

The Tear Drop

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This book is dedicated to the lady of the meadow, Luna, whose magnificence and sterling countenance still inspires, spurs and tragically confounds the mind and heart of this poor soul.

Chapter 1

With a flash of silvery light, as bright as a peek at the sun revealing distant hills and valleys, I awoke. But, I wasn't fully conscious until I heard the accompanying thunder ringing through a canyon sitting below me, after which I was struck with a sense of bewilderment and confusion. Where I was I could not tell, nor could I explain how I had gotten there.

I was lying with my back to the ground on the steep incline of a high hill. Not quite a mountain, but impressive nonetheless. The softest grass, so thick and tall, served as my mattress. And had there been no question as to my presence there I should think I would have been most content. I stared at the sky whose dark slate sported a series of scattered clouds like shreds of cotton floating in water. Far below the hill I occupied was couched a field cloven by a small stream. There were streams of lightning, bands of white reticulated lines shooting out from the clouds raining down on the open turf below. Watching with a sense of awe at what I saw, that inexpressible flow of emotion that comes from realizing nature's 'bigness', I fancied I was in the

presence of a god. A deity who was hidden bodily but whose authoritative presence was nonetheless made known.

But then I was arrested by a flurry of panic and overwhelming fear. The reality of my amnesiac state grabbed hold of me. It was most severe and I was sorely afraid. And, just as adrenaline surfaces when chased by a pursuant to lend speed to the run, so to were my thoughts racing to answer my own questions, but none came. Instead, the awe of my surroundings soon replaced my concerns.

Stored away behind some clouds, intermittently shining through the clusters, the sun desperately tried to come out. By its position above me, I was sure that it was roughly somewhere a little past mid-day. The longer I lied there, the more this suspicion was confirmed. From one point to another, the sun gradually moved away from the center of where I lay. How long I had been there I had no way of knowing. But, the real question was why, and how I had gotten there. Yet, in a way I didn't care. It was as if that place had bewitched me with its soothing charms. A gentle wind grazed my brow, relieving it from sweat. Cracks of thunder rumbled the earth beneath me with vibrations of jarring that was more like a cradle rocking a babe to sleep than a terrifying thunderstorm: And the flashes of white light on and off, framing a picturesque masterpiece to the eye with each strike. The air around me was as thick as the contents of some broth or stew, with flakes of meat and vegetables that escaped the straining process floating about. I

can only compare it to lying at the bottom of a pond where every available space (between myself and the objects around me) was saturated with some bleak vapor of a smoky gray hue. The child in play who with earnest exhausts himself in search of that connection between what he sees and what he'd like to do with all of it was how I felt. What lay before me was like the most impressive dollhouse, gigantic and expansive. It was a picture book with paper fields and mountains and storms popping out of the pages of make-believe. It was everything I had dreamed or perhaps more, if I could only recall what dreams I had had. Under most circumstances the company of dark clouds promising a down-pour, the emptiness of vacant lands of sullen scenery would be cause for gloom and despair. But, there, at that time, I learned the secret of Being that I would learn later from Plotinus and Augustine and Parmenides. What is, is miraculous and full of life, and this is reality. The arteries of existence where coursed a river of blood so warm and thick, kissed me over and over again. Passionate kisses that awake those stale impressions we acquire from age. Stepping outside of myself (and time), I heard an infinite symphony as if for the first time from beginning to end, that now I suspect I had heard before. A melody comprised of notes, that were silence itself, arose within, of which the rests between notes and empty measures were the sounds down below and all around me. Through the sky, its clouds, its bottom-half of hills and valleys, I saw as through a pane of glass smeared with several coats of confusion, something quite familiar, and then it

vanished.

All of this was flooding my thoughts, robbing me of my desire to remember. I closed my eyes to try and undo the enchantment of my surroundings. But, all I could think of was that field of wind-blown grass down below, with every stem bowing towards the ground with a natural reverence. With my mind's eye, I saw nothing but the quaint little stream quietly making its way through the valley, effortlessly and with that peaceful serenity that is captured in every rustic painting of one. That canopy of mountains breaking the horizon was the only border I knew of, like a blue haze warring against the heavens. All was blank but this moment, as if my history was a cup of sugar that had been poured out and replaced with some novel additive.

Yet, clearly my knowledge was not newly born, like that of an infant's. I remembered countless arithmetic truths, such as two plus two equals four and five minus four being one. The fact that thunder followed lightning, that pain followed injury, that hunger followed deprivation, was to name only a few of my immediate inferences. And furthermore, I could imagine things that were not present at the time. I knew of any given species of animals and plants, despite their absence.

Soon, my thoughts gave way to more fundamental questions of my existence. Was I some astral being that materialized, some ethereal spirit whose hopes and aspirations grew so intense they, like the cosmic forces that birthed the universe, were drawn together, turned to a precipitation of flesh and poured

out into a foreign land? A soul now incarnate and equipped with an innate sense of its surroundings?

Or, maybe I was born into this world, like most, but in the course of some errand, robbed, beaten and consequently left with no memory of my life; save common sense. Whatever my situation, my knowledge of it was lost. I could go round and round in my head for an indefinite amount of time and still accomplish nothing. And yet, all the while I was deliberating, an undeveloped thought was nagging at me that I should get up from where I lay and simply start walking. I can't quite describe it, but I suspect that it must be something like what the seasoned traveler experiences right before leaving one place in search of another; exchanging the familiar for the foreign and exotic. Except with me it was in reverse. I wished to find my home, or my identity, and escape the unfamiliar. Though, I suspect that that 'wanderlust' operates the same in both situations.

I strained my eyes, gazing at the hills rising off in the distance and wondered if something beyond them would help me regain my memory: A landmark, a city or town, or a certain area or place I may have frequented before. A firm resolve to journey beyond them sprung up within me like a vernal renewal. With a hint of trepidation, I moved my limbs, which I initially presumed would not function properly, save with great effort and as if inebriated or of slumber. I pushed myself up from the ground, my hand sinking into the soft earth, stumbled and fell back

down. Fortunately, the fall was more the result of imbalance than strength of limb, so that, a second attempt proved successful.

Once on my feet, I stood with dizziness for a moment, rocking back and forth. And yet, I overcame this by posturing my right leg, bending it back behind me. From my new position, I stared out and took in all I could which was really no more than I saw before. A fragrant aroma burst from a small grove of yellowish wildflowers and captured my attention. I froze as a woodland creature freezes in the presence of a bright light, though just for a moment. I wasn't about to be taken in again by the aesthetic anesthesia of what had been hindering me all along. I needed to leave in route of home, wherever that maybe. I needed to learn who I was. And that was just what I was going to do.

Chapter 2.

With some difficulty I tread down the hill. It was harder than it looked, for from its first appearance I thought I could simply walk straight down. But, as it turned out, I had to position my body to the side in the same manner as a mountain goat in order to make the journey down. Lightning still continued etching trails of light upon the horizon, cracking as if an otherworldly whip was being wielded; cracking like an egg shell the heavens that seemed to be ripped apart by a hairline crack outside of which a burning desire shone through.

The thunder's frequency diminished as the storm moved away in an easterly direction (easterly under the assumption I was heading north). And, all the while I doubt I could count a dozen raindrops that fell upon me. It was a dry storm where if any rain were present it was diffused in the mist that masked the canyon

as if it were a translucent forest.

On reaching the valley floor and leaving the steepness of the hill, it was like having a weight lifted from my legs. I moved ahead with far greater ease even increasing my pace to a healthy jog for a moment and then slowing back to a moderate walk. With grass up to my knees, I whisked through brush and found my way to the stream that parted the valley and knelt down. I plunged both hands into the water. It was refreshingly cold. And, cupping my hands, I scooped up as much as I could and drank over and over again from it. Afterwards, I looked into the waters where amidst the thousands of ripples I saw my reflection for the first time. I looked nothing like I thought I should. For my countenance I immediately characterized as that of a dark, mysterious figure, with deep set eyes of dark brown, a long face bereft of any conspicuous shape, a long large nose and a small thin pair of lips. In short, a face that resembled the archetype of an archaic brute, not as sophisticated as I would have expected myself to look; or that my self-reflection would have suggested.

Spotting a pass that divided the walls of the canyon, which had been blocked from my view atop the hill, I stood up from the bank and waded across the stream. At its deepest, it rose no higher than my waist. And being that I moved through a calm pool in the rapids, there was really no current I had to resist, making it through without once slipping on the slimy rocks that

lined its bottom.

Once out of the water, I shook like a wet dog and continued towards the pass. I could see where the haze that sunk into the canyon was separated from the clear air that soaked the rolling hills outside, though I could only see partly what was beyond the towering monuments of earth and grass. One of the slopes that served as the right half of the pass ran along a flat ridge that abruptly came to a point on top. Past the crest it smoothed out into a plateau. And where the land between its vertical and horizontal lines met, brought to mind some steeple or tower's perch. For some reason, I would have loved to scale the cliff and stand from that narrow precipice. I could feel the rush of panic mixed with excitement as if I had been there. And perhaps if I had climbed it, it would have only let me down. For how I imagined it, no actual climb could have provided what I would have liked to have seen. Nonetheless, the challenge of crawling up the hill like a bug, crouched down embracing the hill with animated repose, gripping handfuls of weeds as I pulled my way up it, would have been as close to my daydream as I could've come. But I hadn't an interest in seriously going through with it, so I pressed on through the opening.

Beyond the valley, the land opened up like a folded piece of paper that is spread out over a study desk. The pass led me to a path that was formed by the adjoining of two sets of hills rising and falling in the distance no more than twenty feet at their highest. And just as I stepped out of the valley, with a

miraculous gesture, the clouds dispersed like darkness in the morning. It glazed the tips of homogeneous weeds with a glow of a million fires. An ocean-like meadow of waves was frozen in time, with thoughtless waters that gave birth to what I beheld must have been its newly developed imagination.

A swift breeze cut across the meadow and met me on the path. It splashed me with seeds of grass it had gathered on its journey. I hadn't taken notice of the tiny particles that in number took flight and formed an assortment of shapes, but soon I found a reason to. They floated about like unnatural specters with no peculiarity to note, until out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of the most fantastic thing. I saw one of these wind-swept clouds of seeds take the shape of a person, or the shadow of a person. Initially I couldn't tell which was the case. I thought it was just a trick of the mind until the brief visage was accompanied by a voice. It sounded as what I can only describe as 'girlish', and I think it said, "Good Afternoon." Of course, as soon as I turned my head to spot the apparition, the wind had died down and the seeds just dropped to the ground. But, no sooner had it disappeared, another formed: And then another, and then another, all emerging from various sections of the meadow and all speaking. Some addressing me, however disintegrating before I had a chance to reply, while others were conversing with one another. The cacophony of voices was especially strange in that one of the speakers may have been in mid-sentence when they were cut off by a lull in the wind, consequently discouraging its continued composition. And I am not so sure that the personalities carried over into

each fresh batch of seed clouds created. I discerned in every airborne cluster a unique personality. The face of one figure I happened to notice, all the while comprised of tiny dots (the circumstance of which took some time to get used to), sported a gentle expression like that of a young girl following the strictest rules of etiquette. I couldn't hear what she said for her essence dissipated before I could ask her to repeat it.

From behind I heard the chattering of a voice, but I refused to turn and face the speaker. There was practically no spacing between its words to where it sounded like one droning note repeated without a rest and this thoroughly annoyed me. So I ignored it.

Just as the novelty of running into the unprecedented creatures was wearing off I was about to pick up my pace on the trail when I felt drawn to an area off the path in the meadow. For no reason whatsoever I felt compelled to reach this one specific location, being that it posed no danger and the task was of a benign nature. I crept through the tall grass that found its way up my pant's leg, tickling my knee. I giggled as a small boy who plays tag does when playfully tapped on the shoulder. Upon reaching my destination, I stopped to look around. I saw nothing worth mentioning. The region was a level spot planted on the top of a small hill. And I would have said nothing about the incident had nothing happened. The wind kicked up something fierce. Turning in on itself, it spun around twirling as if of the skill of a ballerina. Collecting debris in the course of its

revolutions, it took the shape of a large ball, and then stretched lengthways losing its bulge. Afterwards, it was sketched into the outline of a beautiful woman. What I first noticed that confirmed this was her eyes. They were large and round, popping out from her face as if they wished to get at all of what they saw. Her face was small with those delicate features that would undoubtedly lead one to believe that she was a real lady. Evidently it was a sustained wind that held her body together since she remained for much longer than any of the others had. While scanning the meadow, she caught sight of me and we locked eyes together. She stared into the tearing windows of my soul with an indescribable tenderness. Had she been able to touch me, I believe she would have. Quite frankly, she did and I would have broken the silence right then and there had she not beaten me to it.

"Hello." She said. Hello! The most glorious word! I took a deep breath and gulped.

"Hello." I replied.

"Who are you?" She asked me.

"I'm afraid I can't answer that." I said. "For you see, I don't know."

With that, she covered her mouth with one of her hands as if to cough, but instead she laughed.

"Don't know who you are, you say?" She said as she pulled herself together.

"I'm sorry I laughed at you. I just didn't expect you to say that because it simply doesn't make any sense. 'Not know who you are?' How can one not know who one is?"

"By forgetting one's past." I said.

"Ah, what's past is passed. There's but one thing that continues from there to here, that's you."

"But, how can I know 'me' without looking back at what was?"

"Look? All one can know of one's self is what one thinks and feels. You and you alone can know that."

"Well, that's true, but I only know a part of 'me'"

"A part of you?" She said, puzzled. "One's self is not something that is divisible. It is either all or nothing."

I could see that this line of reasoning was getting me no where. So, I tried a different approach.

“What I meant to say is that I can’t remember many important facts about my past, such as, where I came from, what others called me, and things like that.”

“You couldn’t have been alive that long as to acquire that many facts about yourself ‘to’ remember.” She said.

Just then, it hit me as to whom I was speaking with. I had to keep in mind what sort of creature I had befriended. In all the excitement of speaking with that remarkably astute and eloquent swirling cloud, the reality of her situation had escaped my attention. I had witnessed her birth and most likely would her death.

“Your right.” I submitted. “What more could I know than I already do of myself.”

She reaffirmed what I said with a smile that was more pleasant than a warm dry afternoon and replied, “Nothing of course. For you know what the secret of knowing is?”

“I didn’t know there was a secret to it.”

“Oh yes. It’s most wonderful. It is the same thing that holds me together, and I suspect what holds you together as well.”

“What is that?”

“It is the tear drop.”

"The tear drop?" I said, puzzled.

"Yes. For as you know, or should know, the invisible waters that fill the sky, the air, the earth, and everything else are held in place by them. And we are ripples that move about like fishes in them. But, when the glory of this ocean subsides for just that brief moment when we are forced to move from one spot to another, a sadness overtakes us and we weep ourselves out of it and into the here until our sadness here brings us back there."

"But, how are we to know any of this? How do you know any of this?"

"Through the drops of it that come when we are sad."

"Are you sad now?"

"Yes."

"And yet am I not sad? I know nothing about myself, forgetting who I am as a person. Is that not sad enough?"

"No. It is the things we know that make us sad, not the things we don't know. I think you just need to find that tear drop and everything will be made clear."

"Where can I find it? And whose is it?"

“Beyond that wood that lies to the south, beyond the world where you can venture. There you will find it. It is mine. I left it there years ago before I was”

This made no sense to me at all. How was I to find something that was beyond my ability to venture to? And even more, how was I to find a tear drop? They only keep their shape when they fall. Once they find a surface to rest upon they lose their shape and seep into the soil, into a creek or pond or into the air as they dissipate. After all, how could she have been there then when she is here now? But for some reason I felt her whisper to me and it seemed she said that she was in the wind, only expressing herself in the seeds.

But enough of that for now for the fact that at any moment this incredibly lovely lady would disappear forever inspired me to dispense with formalities, forget my manners and get to the point, up front about it; be frank about how I felt. I told her she was beautiful. She chuckled as if to blush, wearing a delighted grin as a result. She then asked me, “Would you say.” She hesitated. “That you love me?”

I immediately answered her question. But, before I tell the reader what I said, it is important to explain why it is I said what I said. From the first moment I saw her, I had developed a gnawing sensation in the pit of my stomach that gradually increased in intensity with every motion of her delicate limbs poised with elegance, with every word she poured that was a

river under which I couldn't catch my breath. She changed the world with every laugh, transforming all that was sad and pitiful in it, draped in the shadow of her presence.

All the while I fought off a powerful urge to take her in my arms and embrace her; a maneuver I knew would prove fatal to her short life. I believe that this impulse was due, in part, to an unusual longing to possess her. In every action she engaged, I suffered the pain of not owning it with her. I ached for her. For her breath to be mine, without which in the course of breathing I inhaled only emptiness. It was amazing how quickly I was infected with such a profound infatuation with someone I had just met: Though, not too amazing. I had just met myself only a few hours ago.

I told her I loved her. Of course I loved her. How could I not? How could I ignore that singular force which had it not been for her wanting me to stand, I would have been thrown down to the ground and left for dead.

But while I spoke, I perceived the wind's strength in her waning. I realized that at any moment she would be gone. I could do nothing except watch as she would vanish right in front of me, taking with her an awakened passion I had hitherto disregarded as some useless seed waiting to grow within me.

I reached for her hand, in vain.

"No my Love, don't go!" I said.

She combed her hand through my hair sprinkling crumbs of her composition upon it. Smiling with a look of consolation, she graced me with a countenance reminiscent of a mother who reassures her frightened child with calm, relaxed gestures.

"I love you too!" She said with absolute resolve.

I shook loose the tears from my eyes, trembling. All I could do was feign holding her. In the same manner as we were acquainted, we were to say fair well. I gazed into her airy eyes as she smiled one last time with a faint whisper drawn from her lips, "Oh, my Love." And then she scattered.

I gently bent down and retrieved a handful of what was left. It was a lifeless batch. I sat and wept while all around me men and women of the meadow arose to only be dispatched a moment later. In the presence of such a multitude of persons, I was alone. My lady of the meadow was gone and I knew I could never be the same even if I would discover my identity. Only through finding her tear drop could I be close to her and perhaps discover who I was.

Chapter 3

I must have been kneeling in the grass for hours, as that, the fiery yellow sun had faded in the distant sky to a cool red disc. Against all hope I had waited to see if my lady of the meadow would reappear, knowing that it was highly unlikely that she would. And though time does not heal all wounds-in truth I find it has little to do with the healing process-it certainly presents us with other items of thought. Presently, I was overcome with a longing for home, wherever that may be. My original plan of finding my identity was renewed. I thought of those pet dogs that, while lacking in understanding, were moved by instinct to and familiarity in finding their way home when lost. Maybe I too could benefit from this providential feature nature is graced with. So, I got up from where I sat and moved towards the forest.

Finding a large gap in the trees where a path led, I entered the woods. It was dark but not so dark so that I couldn't see. The sky outside the forest was still red. The day was not yet through though I anticipated night soon. It was a strange thing that the amnesia, being as thorough as it was, had knocked the memory of 'night' out of me, but not the 'sense' of it. For I knew the day changed into night just as a person changes into a different set of clothes, but that was the whole of it. Night was a mere word to me. And so in scanning the interior of the woods I spotted an area of ground hidden in the shadow of its tree towering above it. "That's what night must be like," I thought to myself. The hue of the darkest light stretching from land to sky and back again. Calming the nerves by veiling what grabs one's attention with a brilliant presence. A glow instead of a shine. At peace with what the eyes have not known in the day.

As I moved along the trail, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I jerked my head around to see who it was but there was no one there. And then another tap, and another, and then one on the top of my head. By this time I realized it was raining. But, instead of seeking shelter, I continued on in what appeared to be a light down pour. I listened to the gentle 'tap-tap' of the raindrops coming to rest on the leaves of trees. They coated the vegetation with a refreshing spray. I heard the faint chorus of a song rising with the mist, in between splashes.

With the sprinkle came the wind. And so I was in a playful mood and engaged a game of hide and go seek with the wind that sporadically roared through the wood, rustling up leaves in certain places and in certain degrees. It caught me once or twice behind a tree and in between a pair of bushes, but I got the best of him in the end. My first victorious round was my last, and so I quit while I was ahead.

Before long, the pleasant drips of rain ceased leaving the air stale and musty. The ground that was soggy squished underfoot slurping with every step. And yet the bird's contagiously joyous chirruping, that danced from tree to tree, entertained me enough. The conditions weren't that bad being that I was in the company of such small wonders. And the small wonders grew to amazement when, looking ahead at the trail, I saw that a soft glow of light was coming from behind me. I turned, but when I did so, I saw nothing. Instead the light's source shifted to where it was beaming from the position I then stood. Turning once again in a counter revolution the same thing happened. The light shone from behind me as I gazed at the vacant space in front of me.

By this time my curiosity was gone and I had resolved to continue in spite of the marvel when I heard a series of giggles echo through the wood from where the light shone. I stopped and as abrupt as I froze so to went the laughter. Boldly I spoke into the air as if to address it.

"Whose there?"

A voice from behind me replied, "Why are you trying to find me? If you want to know who I am, it won't do you any good to know where I am."

This made me feel most uncomfortable talking to someone that was behind me, so I continued to turn around to only hear the voice coming up from my back.

Frustrated, I shouted, "Will you stop toying with me and face me!"

"I'm not toying with you. You're the one doing that yourself by twirling about like a foolish little whirlpool. I'm sorry I laughed at you before, I just..."

The voice infuriated me so, as that I was both embarrassed and annoyed, that I picked up a long stick and swung it in all directions.

"I'll thrash you good if you do not come out and face me."

"I would if I could," the voice said. "But as things are I can't."

"What do you mean? Is there something wrong with you?"

"No."

"Do you wish to conceal your appearance for any reason?"

"No."

"Then what is it?"

"Nothing."

"Then why can't I find you?"

"You just can not."

"You must be somewhere for me to see."

"I am not."

"You are no where then?" I said as that this made no sense to me at all.

"I am not nowhere."

"Well, you must be in either the one or the other."

"Must I? That is only under the assumption that both conditions exhaust all possibilities. But, I suspect that when you say somewhere you really mean somewhere 'you' can see."

"What other places are there?" I asked. "Every place is potentially seen."

"There is no such thing as potentially. Either it is or it isn't. Not all places can be seen, but all things seen are places. I suppose you've never dreamt of me. And that is why you can't see me."

Ignoring this unusual assertion of my dreaming of him, I said, "Well, if you are not nowhere and not somewhere I can see, then where are you?"

"The question is not so much where I am, but when I am. Have you not considered my whenabouts in all of your preoccupation with my whereabouts?"

This puzzled me more than anything I'd heard thus far. "Your whenabouts? There's no question as to 'when' you are. You are now."

"What do you mean by 'now'?"

"The present. You know, not the past, not the future...the point where your speaking meets my hearing it. For if it had been yesterday you spoke those words I would not have heard them."

I stopped for a moment to think and thought up a most philosophical reply. "It is the intersection of intended actions meeting real ones. It is the materialization of future intentions

and the source of those traces we call memories. It's what 'is' the case. It's, literally speaking, what 'is'."

"So you don't think one can hear what was or what will be?"
The voice asked.

"No. It is what is called memory. The past is merely recollections of what was for what is going on now in the mind."

"In the mind? What is outside the mind?"

"What's real. What's now."

"And how is it you've come to know this?"

"By reasoning."

"And where is this accomplished?"

"In the mind."

"I see." The voice said analytically. "So you are telling me that the past doesn't exist because it exists somewhere that is filled with unreal things. The same place that produces reason which informs you of what is real and what is not."

I had no answer for this. And I had the feeling I never would nor would anyone else for that matter. It brought to mind the

issue of faith. Of course I didn't have to believe that there was a voice with no body speaking to me, that fact made itself evident. Rather I had to believe as to how it was happening. For now, I had to assume that voices could simply be produced without throats and mouths for the meantime. Otherwise, my curiosity would devour my practicality. Instead of figuring it out, I had to figure this fellow 'in' to my journey. I had to drill him for information and perhaps direction. He seemed most sensible in spite of his invisibility. I was certain that he could help me. Though he was insistent on making his point known, for, just as I conceded one needn't have a body to produce sound, he corrected me further.

"Why do you assume I have no body?"

"Because I don't see one." I said.

"Why must a body be seen? I could simply be moving too fast to be seen or composed of a substance that does not reflect your light."

I confused by this and it made me think, 'Your light.' What does that mean? I don't own light. Light is common to all and yet owned by none. I pressed him on this and he admitted that no one owned light, but that what he meant was that the light I was used to seeing was different than other sorts. That in fact there were different types, such as, what many call 'light of conscience' or 'light of knowledge'. So ultimately what we call

metaphors are really similarities between one type of thing and another.

I asked him his name and he said 'Before'. What a strange name Before, I thought. But I wasn't about to ask him its origin. I'd had about enough of his philosophy.

"What's yours?" He politely asked.

"I don't know."

"Why not?"

"Well, it seems that I have lost my memory."

"Oh, then I should help you find it."

"I wish you could."

"It couldn't be that hard. Memories are easy to find."

"Not mine. I've tried, believe me I've tried, but they're lost."

From that moment I heard nothing but silence. I beckoned him to speak but he didn't. Instead, I heard the sound of scratching as if one were rubbing two pieces of rough fabric together. It got louder then quieter until it abruptly stopped as if the stain that one had been trying to rub out of the material was gone.

But then it started up again: Louder, faster, slower then stopping and then starting. This continued for several minutes until the cyclical process that moved from silence to vicious rubbing remained silent.

Suddenly, the voice returned with, "I think I've found it."

"What?" I queried.

"Your memory."

I gave a smirk. "You can't be serious."

"I can and I am." I'm holding it right now."

"You can't be holding..."

I was about to finish the sentence when I stopped short of what I was going to say. It wasn't worth it to question his claim. Maybe he did have it. Who knows? Certainly not me. If I couldn't figure out 'who' I was, it is possible I was mistaken as to the nature of things such as certain features of logic, the physical universe and other things.

Before then began to describe what he saw of what was supposed to be my memory. Words so wondrous came forth. All describing places, though I'm convinced I'd never been to or seen, nevertheless kindled some smoldering wick with a soft

blowing deep in my chest, bringing forth a flame; like an ancient fire burning earlier than the past could tell. It is as if every word he spoke was in another language, but the tone with which he spoke it was like a recitation of unrhymed poetry. Like nursery rhymes with no meaning save that they sounded so delightful one couldn't help but listen. The model of the child and his teacher who reads books to him that he can't understand yet insists she continue is a perfect analogy. I didn't want him to stop telling the story of what he said was my life up until that point on the hill, not only could I not recall the events he described, I couldn't even discern a consistent theme or pattern. And what's more, everything and everyone that made up the story was not only unfamiliar but incomprehensible. He used words that for those of the story I couldn't understand. It would seem that if it were my memories, it would all come back to me like the recollecting of what one had known before, as in Plato's Meno with the slave boy.

If anything I'd learned of my past, if indeed what he said to me was just that, it had something wonderful about it even though I couldn't say what made it so. And as he finished telling me my tale, he paused and said,

"And now you have your memory back."

"My memory back?" I said with an air of contempt. "I didn't understand a word you said."

“Yes you did. I know you did. I saw your face when you heard it. You acted as if what was lost was found and restored.”

“I enjoyed the telling of the story for some reason. I can’t recall what happened in it. It sounded nice. What it was about, the characters and such comprising it all was hidden from my mind. It’s all blurry, like a dream dreamt long ago and one struggles to remember. It is true that it moved me, but how and why I can’t say.”

“Ah, but the truest memories are the least memorable: Its lies that we know the best. But, when what has happened to us is presented unfiltered and without pretension, it must appear unfamiliar in thought but so intimate to our hearts.”

And so it was with Before, I’d gained more afterward than previously had for he made it clear he was pressed for time, a situation I thought ironic and had to go. I asked if I could come along with him to wherever he was going since I couldn’t know anymore about where I was to go than he. But he declined on the grounds that I had my way to go and he had his, reminding me of what he’d shared of my memory with him. I only said “of course” when really I was no surer of where to go than before I’d met Before.

Chapter 4

No sooner had he left I found myself in a sudden and most unexpected predicament; I was lost. It happened sometime in the conversation with my elusive friend. A displaced remark here and an intellectual struggle there led me away from my previous direction. It wasn't as though I had any real plans on where I was to go. Perhaps just a subtle inclination or intuition, like one who consults the contents of a cup of tea or the entrails of a slaughtered animal for guidance. Mine was less mystical and more gut.

The warm, red glow of the sky shown through the tips of trees and opened up. I walked into a large field that spread apart into a wide pool of grass, waving in the wind. It tapered into

what appeared to be a road of sorts, fading into the distance. From this road I saw a faint light, floating as it were, just above the ground. It was swinging back and forth and coming closer to where I was. Presently, I noticed a hand wielding an apparatus from which the light was shining. It was a lantern and I saw that a man was walking in my direction. I couldn't see him clearly enough to discern his attentions but I heard the rustling of grass under foot. Steadily, he made his way towards me. About halfway the length of the field he stopped. Raising his lantern at eye level, stretching it towards me, he gazed at me. As if studying my identity, he stood motionless, staring at me. With one unexpected hail he bellowed out, "Hay ho, who goes there?"

By this time I'd seen him well enough to examine his disposition. No doubt he was suspicious with leering eyes and arms arched behind him as if to pounce upon me. Though he looked wholesome enough, he was dressed with a rustic wardrobe of overalls, a floppy hat and sandals.

I answered back, "A weary traveler." This had no effect on his attitude and only irritated him more.

He tightened his fist and gritting his teeth he said, "Travel somewhere else. Go around the other side of the forest. You are not welcome in these parts night person."

This title puzzled me and I inquired as to what he meant but he was in no mood for explanations. Instead he repeated his demand with an equal level of ferocity. And just as I was fulfilling his request he made a most unprecedented maneuver. He rushed at me with a rock in his hand and threw it to the side of me. I instinctively swung my head around to see where it landed. My reactions seemed to confirm something in that it encouraged yet another peculiar act by the stranger. For once again he advanced towards me but this time in a whole different way. I perceived him to be more relaxed and affable. He raised his lantern shining it directly into my face and stared into my eyes. He then mumbled to himself something about the color of my eyes, which I didn't hear well enough to repeat. Lowering his lantern he came within an arm's distance and spoke.

"I had to make sure that you weren't one of them."

"You mean the night people?" Trying to catch on.

"Exactly, you can't be too careful with them hideous beasts. They don't come around here much."

"I should say not. If I were treated in such a way, I wouldn't stick around either."

"You don't understand. It's nothing like that. They don't comprehend offense, at least not like that. But still I wouldn't

care if I had. But enough of that! Exactly what are you doing here?"

"Trying to find my home, where I belong."

The farmer was less inquisitive than any other I'd met. He was satisfied with the answer, though when he had asked me my name, a general answer wouldn't suffice. So I gave him an alias in order to forgo the long process of explaining myself. If he'd known who I was, he would have said something and my amnesia would have ended. No, I had resolved to pretend as though I'd known where I was going and this was the quickest way back there.

Yet, in my concealment I found myself striking a conversation with the stoic bumpkin. I asked where he lived and without holding back a thing he gave the location of his farm from our position. From what I gathered it was a modest plot of land but with enough to sustain a reasonably sized family with some to spare for trade and feed storage. He went over the whole of his property which consisted of a fishing pond, a stream that ran behind his barn where a waterwheel was turned by its current day and night, fields of wheat and corn that lay on the other side of the house and all the woods that ran around it. He spoke of the latter with a reverential suspicion that one would usually only suspect from ancient peoples or archaic tribes. This interested most but he spent little time on the subject. He seemed more interested in the consistency of his crops and the

choice condition of his livestock. Every fall he boasted of being able to set his calendar to the pumpkins ripening. And, his cattle though small in number, in slaughtering only one, would feed his family for a whole year. The meat was lean and tender, all of which he contributed to the grasslands of the meadow nestled between a company of rolling hills.

One more item of conversation that piqued my interest was that of his daily hike to a spot he referred to as 'Chimney Rock'. Evidently it was a twin pair of spires that rose alongside a high plateau. He would race up the forested hill to get to the top where the crest sat near the peak of the spire's tip. In fact, once he remarked that since the hilltop sits within a few feet of the rock spire, he recklessly jumped to the flat knoll to the sharp cliff in a fit of ecstatic boldness. Though the act was far from being thought out and could easily have proved fatal, nevertheless, he was proud of the feat. It is a known fact that the more we act out of instinct and thoughtless endeavor the more we accomplish what we are most proud; or at least on a social level. But in the quiet times of our lives we rarely care for such things. Instead, we silently boast of what was least in our control, almost like a spectator watching the natural world's processes unfold. Except we see ourselves as a part of it; the branches of trees dancing to the inaudible tune of a breeze or the sky of clouds floating by like a lifetime of bliss and then we dance to its tune and move to its rhythm and there, just as a man beholds himself in a mirror, we feel the chords of our will

tighten and move and choose and be. And this we can say we'd been proud to have been a part of.

It was time for me to move on, at least I felt it was, and I told the farmer. However, he insisted I visit his home and stay there with him until I was properly rested for the long journey I had ahead of me and I agreed. I was getting most tired and could use a serious respite, a good meal and some conversation with others. All the while he assured me that his home wasn't too far and went on to explain the very same things he had before about his farm. And pretending as though he hadn't mentioned them, I indulged him. There is just something about listening to another's account of themselves in spite of its continued repetition. Each telling brings with it something that transcends the mere information provided. This only proved to me that words mean so much more than we think they represent. No theory of language will ever be capable of capturing its essence anymore than one can cup their hands in a river and in scooping up a handful of water is fooled into thinking they've grasped a river. The air of speech is breathed in and exhaled; like a library book that we borrow, we can never own it.

He led me through the field to a shallow dip in the land where a parting of the woods opened into a broad path. We took to it with a steady stride. And all the while we marched along it, the sky remained red and orange as if resisting the falling twilight. And it remained so for an unnaturally long time. I had planned on suggesting that we make haste to the farmer's home for fear

of traveling in the dark. But as it turned out there was little chance of that happening. This unexplained phenomenon forced me to ask the farmer why the night would not come.

"Come? Where would it come from? The world behind the clouds is like the land all around us. It is in one place and one place alone. You must go to it, not wait for it to come to you."

"I'd always thought just the opposite; that day followed night in all places."

"Perhaps in some but not here."

"So, it always looks like this here?"

"Yes."

"Is there a place of night then?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

The farmer pointed off in a direction with his head bowed in disinterest.

"And that is where a people live who never see daylight?"

"They never see it there."

"So they have to go somewhere else, like here?"

"Exactly, and that is why we must keep them away."

"But why?"

"Because they don't belong. They're strange folk. You see, every once in a while one strays from their land and ventures to ours. And it wouldn't be so bad, but something happens when they reach our sunlit land. Because they are so accustomed to the dark that when their eyes feel the warmth of a golden sky it's the same effect a large meal has on the starved, their stomachs can't handle it and they vomit it up. In this case, a madness overtakes them."

"Have you seen such a madness?"

"Once and I will never forget it."

"What happened?"

My question was echoed with a harsh silence. So I dropped the subject with the same level of abruptness. Instead I further probed the farmer on the subject of farming and his plot of land, which he seemed more than happy to discuss. Although I was incredibly curious to learn more of his encounter with the

strange darkland creatures. I was more interested in his enthusiasm about what he said as opposed to what he spoke about.

It wasn't long before we made it to the farmer's estate. It was gated by a long row of trees extending in opposite directions and plunging into valleys on both sides. The road that led through was blocked by a wooden fence simply fastened to a post by a strand of wire. The farmer skillfully unfastened the wire, pulled it through the lock and swung it open. We advanced through the gate with a steady postured march as if we were the remnant of some battered returning army. The boughs of the trees creaked under the weight of the pressing wind. It found its way between each branch and twig leading into the open, where lay the borders of the farmer's field. And indeed he didn't exaggerate for it was just as majestic as described though its size was less than I'd imagined. But I suppose the size of importance the farmer gave to it was translated by his speech into his description of it.

The field sloped from a plateau and gently fell into a cozy valley where lay the farmer's house. Sitting next to it was a barn, a small windmill and a pond which was the run-off of a deep stream dividing the plot of land. As we approached, two young children dashed out of the house and rushed over to the farmer, all the while hollering about "sweets" and "goodies." To which the farmer reached into his pockets producing a pair of squares,

throwing them into the air as they grabbed upward until they caught them.

At the bank of the pond, two youths were lounging on their bellies with fishing poles. One had his legs bent back with them pointing upward while the other had them comfortably stretched out. The pair of poles looked like two reeds rising from the bank with a pair of strings extending into the water. Just as we were upon the youths, the farmer whispered something to one of them and the boy ran into the house. The farmer then asked me to wait there for a moment as that he had to speak with his wife and excused himself, leaving me to stand next to the one boy that was left. Feeling a bit awkward, I asked him if he was having any luck.

“Not much.” He said. “I think the fish are wising up.”

I chuckled and told him perhaps he should try another section of the pond, for perhaps he would be dealing with either a less intelligent group or at least some that had not caught on.

“No good, the fishes swim around the pond, they’re well mixed. Besides fish talk you know.”

“No, I didn’t know.”

“Yes. And I am sure that information has been shared already.”

"I should imagine so."

And just as I made the remark, something struck me as peculiar. For I looked up as I was speaking and remembered that in that place there was no night sky. And consequently no stars. So I questioned the youth on his knowledge of them.

"I've seen them before." He said.

Surprised by this I asked, "But where?"

"Oh, a couple of times. Father doesn't know this but I've visited the darklands many times."

"Ah, you have." I replied as if interested but morally indifferent.

"Yes. The stars are the best part about going there. They are so smart, but not puffed up at all."

"Smart eh? Well how would you know that?"

"Well they didn't come out and tell me, that would make them arrogant and I hate arrogance. No, I gathered they were by how much they knew."

"You're not suggesting that you've spoken with the stars?"

"That's exactly what I am saying."

And with that I'd had quite enough. I'd humored the boy until my patience ran out. I wasn't angry or annoyed, but simply tired of pretending as though I believed him so my candor led me to tell him he must have been mistaken. Perhaps a dream, a fantasy so lucid and desirable he'd thought it was real; like a person who thinks they hear a voice when it is only the wind. Or one who thinks they see a creature when it is really a stack of things piled on top of each other.

I had to ask him how it was he heard the stars talk. But he said he had no idea how only that they had talked to him. And yet why it was that only he had heard them was a question that made no sense to the boy at all. In fact, it only inspired him to ask,

"Am I the only one they've spoken with?"

Perhaps he wasn't. I for one was in no position to that question. However, I was curious what the stars had to say. And I shouldn't have been surprised to that what began with their introducing themselves to the boy and he to them would lead to the telling of their story of how they came to be as they were. For every being in existence, that is conscious and sentient, even stars, have a story about who they are.

The first thing that puzzled the boy about the stars was how different they were from him. They had no arms, legs, or faces

but only bright lights shining in the dark. But the stars found this observation absurd. Of course they had all of those things. He just couldn't see them for it was too dark. One of them explained. Long ago, the dark of the heavens was not an infinite blanket that covered the sky, but was diffused in shadows here and there, behind all that was seen. Above, as below sat forests and fields and cities and towns, all uniquely heavenly. And they the stars inhabit this world visible to themselves and once to those down below. And once the stars' light had shone brighter from without than from within. However, being that their residence was so elevated, they mistook their own light from that which came from without. So much so that their illumination grew and grew. And then something happened. The light from without diminished increasingly and gradually every night until day overtook night with clouds and sun and sky being brighter than the stars that came after them. The stars felt that God merely turned out the light so those down below couldn't see their pride. And so the stars being so bright from within, prevents us from seeing who they really are.

But just as the boy was talking about the stars whom he'd met and admired, the farmer came rushing up to the pond out of breath.

"Hurry! Come! Your mother is...she's dead!"

Chapter 5

When we heard the farmer's news we rushed back with him to the house. The door stood wide open as we ran through it and found her lying on the ground. But what was particularly strange about the scene was the way in which she lay on the ground. For if she had collapsed and died it would seem that she would have landed haphazardly, an arm lying this way, the other in a non-symmetric manner, her legs spilled across the floor like a dropped glass of milk. Yet, the woman I saw was lying on her side in a partial fetal position, her hands pressed together as if in prayer tucked underneath her head. It looked as if she had simply curled up on the floor and fell asleep.

"Son, get a blanket from our room." Commanded the farmer.

The boy obeyed, returning with a folded up blanket.

"Here." The farmer took it from the boy, unfolded the cover and spread it over her body. Then, he rolled the sleeping beauty over and back again to where her body was covered and neatly tucked within the blanket.

"Here, help me."

The farmer said to the boy as he slipped his hand under her head and the boy likewise under her feet. Lifting her up, they carried her off into another room.

I must say I was reluctant to follow them but did so anyway. I was arrested by an irresistible curiosity. For the very contrived position of the farmer's wife's body and his indifferent composure which was more ceremonial than sentimental in how he reacted to what was happening led me into the other room. No tears were shed.

Once there I saw the glowing orbs of countless candles situated throughout the room. Some sitting on the dresser, some on the floor, but most sat atop and around the bed where they laid her. The farmer leaned over the wrapped lady and carefully pulled the part of the blanket covering her face away. And then, he stepped back and stood to the side of the bed. He bowed his head for a moment and then tapping his son on the shoulder turned to leave the room.

Naturally I followed them. But after that moment there was silence. And not just for a period but for the remainder of, if I can call it this, 'that' day. And here I must remark that the tracking of time was incredibly difficult. The only way it was even possible was in the observation of the family's 'daily' routine. And this was hard to tell since the first and only experience I had of it was on the heels of tragedy.

What felt like hours passed and then I heard the clanking of forks, spoons and other kitchen utensils. I turned and saw the farmer and his children sitting in the adjacent room at a table. He looked over at me with an expression of invitation and still no words were spoken. I sat down at an empty chair where a plate was set in front of me. The dinner was excellent in spite of the overwhelming grief I felt all around me. The family's heads were bowed as they gloomily ate and ate their portions with an elegant sadness. The simple meal was like a mythical epoch of inspiring, yet visceral, tragedy. I longed to weep but not one tear came. The silence stole my cries before they precipitated.

After dinner, again I was led without words. First, the farmer directed me to the living room where the family lounged with leisure activities; the daughter sewed, the sons whittled at blocks of wood and the farmer sat reading a bound in crude animal skins. And still not a word was uttered. Had I been of a rude nature I would have left right then and there, but that was simply not me. I was held by a strong sense of etiquette and manners.

A great poet and writer once said that most people live a life of quiet desperation and the assumption is that this is an undesirable state. If this is only partially true, I'd experienced the whole of it in the family that stood before me. To say the scene was lugubrious or even depressing was an understatement. Each one of them blew a thousand sighs with

each stroke of the needle, knife and pen. For I'd heard that one can be in an unceasing state of drudgery but I hadn't witnessed such a thing until then; and I hope I never do again.

After this, as it appeared the 'evening' was upon us, the farmer got up from his position, gently laid his book down on the chair and bid me with gestures to follow him into another room. It was right next to the room where his wife's body lay (separated by something neither living nor dead-a thin wall). Had I not been so tired in that I barely managed to stagger into the room, I would have been incredibly uncomfortable over its morbidity. However, I scarcely remember observing the room I was to sleep in for the softness of the pillow was the last memory I had of that 'day'.

The 'morning' was the sharp scent of meat frying in a skillet. I heard its pops and hisses accompanied by the 'tap' 'tap' of rain coming to rest on the thatched roof above me. I arose from my bed and walked over to a window where outside lay a thick forest. The trees swayed back and forth under the influence of a wind in perfect harmony. The clouds briefly shielded the red sky and gave the illusion of a grayness where white light pierced its covering with straight conical beams. The light's hue was novel and refreshing; though I suppose that these people would see what I welcomed as a bad omen.

And so went that day and the next. For three days they mourned the passing of the wife and mother whose pale

countenance haunted my residency there. No work, no play, only unassuming occupation. While I was left to observe their spiraling descent into despair. Though I suppose their grim dispositions were at a plateau immediately following her passing. I certainly couldn't blame them. Yet I hoped they would speak soon. The silence was maddening. In passing on through the halls of that ghostly manor I perceived a coldness in each interaction that chilled me to the bone

Though on the second day I found some relief from all of the gloom. For just as I was sitting down to recline for a moment in one of the chairs in the living rooms, the farmer walked past me out the door. I for curiosity's sake (and not my own). He advanced towards the woods and finding a path that went into it, he took to it with myself behind him. He took no notice of me even though undoubtedly he must have been aware of my presence. And I soon discovered why it was he walked it. The trail followed the sharp incline of a steep cliff, but not of rock but of wild colorful vegetation. Down below lay a stream that followed the fold. The path led downward, past the cliff and nearer the stream. In the shape of an oval it must have been since where it turned back around in the opposite direction it almost came to a point. And here it met the stream where a small waterfall fell.

The next day I followed the farmer again on this trek and this must have been his daily routine. Even after what happened on that day he walked the trail and I with him. For on the third day

something miraculous happened and, to me, unprecedented occurred. After walking the wood the farmer and I returned to the house. Upon entering I saw a light brighter than any I'd ever seen coming from the room where the farmer's wife lay. Right then and there I heard the first words spoken in the three loneliest days of my life.

"Father, its happening."

He rushed into the room, but I stayed behind for fear of intrusion, or just for fear, I can't tell. I heard the sound of a gasp for air and then a loud exhale and then the sound of creaking wood as of one were getting out of bed. And then I saw her emerge from the room as a queen of the gods. The farmer's wife was alive!

The family crowded around her bowing with a courtly reverence. She passed through them lightly pressing her hand on each one until she reached the living room where she walked up to the front window. Like a ghost but full of life, she stared out into the forest and up at the fading but never faded sun.

"She's always a little curious when she wakes up."

The farmer said as if he'd told me the punch line to a joke without sharing with me its premise. And yet it seemed that his wife whispered it to me as she walked past but I can't remember what it was she said. Thinking back now, I sense

that it had something to do with a flower that died in season and blossomed shortly following it. And indeed that is precisely how I saw her. Though I hadn't had the privilege of seeing her 'wither' except like a hunched over stem that had already fallen asleep for winter. And the farmer made it a point to explain to me as I witnessed this queen of a place situated between night and day bringing back light to the dawn of forest and farm.

"All things must die every once in a while. For it is the way of things. It is the wavering between what is seen and what is not, traveling back and forth from where what is brighter by her light and the source of it. Both places are one and yet their division is only one of what it means to live a life. For true beauty makes its appearance briefly and then hides from us in trials and once they are all over, then and only then can we see it without ever losing it again."

And this final thought the farmer shared was accompanied by a small tear that trailed down his leathery worn face; which was shared by all of us. I stayed with the family for sometime after that. But the period I spent afterwards made up for all of the sadness and sorrow I'd suffered in the three days prior. Great happiness wipes the slate clean of most bad memories, but not of what I was to gain and what I had lost. I once again thought of my mission to discover who I was and where I was from; to find her tear drop through which all would be made known to me-or at least I hoped. And I also thought once more of my lady of the meadow herself. The former was at least something

that could be remedied. But the latter was not. I could still smell the dry kernels of seed in the air like a perfume from far off. I'll never forget her and never cease to hope for her reconstitution somewhere, in some field where fantasies float about like flocks of birds overhead.

Chapter 6

I stayed with the family that I'd witnessed suffer the highest of sufferings and joys for a week or so. But once again I wasn't precisely sure how long, except through counting the times I'd followed the 'daily' cycles of eating and sleeping. It was a magnificent time I spent with them. They frequently would tell tales of long ago, about their ancestors. One evening around the fire, the farmer spoke of his family who'd walked from the meadows of seed to that land which was previously wilderness. He explained how they'd fought off the beasts that viciously prowled through the woods, conquering them and establishing a settlement where the land could be controlled and useful to them. But, in the story everything was hazy and unclear, and yet to the family they seemed to completely comprehend everything that was spoken. For instance, the farmer talked of how, in the meadow, the sky had grown too heavy, since there were no trees around to support it. It grew more and more

dense, settling closer to the land than ever before. As a result, his ancestors began to experience the sensation of being smothered. And this was the motivation for their moving. After he finished the story I questioned the farmer about this event, but I was not satisfied with his answer. For, all he said was “the sky must be maintained every now and then by the woods.”

If it hadn't been for my determination to find her, her tear, my identity, I would not have left. In many ways, they had been the closest of relation I suspect I could ever have had. The farmer's wife, whose voice resembled that of a distant bird that had found everything she'd flown through satisfactory, was probably the one who I feared parting from the most. I think it's because she reminded me of her, my lady of the meadow, but not so much that I fancied that she was her. No, this was impossible. Her only manifestation, in this world, was in the seeds. And yet I felt that, if I can remember correctly, there is a vehicle that transports persons on a track that I could compare her situation to. I believe it is called a train, or at least at that time I was briefly reminded of its name. Anyway, just as there are separate sets of tracks that run off from the original and go in contrariwise directions, so to, are there complimentary and unconnected 'times' that move this way and that. I believe, or I have come to believe, that she, the lady whose tear and company I sought, exists on another set of tracks now, just as a train changes its set in order to move forward in another direction. I took comfort in this rather bizarre deduction that, like many of my thoughts took the whole

of the world, like a shiny plastic ball, and held it so tight that every crease, every textural facet was made known; at least figuratively.

The farmer and his family made generous provisions for my journey. Wrapped in a wide linen cloth were an assortment of vegetables, mushrooms, berries, jerked beef and anything else they could stuff in the bunched up pack. I took the packaged vitals and with a long stick, skewered it at the end as to carry it in the traditional vagabond manner. After a series of hugs and heartfelt goodbyes, I parted from them and made my way through the forest that laced the boundaries of the fields where the farm stood. It was a dark forest, or perhaps it felt that way since I hadn't been in the woods for some time. The absence of sun, even in that minimal degree, was significant. Its red beams that never ceased to increase or decrease in color or brilliance shone through as much as it could. Every now and then I would come to a bald spot in the forest where it would stream down like a misty waterfall that sprayed upon me subtle hopes of thought that would never precipitate into distinct images. They danced in, or from outside where they were captured by the eyes of my soul-my mind, an elusive rhythm in and out of sight, like a dryad or faun.

The farm I could still see as I glanced behind me. But slowly it sank into the distance like a pebble into quicksand. Ahead of me was the foreign world that would soon vanish into what I feared the most; nighttime. I wasn't sure what it would be like;

I only had an idea of it. It was the absence of light, a world where shadows hung low from the sky and down upon the landscape. How was I to bear it with any courage? How could anyone? The thought of feeling without seeing. Forms of things that would slither upon the surface of the skin without ever knowing what it was, or whether it meant ill or no.

Furthermore, the fact that I must continue on this path without the aid of light was incomprehensible. Was it possible to move about without light, or would I just freeze like a statue forever?

And so it was I put aside my fears and pressed on through the woods in spite of my trepidation. The hours passed and so to went the light. It gradually fell into darkness, but not as darkly as I had anticipated. For, just as the farmer's son had mentioned, there were stars about filling the heavens like a nightly court of regality, all with pin sized holes of light that twinkled above. And so to, the moon, an entity that I'd only heard of briefly (whether it was through the farmer or a memory that was breaking through the firmament of my amnesia-which one I can not say), shone the largest and the most pale. As I stared up at the silvery glowing disc, I fancied that it was a she. For some reason I was given the impression that the moon was a girl; a woman that I wished to know-a goddess. Out of a brief fit of madness, I reached down and plucked a handful of wildflowers that were fed by her. I flung them into the air and fell to my face in a reverential bow. I knew why so many had loved her and that she had eluded them all. Like all the earthly women pursued by the gods, Daphne,

Io, and countless others accosted by Jove, the moon had been chased. I am sure the Sun had been trying for since the beginning of Time, but he didn't know what he was up against. Seeing her then, it was apparent that no one knew what to call her, except moon just as one who is without title is referred to as 'that person' or 'sir'. I clenched my fist and lowered my head to think of a name, one that would be befitting, but none came. For now, I must consign to her beauty without the privilege of knowing her on that level and without that form of intimacy.

The path led me on through a bend, up a small hill and then down into a small valley where ran a tiny brook; scarcely wide enough to host any sizable creek rocks. I easily jumped over the creek and up onto the bank where the trail continued. But, as I made it up the knoll, the woods stopped and ended at the foot of a small mountain, or a large hill-either way it was quite a climb. And yet the strangeness of this mound was that its incline was covered with heather and tall weeds but atop the grand hill was a flat, plateau of woods and tall trees. I saw that the way around was far too long in either direction, so I decided to climb.

There was no discernable path up the hill, but I noticed that there appeared to be a way farther up on top. So, I made my way to the pass up the steep grade. Here and there I had to catch myself with my hands as I leaned into the hill and braced myself with them, crawling up the side of it like some wild beast. Once again, I gazed up into the sky. I tried to ignore

the moon and focus on the stars instead, and for a while it worked. They too were mesmerizing in their own right. I spoke up at them in hopes that they would answer back, like the farmer's son had done. But I forgot that his interaction with the stellar bodies on high was initiated by them, and not him. Surely their interest, like any other person, would be idiosyncratic and thus contingent upon my being 'of interest' to at least one of them. And what were the chances of that?

The hill leveled out and its wilderness thickened. The weeds were replaced by trees, densely scattered here and there, accompanied by vines and dew-drenched ivy. But I found the path I was aiming for and took to it with the precision of an arrow wielded by a Spartan warrior. It was remarkable spacious, but left much to be desired in the way of height. With my head bowed, I passed through the cavern of trees that led to an opening in the forest. But, the silvery light of the moon exposed a most strange sight. For right there, atop the mountain stood a host of what appeared to be alter-like stone beds all situated in rows, filling the cavity of trees. What's more, these 'beds' bore the bodies of young children lying atop them, tucked in with sheets and blankets as if they were sleeping. I crept over to one of the beds where on it laid a boy with long brown hair spread across his pillow, draping the sides of his mattress. His eyes were deep slits tightly shut as if he was determined to see what he was not seeing in them. I was afraid to wake him so I slipped back. But, as I did I heard a voice from behind me.

“Don’t worry, you won’t awaken him that easy?”

I turned my head and saw a woman dressed as a school teacher. She wore a long dress, a wide brimmed hat, a pair of wire rim glasses and the particular habit that all teachers have of staring at a student as if he or she had something to hide. I’m not sure I did, but I suspect that this was an example of my own self delusion.

“Who are you?” I asked, as if ‘she’ needed to tell me. “And who are all these children?”

She straightened her neck, adjusted her skirt and once again gave me a look; not of superiority, but it could easily be mistaken as such if one were inclined to superimpose that motivation on her.

“I am Athena, the guardian of Hushabye Mountain, and these are my children.”

“All of them.”

“Yes. But don’t think that they are ‘mine’ in the sense that you may be assuming. They are mine in so far as they are here. However, their residency is not for long.”

Athena then walked over to me and gently seized the back of my arm. She guided me through the field of beds and to the edge of the mountain, where there was a steep cliff. Looking out, I saw an ocean under the moonlight with its salty waves breaking against the shore below. And low I beheld a host of vessels parting the sea, sailing to and from the coast.

“Those boats”, she said. “Carry children from every world, worlds I am not familiar with, to this mountain where they are carried up by those men down there and brought to me. I take them and lay them down to sleep here, where the quiet lull holds them fast. And here, they can dream uninterrupted dreams, to where, once they have found their rest, they can be carried back to where they have come from.”

“But don’t they sleep where they are from? Why must they come here? Can they not dream uninterrupted there?”

And with that she led me back away from the cliff to the other side of the opening in the wood to answer my question.

“What is it about this place that is different from all other places?” She asked with a piercing glance and a face that supposed I already knew the answer.

“It is dark.”

"Yes, it is dark. The moon, and stars and thin shadows of night grace us with perpetual bliss. The heavens are nearer here than anywhere. For if it were visible, it certainly wouldn't be seen in the daytime where all imperfect lights drown out its meek appearance."

Athena sighed and looked down, and then faced me again.

"I am certain that where these children come from they are furnished with a healthy portion of day and night as they come one right after another. But, blissfulness...uninterrupted tranquility can never blossom from a land where the two exist in twain. Pure night has bathed this land for thousands of years, washing away any traces of the exhilaration and engaging stimulation that daylight has. I am not saying it is bad, and yet, the purer a thing is the more effective it becomes. So that, what we provide these children with is something they could never find in their own world, untainted sleep."

As she finished what she needed to say, I followed her once again to the other side of the opening to the cliff. We gazed down below at the ships that cut through the fog like a knife through butter. Breaking the silence, I explained my predicament. I could sense that she was anxious to hear, but not so anxious as to inquire. I described as best as I could what had happened to me: My amnesia, my lady of the meadow whose instructions I had been trying to follow and all the other

events I cared to disclose. In response she directed my attention to the occupants of the ships down below.

“Do you see those other ships that are unmanned?”

I stole a peak at them and acknowledged their presence.

“Don’t you think it is strange that there are no children aboard?”

“I hadn’t thought about it.” I said without trying to be indifferent nor nosey.

“Well, the reason for this is that not all children who manage to fall asleep do so without a great deal of difficulty. In fact, a restless child who refuses to give in to their slumber never makes it to our world; at least for their night. Oh they sleep well enough for their own, but they never find their way here, preferring to stand at the shore from there to here. This results a most dreadful consequence; the child awakens the next morning grumpy and disagreeable. Anyway, those ships can take you where you need to go.”

“But I don’t wish to go to *their* world.”

“How do you know? You yourself mentioned that you are amnesiac. Perhaps that is precisely where you need to go? But even still, I have it on good faith that the vessels pass many other lands before they reach this one. One of these lands is

that of which you speak, beyond the wood to the south, beyond the world where you can venture. It is there where you can go no further, it is there where all things come around again and where *her* tear drop is sustained.”

I wasn't prepared to question her authority or the origin of her knowledge of such things. Instead, I thanked her for what she told me and left the mountain to take to the sea. The salty air mixed with fish and weed brought me back to life. The fatigue of the darklands had not at that moment 'broke' me. I didn't ask where these 'darkland' inhabitants lived that the farmer spoke of and I had thought that maybe they were legend. One way or another, I would never know for certain. For just as I came to the base of Hushabye Mountain and met the sea head on I was overcome with a frenzy. It must have something to do with what makes sailors ignore the harshness of sailing as they are overcome with a passion for that oceanic god. I too was seized with a desire to be consumed by it. And so I waded out into the shallows, climbed a rope that was strewn alongside the ship's side and pulled myself aboard.

Chapter 7

Once atop the vessel I studied its makeup. The floor I was standing on was comprised of long narrow boards; those with which one would expect from such a ship. The masts rose into the sky like towering beams that were holding up the dark sky.

Their sails flapped and then straightened into a bulge like one who has eaten too much and reclines on a couch afterwards. There was a small cabin with windows all around on deck and down below, where a set of stairs led, was the 'commons' quarters I suppose. I sat down on a bench that was situated next to one of the masts and stared up at the stars. Uncertain where I was to go, I had confidence that someone or something knew. I laid down on the bench in a deep muse as I was caught up in a stellar feast. I began to sing a song, the content of which was written on the spot and undoubtedly inspired by the then uncontrollable stupor I was caught up in. It went something like this:

*In night and seas,
It comes at once
For Darkness frees
This merry dunce.*

*The waves like seasons
Rise and fall.
To find the reasons
For its call.*

*And in the moon's
Alighted course,
Lay the runes,
To mark its source.*

*The stars would speak,
Voices align.
--Saying—
"I would seek
This Holy sign."*

*Couldn't it be
And if its true?
Cries my lady
And I'll cry too.
Cries my lady,
And I'll cry too.*

*With every stroke
Of God's pure hand,
The waters sink
Into the sand.*

*Strands of clouds lace
The sky with what,
It couldn't erase
The evening cut.*

*If lightning strikes
A cracking whip,
To where it likes
To light the ship.*

*Couldn't it be
And if its true?
Cries my lady
And I'll cry too.
Cries my lady,
And I'll cry too*

*But when cold air
Will sweep across,
And between old planks
Writ with dross.*

*And in the dark
Bereft of sun,
Was to embark
To get it done.*

*Couldn't it be
And if its true?
Cries my lady
And I'll cry too.
Cries my lady,
And I'll cry too*

*I'll find my way
To open shores,
A darker day
Maybe in store.*

*A mast is raised
By some chance gale,
To fill the spot
An empty sail*

*Couldn't it be
And if its true?
Cries my lady
And I'll cry too.
Cries my lady,
And I'll cry too*

Who drinks the way
Of darkness when,
The sea will stay
As it has been?

Who fears its shape
And hues concealed,
Behind a cape
A rapier wields

The sharpest words
That silence made?
Must have occurred
Amidst this shade.

*Couldn't it be
And if its true?
Cries my lady
And I'll cry too.
Cries my lady,
And I'll cry too*

*Thus went the sea
Of to and fro,
Where it would be
When tide was low.*

*I float upon
My lady's tears,
And sing her song
As if she's here.*

*And hope for love
In dimmer skies,
Where once above
Came raining cries.*

*Couldn't it be
And if its true?
Cries my lady
And I'll cry too.
Cries my lady,
And I'll cry too*

After finishing the song, I fell into a deep sleep, almost as if I'd been brought to Hushabye Mountain myself. It was a dreamless sleep, or at least filled with dreams so wondrous that consciousness couldn't find anything with which to compare them and thus recall their content. But on my awaking it was frighteningly blunt, for the vessel came to rest upon the beach of some shore thus violently shaking everything around me. But what I saw I could barely believe and I doubt my readers will place full confidence in my testimony: Though it is something I must tell.

Chapter 8

As I opened my eyes I felt the sensation of having a sheet draped over my head. For the world around me had been transformed from that of an open expanse of blackness and starry light to a smoky cloud that permitted one's visual field to only a few yards or more. It was as if a fire had been extinguished and that thick white smoke that comes after had replaced the air with its swirling shroud. But, there was no smell of smoke, of fire, no corresponding effects of one's eye's watering and its presence was far too overreaching to have come from even the most remarkable of blazes. This only made the situation more curious. But in spite of this strange phenomenon, I was determined to explore this new world were I had landed. I was certain that it was here were I would find that tear drop. I had only hoped that it was conspicuous enough for me to find. I really couldn't understand how such a small and malleable item was to be found. It could be anywhere, hiding under some random patch of bushes far from any trail or road. How was I to know in what direction to go, in what area to look, and what exactly to look for? I truly trusted my lady of the meadow, in that, she said I *would* find it.

I climbed off the ship via a long rope ladder that crawled along the side of the ship's outward bow and came to rest on a sandy beach. The waves beating against the shore brought with it the smell of ocean that was the only link to where I'd been. It was familiar even if there was nothing else there that was. And so with an attitude of curiosity, hope and above all guarded apprehension, I walked away from the beach and towards the inland. But as I made my way from the beach I was stopped by a wall of coastal mountains that stood in front of me like an army of ancient giants. They advanced upwards with rock and dirt, but how far I could not see. Determined to get to the other side, in that I had assumed that the thick fog was a consequence of their presence, I took to them with a renewed fervor.

The way up resulted in wafts of dry dust rising from the slopes filling the air with even more obfuscation. Rocks, about the size of my head, loosely lined the hill and were easily set to sliding down it as my foot pushed against them. Smaller rocks found their place in my hands as I clutched at the ground pulling myself up the mount. Eventually, the dirt was replaced with vegetation and moist ground, covered with a significant portion of grass. I began to notice a tree here and there, all shrouded by the mist and thus invisible until within a few feet. This predicament proved most annoying for I was intent on seeing everything as it was. But as it turned out a panoramic view was impossible and I would have to get used to the minor frustration of seeing things close up.

The hill steepened slightly as it came to what felt to be a crest. This was more from an intuition than a confirmation since most pinnacles seem to follow such a topographical feature. And indeed I was right in that the incline abruptly leveled off just as the lip of a jar meets the vertical glass. I crawled past the lip and onto the relatively flat turf. It was somewhat like Hushabye Mountain except that it was all open with gray rocks and tall thin grass, some green some golden. But, how far the plateau stretched was not possible to estimate. All I could see was that the formation of rocks produced a natural walkway with jagged, crusted stones arching over it like a royal procession.

The trench wound around and back again like a reticulated snake. It then opened up into a field where the arched rocks fell away into short stubs of stone coming out of the ground here and there. But, I could see well enough that the trench continued on the other side, although perhaps not as tightly enclosed as it had been before. As I went forward towards the pass I heard a series of faint whispers. They seemed to be coming from a canopy of rock that stood to the left of my position. I could see very little of the area save the opening of the borough itself. I hailed the voice with a, "Hello." And received the strangest of answers.

"Ah, fire learner. The world has forgotten you just as it has forgotten me. It has consumed you just as its fire has consumed me."

"I beg your pardon." I replied sharply. But he said nothing. Rather, a few moments later, after which I was preparing to walk over to the spot where he was obviously residing, he said,

"They did this to me. They chained me up. For all times, or at least all of Time, this Time. I haven't been acquainted with the other times in sometime." With this he chuckled and repeated himself. "Sometime." He laughed. "It always comes into the language one way or another. One can't speak of it in the plural sense without treating it singularly."

He was then silent, giggling to himself. Then there seemed to be a sane moment as he addressed me properly.

"You, over there. What do you want?"

"Nothing, or at least nothing here or with you."

"Oh, well I must assume then you are simply passing through to somewhere else."

"That is correct."

"Come closer so you can see me more clearly."

I walked towards the cavity in the rock, all the while thinking to myself why it was that he wished for *me* to see *him* more clearly

and not the other way around. Obviously, if I could not see him he could not see me. And so it was I came to the spot where the man stood. He was at least double the size of any person I had seen. He was dressed with a cloth gird about his loins, bare chested, a long beard, and old skin but a young face. And yet I could not get over his size. He was in the strictest sense a giant: And not just the sort that you hear of in fairy tales. This was no witless, boulder throwing, club wielding brute. No, he was eloquent, kind, quite eccentric (and at times no less than absolutely out of his mind), but he was no brute. I would say he was a titanic figure, a promethean sort, or the very species itself of the person. As well he was bound in chains. Both his hands and legs were shackled. I am not sure if this contradicts other accounts of who I suspect now this person was, but this is simply what I saw. He leaned over to a pile of meat heaped next the stake where the chain was pinned, tore off a piece and began to eat it. Between chews, or probably waiting until he'd swallowed a sizable morsel (as was the gentleman thing to do) he began speak.

"So young boy, where are you going?"

I took no offence to his referring to me as a 'young boy', but I did not try to correct him even though I found it an incorrect observation. I was clearly of a significant age as the image in the stream proved. I answered his question.

"I am on a journey to find a lady's tear drop."

“That should be hard to find. So did she lose it and now wishes it back or does it hold some magical power that you or her feel you can harness?”

“I suppose the closest is the latter. I am not so sure about it being magical. In fact, from what I understand tears normally do what I expect this one to do.”

“Then why are you seeking that one. Wouldn’t any tear drop do?”

I wasn’t sure what to say since I hadn’t thought as to why hers was so important and so I said, “I don’t know. I was told that it would do something for me and I believed her.”

“Well, that’s good enough for me. I wished I had believed in someone when I needed to. Otherwise I wouldn’t be chained here for all times, or at least these times.”

“What happened to you?” Why are you chained so? And if you don’t mind, why are you so tall? I can’t say I’ve seen anyone nearly as large as you, if you don’t mind me saying so.”

Upon my asking, the giant of a man, who’d been sitting the whole time up until this point, grabbed hold of the top portion of his legs and slowly stood up; all the while eye balling me like a conscious statue. He looked as though he was prepared to

throw a smart scolding at me, but instead he turned his head away and looked up towards the invisible sky. As he gazed into the empty spaces a painful grimace overcame his countenance. He appeared in pain, emotional pain, as if someone had just gave him the worst of news. The sadness then matured into anger. He clenched his fists and threw insults into the air, as a madman.

“You had no right to condemn me! I did it with the best intentions! You have no idea how sorrowful the poor creatures had become! Suffering under the snow, ice and cold rains of fall! Your age of gold had melted into an age of fire! And I gave it to them! Yes, it was me! I admit it! I defy you, foolish...conceited...so called gods! I defy you!”

In his ranting he paid no attention to me. And quite frankly it was a relief. For the fury in his eyes would have been unbearable had one been in their reflection. And I realize now why that was. I suspect it had something to do with the nature of insanity. It was apparent that the giant was reliving, or better yet experiencing the reoccurrence of some foul event in his past; obviously the very same one that was responsible for his current imprisonment. This led me to the conclusion that madness is nothing more than the preoccupation with what is past. So that, contrariwise, sanity is an advancement towards what can, should and will be; embracing this tripartite of all possibilities making up what necessarily is all there is.

But the giant was not always mad; or at least as far as I could see. He fell in and out of fits as the rise and fall of the tides down below. His screams ended as he turned towards me and sat down once more. He calmly bowed his head and looked up at me. I wasn't sure what to expect. And what I got was less than that. He never looked at me again. But he did have something to say and it was directed towards me; in the form of some poetic riddle. Over and over again he said the same short rhyme. It went,

*Fire goes up
Water goes down
Inside the cup
Her tear is found*

He said nothing else, and there was probably nothing left to be said. I ceremonially said goodbye, since in that state he would have understood nothing else. It was clear that her tear lay on the other side of this mountain. The fire had gone up, consuming all above. While the sadness of this place, and all places in this world, fell to the floor, the valley of this land where feelings were corporeal: A deluge of sorrow whose storm could only be seen from the perspective of eternity. Each tear, when taken collectively with all others, was a flood of all floods; and indeed *the* flood of all floods.

Chapter 9

I could still hear the distant murmurings of the troubled giant in the distance as I made my way through the pass on the other side of the field. But his voice went with the mist as love goes with a kiss. It was swallowed up by the cloistered air. The enclosure of rock rose higher than before, like stone spires. Curls of smoke formed rings around the tips of stone like bands of gold. I reached up as if they were real, for they looked as such, with the playful intention of placing them on my finger. But just as I suspected, the rings vanished as my hand passed through them, melting away as if they'd been the victim of a refining fire.

The path of arched stone led downward, as I'd hoped. It went almost in a straight line, with a few mentionable twists. Fortunately, the air gradually cleared with the lowering in altitude. But, there was still little in the way of sunlight. The whole of it proved to be remarkably strange for indeed there was light, but the source of it was indeterminable. It was somewhat likened to that of being indoors, where the light of a candle or iridescent light bulb was the light's cause. Shadows were cast in numerous divisions from their original source. All the while I searched for the sun and clouds in the sky, but I couldn't even spot the sky itself. Above me was the invisible expanse interrupted by swirling clouds of mist; hardly anything like clouds. Unlike the sun baked fields, the land of eternal dawn or the darklands beyond them, this was neither night nor day. What lay before me was a twilight of the world, a world. It was just as when the sky has that look right before it rains, to where, it is neither raining nor is it 'dry.' It was a world between worlds, or that is how I had thought of it.

As I went down the mountain, I came to a plateau. But this was no ordinary flat spot of earth. It was covered in what appeared to be snow, yet it was not chilly outside at all. As I walked out onto the level ground I reached down to feel the substance. As I swept my hand across the ground to gather it up its soft material just disintegrated in my hands, leaving a chalky residue. After studying my hand it was evident that this was not snow at all. Instead it was ashes. And although I saw no

fire anywhere, the ashes covered everything, like a blanket of snow. Furthermore, in some places, the ashes were clumped together and soaked with some liquid. I could see the liquid, in that, in some of the ash patches little dimples formed wherein pools of it sat. In some areas it looked like water, or some watery form. While in others-and I am still not sure whether it was a trick of the light or an actual distinction of the kind of liquid-it appeared red, almost like blood.

I continued to move through this field of ash and the further I walked onto it, the more of it I saw, and the more of it I saw the more it was evident that this plateau was exceptionally large and expansive. I don't know how far it stretched, but it was clearly for miles and miles. As I walked, in the distance I perceived the presence of houses, villages and then even people. They were moving about, paying no attention to me, almost as if I was invisible to them. One was carrying a horse's bridle to a small building, presumably a stable. Another was nailing something to a collection of wooden beams, the reason for which I could not figure out. But, the one commonality they shared was their being caked with this ashen liquid.

Another feature of this place was the fact that it was incredibly windy. It seemed to come from below and from the east of my position, assuming that down the mountain was in a northern direction. In fact, I found at times I had to crawl along the ground grabbing hold of vines and roots just to keep from being blown about or away, into the unknowable sky. Though the

inhabitants of this strange land, being they were weighed down with the ash and blood or water, were innocuous to the winds effects. They carried on their business as if there was no blustery force pushing at them.

Spotting what looked like a downward path that went away from the town I was near, I decided to follow it. It was comprised of crusted ash that was devoid of moisture. It made a crunchy sound underneath my feet, as if I was walking on egg shells. And indeed the path went downward, the consequence of which was the ashy air slightly cleared; at least enough to catch a wider view of where I was. Above me, in the distance, as if floating in the sky, I saw a bridge. Following its direction with my eyes, I saw two land masses connected by it; one significantly lower than the other. In fact, one could say that the lower land mass was just a higher portion of the land I was traveling on. As I moved along, all the while staring at the bridge, I noticed that it was made up of a variety of colors, each one fading into the other. I'd then thought I had mistaken it for a rainbow of sorts, but by its solid appearance I immediately knew that it couldn't be.

The attention I was paying to the sight of the bridge was abruptly interrupted as I heard a chorus of voices, or something more like a roar of individual yells and screams. They were coming from right below me to where I was going. They got louder and louder as I came nearer to their source. Soon, I was able to hear other sounds as well as the distinctness of the

voices. For one, I heard the clanking of steel on steel and the pounding of feet as if a large group of men were running. As well what the voices were saying I soon made out. I heard things like "you'll never take me!" Or "Argh, there you go!" They were all intense and gruesomely aggressive words. It wasn't long before I could actually see what was going on. However, I had guessed long before I saw. It was a battle; and a very heavy one at that.

I feared that I may get in the way or have to choose a side; for I would not be able to go around it since I had come too close to avoid it by then. Though, it was evident, as it was in the village, that they could not see me. I was within striking distance of one man who was as oblivious to my presence as if I were the air itself. I saw a small gap in the battle line, where one of the opposing sides' flank was exposed but not exploited by the other side. I took to it as to dodge any blows when all of a sudden I felt a hand grab my shoulder. I spun around to see a man standing there holding my arm and staring at me. And even more bizarre was the fact that he was not covered in that ash and water blood that everyone else was clothed in. He spoke to me.

"Who are you and what are you doing in my battle."

"I am just a traveler journeying through this world to the one down below."

"You are not one of those from Arold are you?"

"No, I don't think so. I haven't ever heard of it."

"Good. I wouldn't want them involved. This is a day for these sorts, not us."

As I scanned the battlefield I noticed that as the swords, also covered in ash but their wetness was more watery than bloody, caught the body of one of its victims, it would merely wipe the ash away from the person. And as the shaved soldier lost his ash, the winds would sweep him away, up into the air, leaving only the form of him in ash and blood. Each time this happened, companions of the assaulted warrior would lean down to the pile of ashes as if the person was still there. This led me to the conclusion that all one could see in the place were the ashes and blood and not the person, or things covered by the ash and liquid, underneath. And this must have been why they could not see me, or the armor clad gentleman that was neither covered in ash. They then could not see him either. Perhaps he was a god. I asked him and he said that he might be, but that at the present there were more important items of thought than what sort of being he was. For one reason or another he helped to orchestrate the wars of that place by making sure the people were blown towards the right area. For some, if not guided, may end up somewhere else. Why this was so important I couldn't quite understand. The solemn, virile

warrior was more authoritarian than apologetic. He only stated what he thought necessary. He went on to say that,

“As you are and I, being untouched by their ash and blood, we are unseen by them. For all they are consigned to perceive, at least for now, is the ash and blood. And when they manage to see something else the experience is brief and they call it a thought or a feeling, and thus say amongst themselves that it can not be real.”

“And so what place is it that you aim for them to reach as when they are unburdened from this filth they are dressed in?” I asked.

He looked up to the sky and pointed to region that was difficult for me to see.

“Up there. It is called Gottrold and it is where I live most of the time. I only descend upon Mithrold, or where you stand now, when the voices of these people grow loud and interrupt my contemplations and divine activities. ”

“And where does this horribly wind come from?”

“From below. A terrible land called Vindold. I hear the winds themselves are produced by a giant eagle that unceasingly flaps his wings, but I’ve never been there to confirm it.”

As the so called god explained himself, I must honestly admit that I felt he was mistaken about everything. What convinced me of this was that whenever he would describe a region on the sky or down below he would look in one direction but point in another. It was as if what he saw was not what he thought of. When he looked up at Gottrold, his very home, he was actually pointing at Werold, another region that was situated between the bridge and the two landmasses. Also when he looked at Vindold down below, he pointed up towards Pyrold, where he later explained a great fire burned and its ash was the surface of Mittrold. If indeed he was a god, he obviously was not omniscient, or even conscious of what was going on around him.

Suddenly, the fierce war god gave me a grimace and then a queer look. He asked,

“So, where did *you* come from?”

I pointed above me, to the top of the mountain.

“I see.” He replied with a conspicuous skepticism. ““And if that is true, then...””

As he spoke he unsheathed his sword and swung it in my direction.

“You must be a spy from Arold, for no mere mortal can escape the fires of Pyrold.”

I miraculously dodged his blows and ran towards the ashen men that were fighting. The god's sword found its place amongst them, and thankfully not me. He sent dozens of them to flight, scattering the then shaven men into the air and up to either Gottrold or Werold or some other unknown destination. Realizing what he'd done, the war god jumped into the air trying to regain the bodies. He caught a few and re-smearred the filth upon them, thus reinstating their stay in Mittrold, but as he did so I got away. I ran as fast as I could down the hill, tumbling here and there.

Soon, I was away from the land of ash and into an intermediary place, like that of the mountaintop; one of fog and mist. I sat down on a rock to rest. As I sat I thought of the men and women of Mittrold. Why was it they were swept away by the winds when uncovered? The gales were strong, but not that strong. For after all, I managed to stay grounded. And why is it that they could not see anything but the ash and blood and water? I had no answer to these questions at the time, but now I think I do. For one, their muscles must have been accustomed to the weight of the ash and blood, to where, when the mixture was removed from them, their bodily weight was less than any creature that had not grown up with such a burden; thus explaining their weakness to the winds of Vindold. And as to their senses, I suppose one gets used to seeing what is most familiar to them. If anything foreign is presented, it is

regarded as mere fantasy and a trick of the mind, as the god had explained to me before his murderous actions towards me.

After resting for a bit, I sat up and started walking down to the valley. In my journey's course, it started to rain. With light drops precipitating on my head and face, I felt a cool sadness fill what I had thought was my empty heart. But it must not have been empty after all since the depth of my despair was not deep enough. And yet in the midst of this brief interlude of sorrow, I felt a glimmer of optimism; that same flicker of hope that comes with curiosity and with what lay on the other side of where one is going. And so this was how I entered the lowest place I'd been; where all tears rest and all who find rest here will weep with it.

Chapter 10

As the mist faded and a light-the source of which went undetected-shone through I saw the valley floor. To describe what I saw I must appeal to the simple model of a child's play room. For in such a place, there is a completely controlled and contrived environment. But this is not in reference only to that of the room's contents being 'safe' or 'malleable' representations of things outside of it. Rather, this description is inspired by 'how' everything looked. The trees, the grass, the flowers, everything gave a dull soft glow to where their shadows went up against the horizon just as the toys scattered in a room cast shadows on its walls; instead of casting them on the ground. It was as if a great omnipresent lamp was placed on the circumambient lamp stand of some meta-spatial position. It dawned on me that since this was the lowest point of the world I'd traveled, that even the darkness of shadows couldn't fall any further. But it was strange that the light itself could. It only proved the adage that light is more fundamental than darkness and can survive in places where nothing else can; even common sense.

I stepped towards the interior of the valley, where a beautiful field of wildflowers stood. Each plant was arrayed with a distinct color and texture. There was no floral arrangement, only a calico of hues to where no two were alike. And furthermore, each flower was enormous. I mean to say that they were large for flowers, but they were not gigantic in the ordinary sense. I would say that the average petal from each one was the size of my leg. And they were all in the shape of a tulip. In fact, the

flowers all looked like large cups attached to green stems stuck into the ground. This is quite the reverse of what is typically imagined of flower groves. Most often, one rightly thinks of them as growing up from the ground. And there was nothing there that would have contradicted this observation, nor supported it. And yet the non-inferential intuition was just the opposite. That they had grown upside down. That they had germinated in the air, the roots were the blossoms and the unseen roots were their budding finales. I don't know how this thought invaded my conception of them, but there it was; like the name of a person or knowledge of an effect's cause.

And just as I was compelled to approach that spot where my lady had first appeared what seemed like so long ago, something from within-and oddly from without-stirred me to move toward a similar location. I stepped into the garden, taking care of where I stepped. The ground was crisp and slippery, as if it were made of rubber or plastic. As I walked through I inspected the other plants that grew closest to me. One, for instance, was a deep purple, and was ornately graced with red and yellow veins running up the sides of the petals. The stems formed a pear shape that horizontally shot away from the plant and whose tips drooped down. A steady stream of water poured forth from the stems and splashed in puddles on the ground. The liquid must have soaked into the foreign soil in some manner, since the puddles swirled in small eddies like water poured through a funnel. Where the moisture went, I could not see.

Furthermore, this phenomenon was not limited to this flower. All of them seemed to be vessels through which concentrated amounts of moisture would flow. But, this only fascinated me, and equally bewildered me. Where was the water coming from? There was no sky of clouds or sign of precipitation. Even more, I hadn't sensed a presence of humidity in the solid air. And yet the water came nonetheless. If it was coming from the sky, and my intuitions were right about how these plants had taken form, then perhaps the water was soaked up in the seeds and roots before they could be seen or felt. It didn't make much sense, but nothing in that place did at the time. It wasn't until later, much later, that its schema would be revealed. All I knew at the time that I must go forth to a specific location in the garden, which would be made known once I got there.

As I parted the sea of flowering reeds, the feeling of 'rightness' grew stronger. I knew I was close, very close, to where I was supposed to go. My effort became effortless and almost elating. I was overwhelmed with an ecstasy that I suspect I'd felt before. It wasn't anything like *déjà vu*. Rather, the sensation was more like the experience of a scent or an aroma that arrests one's attention and leads it to a once stale memory that is revived. The present of that experience was revived. No longer was it historical, or what we like to call 'the past.' I saw her there, again. I smelled her potent scent, but not with the immediate senses. It was resurrected by something more immediate than these five. But it wasn't the intellect or the

imagination. What it was I can not tell the reader until he or she comes here for themselves. Oops, I have said too much. The spoiler of this plot, this theme that will affect everyone at one time must not be revealed until I recall all of what happened.

I froze when I saw it there. The flower was about my height, it was pink with yellow and green veins, and water too was splashing within it like a violent whirlpool. Knowing that this was it, the cup where 'her' tear drop was, I embraced the rim of it, tipped it over and poured its contents all over me. I wasn't sure what to do with it, whether it was to be ingested or merely touched. But I went with my impulse and in this instant it proved to be right. As the cold waters of the flower ran down my face, they soaked into my eyelids like water into a sponge. I felt a tingling sensation run through the interior of my eyes which caused me to rub them. But no sooner had I done this that the whole of the tear drenched the rest of my body. It brought with it a burning sensation, somewhat like pouring rubbing alcohol over the skin. And yet, it was more like the chill of it than the stinging-if that makes any sense at all.

As the tear's moisture faded I managed to open my eyes again. But when I did, what I saw was more fantastical than anything I'd seen before. I can not with honesty say that it was much like seeing though-although I know better now-when it was more like discovering. If I'd remembered what it was like to 'see' for the first time, like a new born baby, perhaps this

analogy would fit. Going from a world of darkness to that of light, or a world of blindness to that of seeing. However in this case, it was more like beholding a mural painted on a wall until the paint chipped away and one saw the wall itself and the building one was residing in; with the depth and clarity that reality holds over representations of it. I was stunned. I stared at all that was around me and could see everything, the mountains where I first started my journey, the meadow where my lady resided, the forests, Hushabye Mountain, everything. Distance was no longer a barrier to my experience. Instead, it was an enhancement. For I saw Space for the first time. And Time as well. I could feel all things as opposed to awaiting their presentation in some procession of temporal events that would touch what was my body. I had more than just a body; I had more than just a mind and a heart. What it was I gained was more than just my memory. I knew who I was, what I was and to whom I belonged. And now I saw what I had missed.

And for the first time since my meeting her, I was in the presence of my lady. Her tear became my tear and I wept. Not just tears of sadness, but tears that were of someone else's sadness. I knew what made her sad, it was me. She had longed to meet me and when she did, it was for such a brief period. And this is not because of the grass seed that held her together, but because of the ignorance that had held me together. If I would have just let go of finding who I was and found out whom she was, the continuity of her existence would have been eternal, like all things that are.

I spoke with my lady and she with me. I loved her over and over again, never exhausting a moment. My identity was revealed and she spoke my name. But I can not say what it is, for all of you reading this think you know your names, and you probably have a pretty good idea what it is. But I doubt you know as much as you think. For you are on this very same journey. Whether you call yourself what you remember as being your name is of no consequence. The fact is who you are and what you are is so intimately interwoven into the mural that is painted on the walls of your eternal home that you must wait until the paint chips away and you can see where you are. Only by being washed away by the tear drop of our sorrow will this chipping paint come off. The tear drop of true love, the kind that lasts forever.

The End