

A Pilgrimage on the Winds of Fate

by Mike Sennott

I open the door and step outside. A cold breeze blows a thin mist across my face, my body, and the closing door. Light nearly to insubstantiality, the mist billows through the air at an infinite pace, not bothering to attempt clinging to the skin. It plays around the threshold of feeling, teasing the senses into a bemused and complacent numbness. As the coolness of the wind cancels the warm diffractions of the sun, it instantly becomes difficult to tell where the individual ends and nature begins. Alone in this of all atmospheres, I feel that I can release my spirit to the wind, to see the entirety of the world in a single moment. I allow my mind to wander among the prospects of transcendence for a brief time before I begin walking.

Today, I am going to walk to the marbled stone bench at the center of the park, and I am going to find her there. This time, I will finally be able to reveal to her my true feelings. I still do not know the precise way in which I will express my love, only that somehow I must. She will no longer be glorious perfection, hopes and dreams, but instead a real person, as she has known herself to be all along.

I recall the day when I decided on this plan of action. It was not long ago, on a perfectly sunny spring day. It was almost like a state of emergency, in that everyone reevaluated their priorities, putting aside their most urgent tasks in order to experience the wonderful rarity of the meteorological ideal. For me, it took place in a verdant expanse of parkland just large enough for two sporting activities to take place without interfering with each other. Someone was playing a song in which a sharp-voiced English major with a guitar

used a similarly idyllic day as the starting point for an existential exploration. I was sitting under a tree, relaxing and enjoying the weather. Across the reclining crowd, I saw her walking by, and smiled at her. She was too far away for me to see her face or know her reply, but I felt a spark of joy nevertheless. I had seen her before, and smiled at her before, and even exchanged brief pleasantries with her before, but it was not until that moment that I was able to put my dreams and adulation into perspective. In the sunlight that day, the spark appeared to me in a color that I had never seen before, a color that I immediately used in repainting the portrait of her in my mind. Looking at her with that feeling in my chest, I discovered something that I had previously overlooked, another meaning symbolized by her image: freedom from regret. I would never forgive myself if I stood by, locked indoors by uncertainty and anxiety, as she came and went from my life.

I am walking away from that captivity, and she is the single hope that guides my footsteps. I take one step, then another, stepping from pavement to soft earth. The forest separating the park from where I live is decorated by the same broken glass and cigarette butts as the rest of this town. It harbors only as many trees as are necessary for it to retain its appellation, dutifully submitting to the requisitions of nearby settlers in exchange for a multitude of stumps. Up ahead, a single piece of paper flaps violently in the wind, pinned at its top to one of the remaining evergreens. I am not able to make out its faded lettering in the mist, but it appears to be a warning raised by some environmentalist attempting to salvage the remnants of a forest that has been desecrated since before I was born. So trivial an attempt at such a task cannot possess much purpose, besides perhaps allowing its maker to expunge

responsibility from his or her mind. I shake my head, and as I do so the sound of leaves and paper rustling seems to increase in volume. Once I notice the intensity of the wind, I feel a brief chill, and I shiver as I continue to walk.

Each step takes me further into the forest, further into the mist. I imagine that with each step, the universe splits into infinite worlds, as each possibility manifests itself into a parallel dimension. It comforts me to know that in many of those worlds, I will find her. In some, she will accept me, and we will know each other and be happy. It is not a matter of creating an impossible world, but simply of finding the right one. Perhaps if I step on this exposed root, we will marry and grow old together, but if I walk around it to the left, she will never want to see me again. I must carefully consider every step, as once I make my choice, I will be forever trapped in the universe of its consequences. Maybe somewhere deep within my subconscious lies the secret to finding a path that will end happily. A rock with a swirling light gray texture resembling the sky appears to be a safe place to step. I should avoid the exposed bit of moss just up ahead, with its connotations of death and decay. I walk slowly, my path veering gently back and forth as I sway in the dizzying crosswinds of fate.

I finally come upon the solid line of trees that I know to be just before the park. I blink as I duck through into the clearing. By the time I take a few more steps, the trees behind me have disappeared. Within the spherical arena of the park, the world is flat and homogenous. The open sea of mist seems like a stage upon which dreams should take place. The marble bench looks strangely vivid, almost superimposed over the constant motion of the backdrop. I see her walking by the bench, and I see myself approach her. I cannot see her face, but her

voice is as I have always remembered it. I am not aware of what I am saying, but it coaxes from her laughter, joyful and melodic. The mist is thickening now, into a palpable and forceful condensation. I can feel it pushing the two of us together. Searching for the right words to say, I allow the mist to fill my mouth and lungs and draw them out from my soul. I see that the we are happy, so I smile.

At that moment, a flicker of lightning forms a crack on the stage's domed roof. Raging thunder floods into the park, frightening the mist into clusters of raindrops, which hang in the air a moment before falling to the grass below. I see myself standing there with her, now holding hands, for one last moment before the image dissolves with the mist and sinks back into the earth. The bench appears distorted by the streaks of rain, divided into smooth slivers of color like a stained glass window. The ghosts are gone from this place, and I am alone, as some scorned part of me has known myself to be all along.

I continue to stare into the park for an unknowably long stretch of time. Occasional flashes of lightning hint at a far away horizon. There is no chance of finding her now, today. Soon, I will come to accept this. I will turn around to find that the forest has faded back into existence. I will return home to contentment devoid of happiness. As another day has passed, I will have eliminated another false route to my hopes and dreams. Tomorrow, I will attempt another path through the forest, the hundreds that I have eliminated making the right one slightly closer and infinitely more tantalizing than ever before.