wind wrapping her arms around them and shuffling to and fro. Her breeze was strange and unpredictable, yet every living thing would greet her touch as familiar. It's one of the many peculiar things, I suppose, if you stop to consider it.

This fall season her dance is smooth, melodic, and slow; arching high and swinging down low as one would in an old-english ballroom. It was a lazy warmth within each tumbling toil of air, yet it carried a slight undertouch of winter that was soon to come. She laughed and twirled with every tree in its turn, none left lonely in wanting. At such a time it would have been a miserable thing if her love were not so maternal. For the leaves were enjoying their final days, and their sturdy hosts were soon to release them, allowing the call of time to carry them off to new and unknown places, never to return. I always loved that part. It's not as if the leaves could turn into nothing, they simply changed form, and continued on as something new, something different, something beautiful and unknown. I like to believe their memories remain.

Farther beneath the great glowing ball, a cooler world remained serene. Thin blades of dark green grass would sway with the wind's flowering dress as she twirled, not so much joining in the lively movements, but rather, watching from below with great appreciation and awestruck reverence, as their childhood friends reached the end of their races with smiles abroad. Once the leaves were dry and stolen away, the quickly tiring blades knew they were destined to shrivel and be sealed away, as no protection for them would remain. Standing alongside, with a hidden elegance, patches of moss observed the shifting season, droplets of water from days past still clinging to life within their blanketed folds. Their deep soft greenery held a wakefulness that the rest of the autumn valley had seemingly forgotten, clinging tight to the great bulging roots of the trees as they foresaw the cold darkness rising from afar. The silver streams and bubbling brooks on the other hand, seemed to be ignorant of all change, flowing with subtle bursts of life as small silver fish and slim water bugs played on the surface, as if summer were not many months past.

In the spring seasons their waters would run with a vengeance, as rain would feed into the valley, giving the rivers a power they were not prepared for; and as such with man, they are overrun and transformed into something violent and destructive. But alas, the pendulum swings back, and in the desperate draught of the summer, their beds often run dry, or trickle with the tears of thirsty underbrush and hidden creatures. When I think about it, as the topic has now come to mind, the deer and other gentle beasts always seemed more alive within that pocket of paradise. I would still see them in the outside world, scampering across roads or crossing cultivated land, and though they would move with great haste and breathe hot breaths, the feeling of life, of intrinsic value, was not there. I could watch a thousand be hunted and left rotten to time and I would not think anything of it. Though if I were to hear a single uttered sigh of discontentment from within that valley, while alongside the blood of wood, beast, and briar, I would rush to the precious gift and present myself a servant to nature and her beauty.

I stand now, alone as ever, above this great wonder, peaceful bliss written on my dry and tired lips. The dirt is still ever dark and soft, and its touch a mattress to my bare feet, as they are engulfed in a green frilled carpet. It truly is a wonderful feeling, though as I have witnessed often before, the present man wouldn't relish such a simple thing. It is beneath him after all. Why should such an accessible and mundane sensation bring him joy, when greater, manufactured pleasures await him? Afterall, an entire world is out of his grasp and will forever remain so. How can he find joy at all? Are you ever truly great if someone else is greater?

I find my understanding complete as to how their eyes are closed to wonder, and their minds a prison of self service and loathsome need for all that but which they have; because, I regrettably describe myself in a sense. I would like to believe that on this very present day I

have surpassed such trivial things, yet I know it is but a moment of clarity amidst a life of blurred vision. I am thankful still, as the majority of men never see clearly at all, and so they live with the belief that their muddled eyes can see everything. I thought about helping them once, which may seem crude in its number, but I quickly realized such an act was foolish. A man sees what he believes, believes what he wants, and wants what he cannot see. A paradoxical cycle of sorts, it becomes endless and engaging. Past that, you cannot stop for a moment in the today to even consider such ideas, because time is never increasing, only falling like sand—a terrible waste—between your open hands.

Dear heavens, it drives me mad now that I have worded myself into a corner. What little I have done with the time I have been given! A grand shame and disappointment when compared to the stunning valley. If only I could be so useful or free as a tree; quite the peculiar thought I suppose. But the trees give life, give beauty, give protection, give all they have for all their days. I take. Man takes, and does not give. He might go about convincing himself that he is generous, selfless, and good, by handing back a little of what he has already unrighteously stolen. But it is a self delusion within itself. Even if I, or any other man, were to spend his entire life struggling towards perfection, towards true selflessness, he would fall short as long as he stands within a world under man's control. That's why I suffer so, because I cannot hate myself and all of mankind, and yet, what other option remains?

I have supposed that a run into the great distance, an escape into the unknown, following the leaves, changing into something different, could be a viable option. But I have also supposed that such a feat would be nothing short of selfish and vile, as there is no escape from the mind, and I would always remember how I took the easy path, and left everyone else to blindness, to aimless struggle, to drugged self delusion, and to the all consuming pleaurities. I cannot do such a thing. I would waste the dew drop of clarity that I have been allowed.

It all comes back to thought, I now derive, as I think about thinking, and ponder why exactly it is that pondering is so important. The modern man, as I like to reference, does not partake in much thought anymore, which to a rather strong extent, is that defining trait that makes us human. Sure, he will consider many things within his life, make choices, dream about the future, and reminisce about the past. But what good are those thoughts if you do not understand the purpose of thought itself, which happened to bring about everything you were to consider? Purpose is a better word, though far too many are fooled into believing they understand the word when placed in such a light. Most will surmise, in accordance to what is easiest, that happiness is the purpose of all life. I am sorry to say, if you believe in such a thing, you are one of the damned, who will die more miserable than any other.

It seems obvious to me now, though it has taken years of deep analyzing and miserable argument, that those who seek happiness for themselves will not find it. They work towards great fame and fortune, only to realize they are no less filled with joy or peace than before. All that they achieve is temporary, and when gone, leaves a sour taste in the mouth like vinegar. They can't say that of course, because then their lives would have been forfeit and lived in vain, and that terrible human need for approval, for understanding, for validation, would tear them apart. I am far from the only one to have knowledge of this. In truth, every man knows deep down, as we have all seen through countless stories, whether upon screen or paper, that it's such simple things as love, passion, and purpose that bring true happiness. I once heard a man put it very simply, saying that "happiness is the byproduct of a life well lived". I believe through all my many thoughts and examinations that this is so. And yet, man continues to impose the easy path of self suffering upon himself. For it fits his ease and appeases the momentary desires of his heart.

I find I am growing tired, though I have much more to say, jumbled and confusing accusations from within my own head. The wild calls me, and so I must now answer, strolling down into the tranquil valley before me, my true unspoken home. My thoughts draw back now to the purpose of this present ramble. The modern man has fallen from understanding, he has forsaken thought, and in doing so, has lost the path to true life. That is my current grievance. It is quite a claim, so the duty falls on me to place the evidence plainly before you, as one has to reach a conclusion on his own for it to stick and surpass any predisposed ideas.

Take, for example, the simple questions of origins, one that is often addressed within the scientific and religious community alike: from where did man arise? Or furthermore: how did the consciousness of man come to be? The answer, to any logical and sane person, should determine everything about how you experience and live out the present. If man were a creation, we would be forever indebted and subject to a creator. And if man were a sum of chance, then we are subject to nothing, and in doing so, rise to the term most widely referred to as ‘god’, though the word itself would be robbed of its power in doing so. Now, allow for a moment, the past to rise, and view it in respect to this very question, and ask yourself: have I lived as a god, or in subject to a god? An honest answer will most likely reveal that you have followed the latter, whether a living being, object, or idea. The reason being that a life as ‘god’ is no life at all. It is a lawless, void, and unnatural world, where man runs free and pursues his own selected insanity—that which meets his fancy and settles his every vice.

Anarchy and destruction would ensue, because the very nature of being ‘god’ places them above others, above humanity. There is no right if there is no wrong, in the same way, man’s imperfection bars him from being the ruling force, the epitome of creation, for the nature of all life forbids it. Morality itself would cease to exist. I have conversed with some who claim it would not, but their eyes are empty and filled with restrained fear even as they speak. They know as well as I do, that the physical world without some intentional creation

or divine intervention is harsh and indifferent, not good, not evil, and so without some source of unnatural cause, we cannot then be so. To reject such an idea is to succumb to a destitute existence of nothingness.

I draw back now to the overarching purpose of this example. I have asked countless acquaintances and fellow nameless philosophers (of which every man is his own) this very question, and though its answer should determine how you live your entire life, none of them had ever thought of it so deeply. How can that be? Is there nothing more important to consider? The answer is simple and rises in correlation to what has now been claimed. The modern man has forsaken his mind, and from that his heart; and in doing so, has begun to lose his humanity. He does so because it fits his ease, it feeds his physical needs, and fulfills the bare moment just enough to live by. It is a harsh claim, but rings true nonetheless.

“Alas, who am I to raise such a controversy? Who am I to challenge the world?”

I do not know why I speak aloud in this timeless moment. I could attribute it to my subtle dreaming desire for the world to respond. And I suppose I can allow hope for such a thing because I have received many before, back when I did not stand alone on the hill, but with a friend. He had viewed the world through a lens similar to mine, but he had always held a hope, even to his bitter end, that there was more to the world; that if man truly wanted to, he would not just walk, but fly. It was a beautiful and tragic dream, the kind that you hear from the mouth of a child and smile knowing it to be impossible.

This friend, before his untimely death, left a final story for me. He said that it was a vision, and sure enough, though his words left much to mysterious pondering, in a strange sense, his vision came true. I miss him dearly, because now I feel that my own story may draw to a melancholy close, as man was not created to be alone, and it seems that forever

more I shall be. To reference religious texts such as the Bible, man, even amidst the animals of creation and the dwelling of God himself, was not complete (per God's design) until he was given a companion.

Nevertheless, in his vision, my friend spoke of a love so great and so passionate that my own heart bled with longing, for somehow he had glimpsed heaven, or possibly something deeper, and retained it. I never understood what she was. An angel, a personified dream, a remnant of someone lost, or a glimpse towards the eternal future. It is but another line of questions I wish he could answer. But now that I relinquish the tale, reading it as it was left for me, in a strange recount, I suppose that an explanation is deserved. I shall attempt to retell, though it will be an injustice, the story of a moonlit reverie, one that I still cannot understand, but hold close to my chest as the story of a man, a man I could not understand, nor save.

A Moonrippled Reverie - retold

"There is no stopping me this time m'lady. My mind is made up," I said nonchalantly, turning my gaze lazily towards her approaching form. "The project is at its end, and I have labored myself into nothingness just as I had foreseen."

She looked at me with her accursed twilight eyes, her melancholy smile patronizing me like a mother would a despondent child. I refused to turn to her overpowering presence, deciding, rather, to admire the blood orange sunset as it dissipated behind the clouds. I knew if I were to gaze back into those eternal pools that my resolve would crumble and I would trek back down the mountain and into the black star-speckled fog that awaited me with despairing desire. The city was stunning in a strange reminiscent way, as if I had actually

lived there, and experienced life within its borders. But I hadn't. Unless you considered my repetitive schooldays and lackluster pastimes as truly living. My project was all I had.

I glanced carefully over my left shoulder at the poorly fastened wings that hung heavily on my back. I had spent half of my young life designing and building this last hope, these strips of iron will, these wings that would undoubtedly fail. I heard the subtle sound of Loriana's feathered wings slowly dragging across the stone floor of the mountain peak, knocking pebbles away and stirring small turrets of dust into whirling tornados. Her long dark blue hair was undoubtedly flowing in the wind, swimming over her smooth shoulders and complementing whatever heavenly dress she had decided to wear. Undoubtedly she would be quite the sight. Most men would have given an arm to even glance at her, and inevitably lose everything else in a selfish pursuit of her grace. But I know better than to look. I had stolen countless views before, and my life was torn to ruins because of it.

"The stars will be brilliant tonight," Loriana's sweet and melodic voice sang, every word striking a different nerve on the strings of my heart. "My father retires, and for you, I intend to bring great vibrance to the skies. And though the circumstances are grim, I am glad you have decided to join me. It has been far too long." I heard her feet shift as she sat besides me, likely smiling as the cool shadows overtook the dying light of the sun.

"I am not here for you. Your stars are cold and distant, and the shadows that I used to rest within are no longer of use to me. If I could, I would rise with the morning and tear down all light from the skies so that man would see no more. What use are his covetous eyes? He cannot glimpse glory without wanting it for himself." I spoke with deep set conviction and a vile hatred that I had chosen to forget at the back of mind. I already felt her presence reaching over to embrace me, but I ignored her, even knowing that I would eventually concede.

“You love the stars, the vibrant moon, and the whispers of my creatures. Why do you lie to yourself? There were days I recall, when you aimed to fly beside me, and not against me. You created and strove out of love, not hate and shadowed despondence.”

I inhaled a deep cool breath, the frigid night air encasing my lungs in life. I had vowed against speaking with her, but alas, my eternal weaknesses and be-dredged humanity overpowered my greater intuition. I slowly rotated my hips to face the lovely lady of the night, my Lorian. Well, she wasn't mine. She wasn't anyone's at all truly, as her existence was simply the temptation of a dream, the foolish desires to forge a better world or even, a better reality against all odds—against all that was natural. Her eyes were crystal chalices filled with the blood from the heart of my heart, something I never forgot. Her face was glorious, smooth, and symmetrical, pleasing the eyes in every scientific and above human manner. Her free and flowing midnight blue hair was a magnificent painting against the darkening visage behind her, and the slenderness of her arms and legs that seemed almost unnatural in their unscarred perfection, melded into the rocks as she leaned casually back. She was an angel, an angel I wish I had never seen.

“I loved this once. I loved you once. But that is how many times a human soul can truly break. We fantasize about mending a broken heart, about healing the scars over time. But that is simply how we have learned to cope. Humans can't be unbroken, we cannot be fixed. We are like glass that shatters into a thousand pieces. I could convince myself that the stars are warm, and that the moon is a swirling distant story waiting to be told. I could gaze upon your majesty and promise to serve you with all I had, to love you past the extent of human life, and to follow you through any darkness, knowing that you would light the way.” She met my gaze, unwavering in her pity as sparkling tears fell silently, invisibly, and unwarranted from her polished face, striking the flat stone upon which she sat, not a single

soul to care. “But you know as well as I do, that no one can catch you, none will ever deserve you, or appreciate the world you create without others trying to steal the experience from their grasp. I beheld the glory, I fought to understand the mystery, but it remains too complex... questions without answers. Your words, though spoken out of care, inspired me to rise to my own demise.” Her soft hand scooped closer to mine, but I refused to accept it. “This life is not meant to be understood, that much I know for certain. So stop drawing me to the water when you know I will drown.” I allowed myself to show emotion, my own muddled brown tears mixing with her crystal droplets on the ground.

“You are one of the few to find me. Do you believe that this wasn’t meant to be? Are you unsatisfied that you cannot hold the entirety of the world in your own two hands? Do you refuse to acknowledge the splendor if it refuses to honor you?” I averted my eyes from hers, turning back to the swaying form of the distant city. She followed my mourning gaze, a frown appearing on her lips. This was something that truly surprised me, as she had only ever allowed such a dip to occur on her lips once before. “Look at the city, at the world you hail from, and tell me what you see.” I sighed, knowing very well what I saw. The world was an ugly place. It was but a strange dichotomy. Entirely ugly and filled with disdain and hate, while also giving rise to the greatest magnificence and selfless spirits. Though in the present, as I looked upon it, one side seemed to conquer the other.

“I see despicable rodents,” I laughed, suddenly grabbing her hand to point out into the city. “I see the lowest rats struggling and fighting for morsels of food, stealing rather than learning to hunt for their own. They hid beneath boards and into the dark because it is easier than facing the sun. And the few who want to be more cannot move, because the writhing mass of them refuse to allow any to do so.” I suddenly raised her finger from the bottom layer of the city to point near the middle of a skyscraper where many lights could be seen. “I see

hamsters running in their wheels day after day, moving to nowhere, yet feeling as if they have taken the world. Some may leave their pitiful cages, but they fall right into another, running on a new wheel to a newer nowhere.” Loriana didn’t interrupt me, which was yet another surprise, so I continued on, raising her shimmering arm to accuse the highest peaks of the city. “And here, at the very top, are the squirrels who hoard away their wealth and hide in the sky. They build themselves as high as they can, believing that they can eventually seize the sun from its place in the air, and name the day as their own. But they are more foolish than even the rats, as they actually have faith they can do it, that anything they achieve has meaning. That the wealth they hoard will last, be worth anything, when their time has come.” Loriana suddenly took control of her body once more, and pointed to a large memorial light, pasted upon the side of a building. It was too far to see, and there were so many like it, and yet I knew whose face was so confidently shown upon it.

“What about him?” She asked me, gently brushing my lower back with her pillowy wings.

The man was hero of the city. He had given his life to serving the poor, to helping the weak, to feeding the hungry. Killed by members of the very community he served, his name was known as nothing but a heroic tragedy. He would be forgotten very soon, as it is with most true heroes, but nevertheless, he was admired for the moment.

“He is a lion,” I finally admitted, “and for the few who are like him, I bow my head in respect. But we don’t live in a world where lions can last. Life hunts the lions, and steals the very fur off of their backs. Even if for nothing more than a thrill, for a meager handful of pocket change.” I shifted my shoulders, and the makeshift wings that were upon them. “It shoots down the birds from below. It turns the brilliant sea into a cesspool.” I lightly knocked away her wing and released her arm, rising to stand on my own two feet. I trembled in light of all I knew, which within the great scheme, I recognized as nothing at all.

“I didn’t want to run in a wheel, so they laughed at me. I told the world I could fly, and the hoarders above scoffed at my conviction. I built my wings, inspired by what I had found here, what I had found in you, and the rats... the people... they tore my wings apart. For I had something they could never have, I knew things they didn’t, and I proclaimed truths they never wanted to hear. So they broke me down and allowed the others to steal all I had built.” I paused to relive that faded adventure of a life, the days when I saw clearly and loved every blade of grass and stormy cloud. “The wings could have been rebuilt,” I cried, “my pride was something that I could have cast aside. But it was the people who told me that they had expected my failure, the people who pushed me back into a wheel and told me there was nothing more... They are the ones who broke what little was left of my soul.”

“So you gave up on beauty? You denied wonder? You subjected yourself to all of their foolish machinations because the faceless told you to do so? There is no night without day. There is no peace without turmoil. You simply cannot accept that there are things you will never understand and treasures you will never obtain. Nor can you accept the false reality that humanity ties themselves to in order to escape life.” I harnessed the little emotion I had left into a corner, refusing her words. I had come to terms with this wretched place. I had decided to be more, and I had vowed to end as more.

“All you say, I already know. I do not ignore the existence of all of this.” I motioned around me in a grand circle, the moonlit flowers and carved stars all but the same. “I only returned to honor you and this discovery. These wings will fail, and I shall fall. But I will fall reaching to be more, I will plummet knowing that I beheld all that life had to offer, and that I brought my humanity to its limit in pursuit of it. I still hold out hope that these flimsy extensions of myself will catch the wind and raise me up. But you know better, and therefore, so do I.” With that final statement, I kissed Loriana lightly on the cheek and stood at the edge

of the mountain, pulling a string so that my wings shot out behind me, catching the light gusts of wind and causing my feet to stutter.

“You miss the purpose,” her voice protruded, a final symphony of burning passion. “You have fallen into the mud and refuse to clear your eyes. You were never meant to obtain the stars, only reach for them. And that is clarity. Because in reaching for the stars, in discovering the elegance of the night, you find so much more to love, to experience. If only you were willing to see it past your own shattered dream.” I allowed her words to sink in. It was a lovely attempt, quite poetic. But she was correct. I refuse to accept that which I cannot have, all that I cannot understand.

“I fly to obtain it all. I will settle for nothing less. And in my freefall I will have defeated my only true enemy. Fear.” I adjusted a nob or two, though they would have little effect. I did it more to appease that human part of my mind than anything else. I closed my eyes, picturing Loriana in her godly state, flying through the stars by my side. It was all so extraordinary, it was a true shame that I could never have any of it. With that ever changing mirage floating on the back of my eyelids, I leapt forward to achieve it all, the wind engulfing my shattered soul.

- Finis

It is a peculiar tale. I still feel as if I am missing something grand and untouched when I take the time to consider it. My first reaction after his passing was to search for this Loriana he spoke of, this city he hailed from, but I found nothing. I can assume she is but a myth within his mind or an angel of his own creation... Yet, something tells me there is more to it than I can ever comprehend. I lay such a decision before an individual to determine, since I myself feel as if I shall encounter her one day. If ever I were to veer from my current path and

delve deeper into the unknown, to places no man has seen, to question things no man has considered, I feel as if she will be waiting there. But alas, the city is foreign to me and the mountains do not call my name. I remain in the valley, timeless, and timeless I shall remain until time is no more. As you have noticed by now there is no real plan behind these troubles, behind these questions. No motive or tact to be found. If I ever were to transcribe this experience into words it would be nothing but true and naked thought.

So I end, tired and weary, as I know, leaving many stones unturned and arguments left to rust. I shall only say to you, in farewell, that I will never be found in your world, for I exist in the mind alone. I wander between the conscious and the dreaming, I exist as a separate entity and yet I hold no body nor spirit. Perhaps I shall shine through the eyes or force myself through the pen, but in doing so I present merely a glimpse, a thought, an idea, and then I am gone. I suppose that we could meet again, as you may perhaps wander into this very golden valley, this garden, or discover my presence by stumbling chance. But alas, I am simply a wandering man, and as I always have, I wander on, alone.