

The boy and the waterfall

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My Lord, My God, you are a mystery worth discovering

You could hardly call it a bright evening—the sun was a darkened smudge on a horizon of charcoal. I caught a glimpse of a lonesome star, trudging across the quiet sky, but it was quickly veiled by thick, traipsing cloud.

I wandered aimlessly, lost as a seed borne on the wind.

When darkness finally settled in, the change in light was so negligible it was like attempting to watch dust fall. I scanned the horizon for signs of life but nothing stirred. What had I expected, really? Him to show? Perhaps.

That was why I incessantly waited there, in that field, twice a week. I was only fourteen at the time, so could be forgiven for wearing my faith out on my sleeve.

It all started with the farmer across the way. He would tell of a man who would turn up when you least expected him, yet somehow that happened to be when you really wanted him the most. Some said he was an angel, some wrote him off as a bits-and-pieces tramp, while some would go as far as to say he was an evil spirit—a ghost, I suppose—trying to allure you into a false sense of safety.

Whatever theory prevailed regarding his identity, this man was described as someone who knew every bird and its synonymous call under the sun, yet delighted in not just relating you that information, but in you investigating and drawing it out for yourself. He was spoken of as the type of man people would look for, but never turn over enough stones to actually find. And here I was, a child lost in an unusually dark twilight, about to do the same.

About to give up hope and simply enjoy the wind in the trees.

I knew the lay of the field so well by now, after so many nights out here waiting, that I had no problem navigating the dewy grass in complete darkness. I knew all the different textures and patterns and distances simply by feel. And that night was no different to any

other night, in that I was simply navigating from tree to tree, hoping I would meet and encounter this strange man/spirit/being, told of in the stories and written about in countless songs.

Most of my family discouraged me from my goal with sarcastic putdowns, saying I was a baby for believing such myths. But I knew, I knew, I *knew* he was real and would change my life forever, if I could just find him.

What happened next was so unexpected I knew I wasn't making it up. It was just too real to sprout from my juvenile mind.

Something brushed—no, *grabbed*—my hand. My attention snapped into alertness from its foggy wasteland, instantly elevating the pace of my heart. I looked to my hand, expecting to see inky blackness, but instead the darkness clicked off, daylight flooded my vision, and there resting in my hand was the hand of a child's.

I didn't have time for shock, disbelief or fear, because the hand pulled me into a run, and I was under no circumstances going to let go, so I let my body oblige. He had grabbed me by the hand and, with the joy of a birdsong lining his voice, laughed and pulled me away with him.

I was never the same again.

We ran, my hand in his, for what seemed like just a few moments, before he pulled up, panting, by a long belt of trees. That's when I saw him properly for the first time: a boy, maybe nine or ten years old, with sandy, wind-swept hair. But his eyes are what captured my heart. Can the ocean sit behind a retina? Can galaxies dwell inside a pupil? If so, this boy became my world in one glance.

And then he did the most ridiculous thing. He started to dance. It wasn't just any dance—it was the most comical, side-splitting dance I have ever seen! He systematically

sliced his arms through the air as if climbing a ladder while simultaneously running on the spot. It may seem like a paltry description on paper, but it was electric in real life. And the best part is that he wanted me to join him. I couldn't contain my joy any longer and, with my sides splitting with laughter, I began to mimic his ludicrous dance.

Sides aching, we both lay on the ground looking heavenward. But instead of seeing an overcast, lifeless sky as I had before, the sun was completely visible—a tiny island surrounded by a never ending ocean of blue. I was stunned, absolutely struck with awe.

And then we were running again.

Over hills, past streams, around trees and up shallow embankments we ran. Every view was superior to the previous, and every moment superseded the last, yet I was in no way prepared for what I was about to see.

Eventually I noticed we were running towards what appeared as an impenetrable wall of mist. But this seemed in stark contradiction to the blazing sun in the sky, which would, under normal circumstances, would burn away any low-lying fog. As we got nearer, however, I realised that it wasn't mist but light shining so brightly it was creating a wall of fluffy, white-hot light.

We started to slow, and I wondered at this, but then he spoke to me—his voice was the sweetest sound I have ever heard, like the wind harmonising with the rain—asking, “Are you ready to see beyond the veil?”

I felt a lump in my throat, but of course my answer was an affirmative.

He nodded and we didn't just run, we *sprinted* past the veil of light.

The thing which instantly captured my attention was the waterfall: it stood as a deliberate negation of a graceful giant: its form a monstrous tower of rock, its water a bride's

flowing train. The sheer width of the waterfall was, in itself, magnificent. I estimated running a full hundred metres and not coming covering its width.

I started to take in the landscape around me, slowly twisting my body in a 360-degree rotation. That's when I saw that the boy had disappeared.

I chided myself for being so distracted by the beauty that I had lost sight of the boy. I had become so focussed on where the boy was taking me that I forgot the very reason I was there.

Spinning around aimlessly, I felt completely and utterly lost again, just as I had in the field before coming to this strange land. I looked up again at the waterfall and somehow knew that I needed to get to the top; to get a panorama of the lay of the land, perhaps, but more to see if I could find the boy.

Running to the cliff where no water was flowing, I lodged my foot in a crevice and braced myself for a torturous, not to mention nerve-racking climb. I was blown away when I discovered I could climb the rock-face as easily as a wriggling spider. Somehow I knew it was because of the boy. It was like just being in the close vicinity of the boy, even if he wasn't in sight, brought the impossible to defeated rubble around your feet.

I scrambled over the final lip of the top of the cliff, pulled myself up and turned to survey the land. It was glorious! Snow-peaked mountains flowed like silk in the far distance on the edge of the horizon; streams ran like deer through the grassy valleys; flowers adorned what appeared to be every available surface they could possibly grow on; and trees—such old, magnificent trees!—lined the riverbanks like strong men.

I couldn't contain my awe, and let out a loud gasp of amazement. Then for the second time in one day I felt something brush my hand, and, before he spoke, I knew the boy was back.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” I replied, “it really is.”

“It’s all yours, you know?” His voice suddenly grew very quiet, yet firm. “That’s why I called you, you know. To bring this kingdom—my kingdom—to earth; even just one drop of this beauty to my people.”

I started to weep. “It seems so easy to see that here, standing with you and hearing the words from your mouth. But I know back there my mind gets so thick with confusion.”

His eyes told the story. I knew right there that every hurt, every drop of pain I ever felt, he experienced with exaggerated intensity. I didn’t expect what he would say next. “But I have called you there, and what I have called you to, no one can deter.”

My fourteen-year-old mind whirled at the implications of that statement, and, with my fourteen-year-old wisdom I posed my deepest theological question: “But what about freewill?”

He said nothing. Instead the boy—his name of which I still hadn’t asked for— withdrew a sword from the sheath at his side. Taking the sword in his fighting hand, he motioned for me to kneel. Without hesitating I bowed to one knee before him. He raised the sword, flat-side down, above his head and lowered it to my right shoulder. Fearful in a strangely exhilarating way, I bowed my head in honour. As I felt the blade touch each shoulder, I knew then the full weight of what the boy had called me to, yet at the same time I knew he hadn’t called me to do something I couldn’t achieve.

And now, in glorious hindsight, I can see that I did in fact have the option to choose to accept the call on my life or to ignore it, but the boy had already birthed something in me which was about as easy to ignore as a stag killing a lion.

I raised my head, but instead of seeing the boy, I was kneeling before a warrior. He was standing beside a horse as white as snow. My heart seemed to shrink and quake inside my chest; I felt smaller than a mouse kneeling before this mighty man. Nonetheless he motioned me to stand, so I lifted myself up to stand before him.

The warrior sheathed his sword and placed his hands on my shoulders. “Look out before you across the valley. What do you see?”

I shaded my eyes from the sun, and stared across the valley. My eyes could see for miles upon miles, the distant objects as sharp and clear as if they were directly before me. “I see mysteries untold, lands of untold beauty and depth . . . I see freedom.”—I halted as emotion choked my throat, forcing a quiver to my voice—“I just wish I could harness it and take it home with me.”

Silence hung in the air as thick as storm clouds. When he finally spoke, the warrior’s voice carried so much authority I felt like every word was ripping me out of my skin. “But, my child, all this is available on earth!” Then, with light caressing his face and the radiance of a thousand suns bursting from his eyes, the warrior laughed and said, “And the best part is, I have so much more to show you!”

Somehow I knew what was coming next, knew I was about to have to go back to normality. I tried to fight it. “No!” I cried, “Don’t make me go back. Please, I’m begging you!”

“I need you to tell others what you have seen and experienced; I’ll give you what you need to make that happen. Trust me.”

I have trouble recounting what happened next, because it still pains me that I had to return to normality after being in such a perfect place. But I suppose I must, as it is an integral part of the story.

Suddenly, just as fast as it had happened, it was over. The brightness of that world turned to gray all around me, and I was back in the forest under an overcast sky. The saturated colours faded, the sense of freedom in the air flew away, stolen from my grasp. I tried ever so frantically to hold to that world—much like when one tries to hold onto a glorious dream upon waking in the morning hours—but it slipped through my fingers like fine sand. My heart sank to my toes; to say that everything here felt heavy and lifeless in comparison to the sheer beauty of that valley I had seen would be a horrendous understatement.

With a deep sigh, I turned and headed back to our house.

The porch light was on when I reached our driveway. I hesitated at the door, wishing I could tell my family of my incredible experience but, at the same time, wishing I could have them believe a single word I said. I could almost already hear their laughter and mocking as I opened the door and stepped inside.

Instead my brother hailed me as I crossed the threshold. “Did you find him?” I could hear scorn lurking in his voice. “I know you went—” he stopped short, his jaw dropping as I stepped into the light. “Your body . . . it’s . . . *glowing!*”

I looked down at my arms and legs, shocked at the implications of what he had said. Sure enough, my whole body was pulsating with an incredible efflorescent array of light. I gaped; how had I not noticed that before? I looked back up at my brother and his expression was very similar to mine. “Come,” I breathed, “I’ll tell you all about it.”