

Visions & Dreams

A water droplet perched at roof's edge caught the rays of dawn. It refracted in a kaleidoscopic array and awoke me from uneasy dreams.

The pavement felt cool beneath the boards that served as a bed. The muffled scratching noises seemed amplified by the silence as I tidied my plat. I looked over my shoulder, sensing eyes peering towards me, but found none.

As the sun rose, so too did the businessmen and women, the schoolchildren and their parents, the retirees and interviewees.

Morning-dew and remnants of the prior night's rain evaporated in the heat as my soggy clothes were given a chance to dry.

It was in the morning chaos, rather, at the brink of that chaos, where I often found my thoughts wandering, meditating on distant past and distant future. In that moment, I felt the past to be so remote that I'd been reincarnated and glimpsing into another life. . . Had it been months, years, decades? Some days passed without dates, without context, without meaning. The search for that meaning proved easier on some days than others. "What are you doing out here!" A petite and stern-looking woman pronounced directly, emphasizing each syllable. I presume she thought me to be an idiot, too stupid to comprehend even the most basic of queries.

"I was resting a bit."

"On *my* property!"

"Yes, I suppose it is, and it's quite nice as well; the veranda provided ample shelter from the rain, and for that, I thank you. Give me a moment and I'll be out of your hair."

The woman softened her expression a bit at this. "Five minutes, and not a moment more!"

She was one of the nice ones, often people would run me out at the sound of my footstep on the sidewalk leading to their door, others would remain hidden inside and call the police, too afraid to face me.

I suppose my appearance was a bit off-putting. Whenever I was afforded an opportunity to glance at a mirror I found it difficult to distinguish my face. Something about being outside most of the time will do that to you. Weathering, even in a humid climate, even in the mildest seasons, has a way of drawing everything out of you. My eyes were stony, inset with red rifts. My sallow skin was rough as the concrete sidewalks that often served as a bed.

I gathered my blankets into the small bag that housed all of my belongings. There wasn't much there, two changes of clothes, one of a slightly heavier fabric for the cooler days; a water bottle, my identification card, a toothbrush, a faded photograph . . .

My skin had roughened over time, enough so that the vitality beneath was coated, layered over by grime and dirt. My skin had hardened, my emotions had hardened. Everything was set, fixed in a position without any hope of being remedied, without any hope of moving past, onwards, upwards.

I staggered down the woman's porch steps and made for the street.

Morning time in the city is filled with motion and action. People move in great masses, they follow some grand design that points towards a non-existent destination. I'd often sit and people-watch. They'd looked like multicolored waves—charging forth and receding at sidewalk's edge as cars zoomed over asphalt rivers. And the sounds were a rich cacophony: the resonant hums of engines, the antiphonal ringing of horns here and there; voices—of people of birds of machines . . . it was enough to get lost in. I spent much of that day lost in thought, no different from any other. Looking, seeing, wondering.

As evening fell, I remember feeling as though I was being watched. Looking back, I'd see the glint of eyes for a moment before they fell to darkness. "What can I do?" I thought as I walked. I had no answer, so I just kept walking. In the daylight, I felt less visible than in that moment. As the sunlight shone at noontime people would stream past with their gazes averted, not wanting to see my stony eyes. I was invisible.

But, I was being watched just then, and for what purpose, I'm still unsure. I walked for what seemed hours, the streets became sparse as did the light and I felt my legs slowing. I was near the city center and the park that rested there and before I knew it there was a crack like fire, the crunch of grass, the snapping of branches along a path as I ran. Bones fractured while laughter rang, that of children playing on black asphalt fields, and of families rumbling in unison. Memories streamed forth in a geyser. Thoughts became a river of pictographs requiring deciphering, faces holding an inkling of importance quickly dissolved into a pool of unrecognizability. I breathed and heard memories, they joined with what was real and what was seen and what was done to me.

The inundation that followed was equally as interminable as it was instantaneous. Blood began to drip as if juice from a ripe fruit from the wounds across my body.

I fell to the ground and considered a puddle. I saw my stony gaze, the red-rifts, the arid skin and in a never-ending instant I felt the vitality trapped beneath my shell tremble. I felt purpose flowing through my veins and my heart before crumbling completely into the landscape. The man's laugh was the last thing I could remember for a long while.

Then, Blackness . . . a tangible darkness surrounded me. Reaching out I felt a shadow's presence—thick as fog wafting through my fingers . . . The air, heavy with the scent of incense—cayenne, cardamom, cinnamon . . . The atmosphere filled with a biting perfume that tingled on my tongue. The shadow enveloped me in warmth; I was smuggled by smoke, the chalkiness of charcoal overwhelming. . . I imagined death. It was imminent. In the damp cool of night, I felt as though I was withering away. The air drew everything out of me. I dreamt of the far-distant past, I could feel the warmth beneath it all—a bed—my own bed and my own sheets enveloping me. I'd been a cocoon;

I thought back and farther back still, before the days and weeks prior. I thought of my mother and father, of my sister, my friends, and all of my family. I thought of us together. I thought of a lit fire—the air was tinged with the heady aroma of the holidays—cinnamon and cardamom, allspice and sage. I could hear laughter in the distance. And there was light. Plenty of light surrounded me.

There were red and white strands and blue ones too. There was an ornamented tree at the center of the foyer, the chime of glasses and the popping of uncorked bottles. It wouldn't be bad to die like this. I could feel the warmth from the fire, taste cinnamon. I could hear voices. I felt lightweight. The light grew brighter and brighter, the sounds louder and louder until it was too much. "Everything will be okay."

Footsteps on the pavement around me jolted me back to the moment. I could still see the strands of red and white and blue lights. I was moving somehow, being lifted upwards and onwards. Perhaps this is it, I thought to myself. I'm moving on. But then I saw faces gathered around me. I saw their eyes—they were fixed on my own in a grave expression. "Everything will be okay," I heard someone say once more.

Then they took me.