

In the Style of Other and Severely More Talented Authors

When I was a young adult, before I had any real responsibility due to my good position in the world, I often found myself wandering around the streets of my neighborhood at night. This was the best time to think because the crisp air helped to generate refreshing thoughts, and it also helped to hold them there, because they'd be so reluctant to leave the warm sanctuary of a thinking head. So, I would think and walk and walk and walk. Sometimes I'd think about the stars, sometimes about things that weren't the stars but could have been if the time had been just right for them.

Once I was out of school, I most often thought about where my life was leading me. See, I had no discernable talent. How I graduated from school was a mystery to most, even to my family. I'll tell you now that, if you happen to know that there are strings and pulleys by which most of us are controlled, and that the person who is at one end of a string can not tell who has done the pulling and only that the pulling has been done, then you can figure out what strings to pull and which to not pull. There were more than a few times when I simply cut a string altogether, such that nobody could pull it ever again. At the peak of my abilities I was very much like a spider; lying in wait, sensing the tiniest of vibrations along each strand of my web. In this way, I knew exactly when to strike and when to hold back. If the pull at the end of a strand was quite large, then I would stay clear, because this meant that something bigger than me was around there, and certainly it would gobble me up. When the tugs were lightly done or erratic, that was when I would make my move. And so, I wove my way through the early years of my existence like this, always waiting for the most opportune moment. And because of the way I spun my strands into all aspects of my life, I really felt like I could see into the future.

Once I was no longer in school my old strands led to nowhere. I felt blind and listless, and it was on those nights that I would walk around and think about the trajectory of my life.

One night, while following my typical route, it just so happened that I caught a glimpse of silver flash from out of the nearby woods. Curious, and with very little else to do, I pushed my glasses up my nose, and slipped through the brush that was growing at the tree-line, making my way to the spot where I thought the light had been. I must have been mistaken though, there was nothing there. I searched all around, between the roots of each tree nearby. Nothing.

I had given up, hands-in-my-pockets-eyes-rolling, when just twenty feet in-front of me there was the same flash. 'HA! It was a simple miscalculation!' I thought, and I moved deeper into the forest. When I got to the spot, wouldn't you know it, there was still nothing! Even though I searched twice as hard this time, going as far as to climb into the low branches around me. I struggled up the thin trunks into the thorny branches and perched myself like an owl, sweeping the moon-lit ground for that strange glinting object. From my high vantage point I saw it again, just in the corner of my eye, and this time I called out to it. "Hey you! So you like to play games, is that it? Well I know what you're up to! You can't fool me, oh no you can't oh no you can't!"

Whatever bugs or birds were crawling around the trees at that late hour must have thought me to be truly insane, crying out and blundering through the woods with not an ounce of eloquence. But did I care? Of course not! Because I knew something that they didn't. I was on the hunt for something that those modest creatures could not understand. This way, I found

them to be the ones who were insane, because they did not know that they could not know what they did not know already.

I crashed through the woods, with very little regard for what the birds thought of me, and made my way to the most recent spot the light had appeared. Of course, I knew that there would be nothing there when I arrived, which is exactly why, as I made my approach, I was really calculating the most likely spot for the light to appear next. I also knew that it always appeared in the corner of my eye, so if I was clever enough, I would be able to head it off and the pair of us would arrive at the same point at the same time and I could finally catch it. I looked about at the trees around me and noticed that two had fallen over, one crossing the other which made an X on the forest floor. 'That's as good a spot as any' I thought, and, with the cross just in my periphery, I started on a path tangential to my target. Once I was in range, I leaped to the side, swung my arms together in a hugging motion, and yelled, "I got you now!"

I'll tell you that I've never been a poor shot. In my elementary school gym class, we played a game called Hoops-and-Hurts. The goal of the game was simply to throw the basketball through the hoop. If we made it we could go again, but if we missed the gym teacher would use their hockey stick to whack us behind the knees. With the constant fear of being whacked, it was nearly impossible for anyone of us to make a clean shot. In those first days of school, I would often find myself walking home bandy-legged with huge purple welts all along my legs; some days I was in too much pain to walk at all, and so they would just leave me lying on the bleachers until classes started the next day.

I came to a revelation while spending a night on those bleachers. The next night I also spent in the gym, even though I had only been whacked a handful of times that day and was feeling well-off enough that I could have walked home if I had wanted to. But I didn't want too, and all through the night I practiced my shooting technique, until I came to perfect it, right down to the exact motion of my pinky fingers. On the following day, when it was my turn to play Hoops-and-Hurts, I was able to make shots for thirty-minutes straight without missing a single one. Teacher suspected that I was cheating and gave me whacks behind my knees despite my perfect accuracy, but after a few days they realized that I could not be cheating, and so, in order to give the other students their fair turn, always made me go last.

You can imagine my surprise when, in my current situation in the dark in the woods near my house, my arms closed around nothing! I had failed to grab onto whatever it was that was producing the light, and I stumbled over the X in my now resistanceless flight toward the ground. While I fell I saw it again, just here on the edge of the night, and I thought to myself that it had really done a good job tricking me. For a long while I lay on the ground with my face in the dirt, then I propped myself up, not wanting to accept defeat so easily, and said, "The jokes on you. I didn't want to catch you anyways you ugly little thing."

This of course, was a lie. I very much wanted to catch it and what better way than to trick it into coming to me? 'This new tactic is sure to work' I thought, as I sat there playing in the bed mossy earth. I continually talked out loud, making sure that it was clear how little I cared about the light, that really I had come here to sit in the dirt and that it was the light who wanted *my* attention, not the other way around. I took inspiration for this from those deep-sea fished that prowl the lightless water-ways with enormous bulbs on their heads, which glow and

draw in smaller, less adapted fishes who believe they have found themselves their own tasty morsel.

It seems obvious now, but while I sat there in the dark I never once thought how my analogy is exactly the opposite of the situation to which I was applying it! See, I was trying to draw a light to the darkness, but since it was nighttime there was an unlimited amount of darkness to which the light could go to, and absolutely nothing special about my spot that may have drawn it near. Of the infinite possible places at which the light could materialize, why would it choose exactly where I was sitting. The answer is that it wouldn't, and so I was waiting for something to happen that would, statistically, never happen. But, since I didn't think any better of it, I sat like that for an hour, until my knees were so stiff that it took me nearly another hour to stand up straight again, and by that time I hadn't seen one glimpse of the specter.

I had resigned myself to defeat, true defeat this time and not just a play, when there it was again. By now I was too frustrated to care. I climbed up and over some low-hanging limbs and was almost out of the woods, but the light persisted, flashing just in the periphery. My patience was worn out and I turned and screamed into the night, "HA! You think that I need to see you? You're no will-o-wisp! Watch me, I'll walk out of this forest right now and you'll never see me again!"

My words were hollow though, for even as I spoke them I was turning around, crashing through the trees without seeing where I was going, red bubbles forming all along my face and arms where the little branches whipped me. I was like a mad dog who had caught the scent of some wild animal, racing around without thinking for even a second. No matter how fast I ran it

was always just out of reach and just out of sight, and I was beginning to run out of breath. 'How much longer can I keep this up?' I wondered to myself, huffing in the cool night air that felt like paint in my throat. My head was spinning. For a moment, I put my head between my legs so that I could catch my breath. Now that I had stopped, I really began to feel the way my body ached. The lesions on my skin, fire in my lungs, and my legs were soft and melting into the spot where I stood.

Bleeding into the dirt like that, I couldn't help but start to laugh. I only laughed to myself at first, small and airy and dry, because I thought that there was nobody around to hear me. But there was. They were there the whole time, hiding behind the thick trunks or squeezed into the branches like fat caterpillars. I heard them laughing at me now. From every direction that hideous sound slithered its way into my ears and out through my chattering teeth. The trees had faces that were crying tears of oozing sap because of how funny they found the comedy of my situation.

The volume of sound was critical then, I could feel the pressure in my skull build up and up. My head was inflating like a balloon. To relieve the pressure, I too began to laugh, matching the intensity with that of the trees, but I very quickly overtook them and was at a full howl. Their laughter was lost in my own, like a glimmer to day, and once I could no longer hear them, I felt my ears collapse back to their normal inflation. I didn't stop. The voices were still out there, masquerading as fat caterpillars, so I could not stop, or my head would blow back up.

I was in a tricky spot because, already out of breath as I was, I now had to maintain this absurd play, as well as walk out of the woods. All of this would have been overwhelming for

someone who did not have my experiences. See, when I was six, my parents decided that I was to become a famous opera singer. They told me to work very hard to achieve this goal, and would lock me in my room, throwing ashes in the air to make my lungs strong, and force me to sing for ten hours each day. They let me out only to eat, but never allowed me to have solid food because of the effect it is known to have on the vocal chords. Sundays were the only days I was not locked in my room, but on those days my parents would invite their friends over, and they would parade me around, and make me sing like a little songbird for them.

All the work really did pay off! In just two years I was auditioning for parts in the most famous operas of the time, memorizing the entire libretto for each one so that I could astound the producers. This worked too, and I found myself in the leading role of Mozart's very own *Don Giovanni*. Still, my parents did not believe in my abilities, and they forced me to sing for sixteen hours a day, until my throat was foaming, and even the Sunday visits from friends were put to a stop. They said that I did not prove myself until the world heard my voice.

Premier night came. My parents drove me to the theater, lecturing me on the proper way to stretch my tongue, as if I did not know. They were oblivious to the great swarm of flies that were buzzing around the car as we drove, but if I tried to point this out, they would turn to me and scream, angry that I would risk my voice with so many empty words.

They left me at the back of the theater and went to take their seats in the front row. The show started, and it was all going quite well. Through all my practice my lungs had become so enlarged that I could hold a single note for nearly two hours before I had to take another

breath, and the director put this to good use, filling a lot of otherwise empty space with my own monologues.

We were getting close to the end of the fifteen-hour long performance, I had barely even sweat a drop, and it was time for the grand crescendo. I was to sustain a vibrato E^b for a total of thirty-seven minutes as the set was disassembled around me. At the thirty-fifth minute I happened to glance up, and I saw above me the swarm of black flies. 'They must have followed me in! But what do they want?' I thought to myself, but I didn't have to wait to find out. At the thirty-sixth minute a single fly flew straight down my throat then, one-by-one, they all began to dive into my mouth. I could feel them filling up my lungs, forming hard black masses at the very bottoms of them.

At thirty-six-and-a-half minutes I could no longer hold the note because my lungs had been so overfilled with squirming flies. The whole audience erupted in a unified jeer. Even my parents, who I thought would be proud even despite this, threw big handfuls of ash in my face. All the way home, and for many months after the incident, they refused to acknowledge me, even going so far as to burn all the things I had kept in my room and all the things that reminded them of me.

I never sang opera again, but the flies still live in my lungs up to this day, and every now-and-then I am taken by coughing fits and little white maggots come crawling out. Even with the flies buzzing around in there, my lungs are very large, and so now you can see why I should really be thankful to my parents. If I was not a classically trained vocalist, then who know how

long I could have continued to laugh, and then maybe I never would have gotten out from that forest.

I was not running now, since running was too much work, but I was going quick; I desperately wanted to be away from the gaze of those trees. Through the leaves overhead the moonlight was enough for me to re-trace the zigging path I had taken, and the moon was just about set by the time I worked my way out. There was no more laughing, from me or the trees, and I was sure that I would never see that shine again. My glasses were crusted with sweat and sap, so I took them off and wiped them on my shirt. As I put them back on, the last bit of light from the moon reflected off the corner of the frame. 'So that was it then?' I thought and put my glasses on and walked home through the ending night.