

FINDING THE HOST THAT SUSTAINS

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I walked through the truculent sands for many days without end. Their color glistened and appeared to shine brighter with each new dawning of the sun—a sun that radiated and shown power beyond the means of natural, un-orchestrated things. I could feel the sun's reach and be witness to its breadth. The sky was either a pearly hue of blue that mixed and submitted to the distant horizons in a lackluster surrender or a faded negativity of gray, humming illusions through the paleness of the moon. Of any movement other than my own, there was none.

While traveling, I tried to recall how my presence had come to reside in the cradle of desolation. I thought back upon those memories that marked the birth of my waywardness, but I could not find anything defining before that moment I first started out upon the truculent sands. It not only was my first memory of the desert; it was—as I searched desperately through my mind—the first crisp and clear memory of my life. Only jumbled glimpses and sensations of interaction meshed in-between the stored images of sand, sky, and sun; they were like indistinguishable residues. Besides these, there was only emptiness. Of my name, my acquaintances, and my experiences, there was nothing to be found. This frustrated me, and pushed me more fiercely through my steps.

It was on the third day, after not attaining any level of exhaustion, that I realized the difference of life within me than what should have been. Something dark was inside me: a shadow beneath my skin, crawling throughout me anxiously and restlessly. My feet never slowed; my pace never slackened. Hunger never came; thirst never clawed. Immunity—certainly cursed—hung within my spirit, empowering me beyond the likeness of depravity's deterioration. Day or night, my heart was the same. Fast or slow, my breath never faltered.

While under the care of the striking and inexplicable sustenance, I journeyed forward towards a place I knew not. I traveled up and down hundreds of dunes, trekking across a terrain that never changed. Using only the sun as navigation, I pressed towards the westward horizon in search of communion.

Ten more days passed and still nothing came into my proximity; nothing even tapped upon my physical self, not even the most miniscule of bodily stresses. I moved as steadily as ever. The presence inside me writhed upon my will and forced me into fits of rage-filled energy, pressing me on more precisely in the scavenging.

Then, on that eleventh day, when the sun begot its final descension, something invisible spoke to me.

"Have you tried digging?" it said softly, permeating the atmosphere around me. I could not tell from where it came; it came from everywhere and nowhere all at once. My head pivoted to locate the origin, but my movement did not cease.

Finding I knew how to speak, I replied, "To unearth what secret?" My voice was strange to me and I knew not how it resonated.

"Home," the other voice stated as it followed me.

"What home do you speak of," I returned.

The voice did not speak again.

For another day, I did not change my course or speed.

On the following day, I thought more seriously about the proposition that struck me from the voice without origin. My path as it was, was for nothing so far, and a change in strategy was by no means anything foolish.

For the first time, I stopped. I let my feet sink slightly into the sand and my arms fall to my sides. Nothing changed in my body and my breathing remained the same; it was no more relaxing than when I was on the move. Nevertheless, slowly, I slid to my knees, contemplating my entrance into the explorative. And then, right there, with almost no pause, I slid my hands into the empty granules of warmth and began digging.

At first, I dug carefully, using different techniques to find the most successful. But then, gradually, after I found my groove, I became anxious in my scoops and pushes. If there was something to find, then the-quicker-the-better to find it. Just as it took no effort to wander through the desert, my body allowed me to dig without end of ease.

Over a couple more days, I continued to dig, and as I dug deeper, I also dug wider, and as I dug wider, the longer it took to continue down. All in all, my fever for the hunt never dampened and my energy never lessened. The shadow inside me churned as forcefully as ever.

Four days after I begun the dig, I struck something. I had no idea what it could have been, but it was black—all black. When I uncovered more sand around it, I found that this blackness, like a layer, or ocean, expanded forever beneath the endless sands of the desert. I became excited at the find, and strange, new sensations filled me.

I dropped sand upon the blackness, but it was repelled and left to pile up once more. Only my own body could be the tool to further the experimentation. A gaping wound of darkness—as if it were the eye of some horrid manifestation beckoned me forth to taste of its secrecy.

Somehow, even with the shadow of my insides boiling within, I hesitated before extending my foot out to be placed upon the black surface. Whatever there was inside me that accounted for a conscious and judgment stepped forth and pinned my movement to the edge of the hole. It did not let me budge; it held me steadfast against decision as if it knew, before thought or instinct, the right and wrong hovering at the balance of my position.

But, as if a force unknown lingered between those things of presence and united with my internal shadow, a decision was made for me, rather than by me. I slid partially down the slope of the hole while gazing into the blackness and lost my balance. To avert my fall, I extended my foot towards the hole to support me when placed, but my foot did not stop like the sand did. I plunged into the unkind darkness. With ease, I sifted through the black, and while doing so, everything turned inside-out. My senses, my understanding, my perception, and my mass inverted and reverted to an otherworldly self, hollow and wasted deprecated and used.

When I came out of the blackness, I was thrust into a lowly lit room. Three children sat cross-legged on the floor of what was a bedroom. A small bed rested against the wall, a desk sat beneath the one window, and a dresser and large shelf appeared the space upon a third wall of the room. Toys and trinkets lined the shelves, haggardly filling the surfaces they allocated.

I landed in a heap upon a deck of cards held by one of the children, a girl, but no one noticed me. The girl who held me was frivolously speaking words to the cards as if mocking them, or testing them. The other children laughed, and as they did, the cards pulled upon me and ripped me into pieces, allowing each part of me to be grinded into each one of the cards' cores. Memory came into my being and unequivocal knowledge expanded from my essence as unnerving foresight. A strange awakening revolutionized my consciousness and gave me new control.

The girl holding the cards gripped them tightly and uncoordinatedly mixed the cards. As the hands touched me, I reached through them like water through roots towards their pinnacle. Through the wrists I went, up through the elbows and then through the chest and atop the shoulders. I swirled up the child's neck and dashed upon her mind. I reached her memories and her personhood and played amongst them in destruction and glee. I took her memories and made them my own, using them to create a personality of my own design.

I went back to the cards as the child placed six of them face up upon the ground before the other two children. She pointed to them and spoke as if she knew their meaning. And, actually, she did know their meaning; I knew their meaning, and I was with her. The child I found spoke of fantastical and dreadful futures to the others. She spoke of their lives and she spoke of their secrets, their sins, and their deaths.

When the games had stopped and the other two children had left the girl of whom I found, the voice of invisible origins returned.

"Dig," it said. "Dig."

And so I continued to dig, effortlessly, further into the girl, her spirit and her soul, finding the host that sustains.