

Night and the spell that gave me peace

by Michael Parker

When you have lived with pain so long, you grow old and the old man inside of you takes over. That's just the way it is.

Last year, the old man captive inside me was mad, incessantly complaining about how much pain he was in and how unbearable his plight was. He cried to me: "How long must I suffer? How long must I bear it? Will there ever be hope like a new morning? Will I have to walk with the dread of pain until my last breath?" "

I had not one answer for the old man's questions so I grabbed him by the nape of his thinned neck and I kicked him down the ten or twenty or so floors from the reception room in my head to the dark recesses of my heart so I would have some peace. But peace wasn't something I could own. I could never feel peace; nor was it a place that I could see, let alone reach. For the old man in my heart had turned my heart into an echo chamber and all of his protestations, all of the ranting from a lack of sleep, and all of his moans and fits of emotion reverberated off the walls. And as he protested and as he ranted and as he cried, he dug and he dug until one day my heart developed a hole.

It has been said that whatever consumes your heart, likewise consumes you. It's true. Slowly, I began to change into that old man in my heart. Not only did I feel this in the way that I walked and carried myself, but I could see it in my face and in my eyes. Soon, I too was unable to sleep because of the pain. And I walked the darkness of the halls and rooms of the house trying to focus on my own thoughts and aspirations. But my dreams and aspirations seemed distant and unrealistic, like a land existing through a fog and whose ground was not the ground of rock and clay but that of clouds and a structure-less blue.

Before the transformation was complete, before the color of slate settled into my hair and the muscles thinned and the sinew sloughed slightly from bones like weakened tapestry, I walked out of the sleeping house, into the yard by the large maple tree already shedding her leaves. The cool Autumn air, sensing warm meat, began stabbing me.

Night was heavy on the land. She had devoured two-thirds of the moon and was still in hunger. I could see in her eyes she was contemplating the stars. "Excuse me," I asked her loudly, but strained, as my voice had already taken on the old man's age. "How long is night? Is there ever a respite from pain? How much longer can a man bear without hope?"

She heard me, but it was like one might hear an annoying fly buzzing at the ear, for she stopped reaching up into the Universe as if it were a tree ripe with fruit. She glanced down at me with that wide, pale face that could wear a sky. Her eyes were dark and unalive as coal rock or lava that had slowed into a stationary place and hardened dead-cold. This startled me, but she seemed unperturbed. Night remained expressionless and did not speak or even move her lips to speak. She glanced at me not like a mute, nor like I was beneath her station. She was just sealed as an ancient tomb.

But something remarkable occurred. From her lips so high in the air, maybe as high as the peaks of the Eastern mountains, there came a song, a gorgeous melodic tune, much like a lullaby. It was Night who was humming as she turned back to the sky to search for that perfect star to pick.

I stood in the half-light of the glowing canopy of stars, mesmerized. If I were more versed in feeling, in the grand sentience of things, I would have known this whole affair magic. And I would have had the manners to give a gentlemanly bow, for I was in the presence of the mighty Enchantress. And she had just graced me with a spell; a spell of peace.

