

Beyond the Physical

By : **dibbledabble**

A story about a mans journey towards spirtuality. A long short story, that has taken quite an effort to write, the subject matter instictively known to us all but hard to portray with in the framework of a short story. At least by me, anyhow. I hope it makes sense and it is a good read too. 3500 words so put the coffee machine on and set for more than one cup.



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The rain lashed down and the storm screamed, wildly exciting and fearfully frightening. A furious gale rattled through the wood demanding the dying green and golden leaves giving up their last claims to summer and their branch. A mass battle raged with the legions of near spent foliage, a tug of war between wind and bow. Trees straining every sinew like mothers reaching out towards their children as they are forced apart by a cruel and irresistible force. Each tree hanging desperately to its bedraggled autumnal glory by twigged fingers, holding onto its vanity as determined gusts pull to the east and push from the west, till with gathered invisible might the wind blasts its final loud ferocious assault, stripping the tree of her youth. With a sigh of resignation she returns to her shape, gnarled bony fingers indignantly pointing at the driving rain. And for her leaves to be carried tumbling away skidding limply across the woodland floor until, so stung by the rain, they stick sodden to the earth to become part of the autumnal carpet. Evergreens bow low to their tempestuous master adding to the cacophony of war, wickedly scoffing at the broad leaves disrobing. I had crossed the rolling downs at almost a crawl, leaning into the wind trying to counteract its might. So severe the passing of the season I only just won my skirmish with the elements to reach the wood for some respite as the wind howled and threw small branches mockingly at me and desperate leaves hung longingly to my jacket and trousers. I pressed on trusting to luck and mother earths grace towards the tithe barn cursing the wind and rain, and thanking the trees for their protection.

On the edge of the coppice the monolith stood weatherworn stone extending out of the ground, cradled by swaying half naked broad leaf and hyena fir, as natural as the outcrop of rock it had been quarried from, resolute and firm, in harmony with countryside it shared. Five hundred years it had stood. The rubble stone walls and slab roof as organic as the corn the monks had once stored within its walls. It belonged, it was meant to be. Limestone and great ancient oak, immovable and serene as a church of which it shared many attributes. It spoke to me, it said, "I am of this land, come shelter within me". Grateful of her generosity I hurried to her lee side and the immense barn doors affixed with great wrought straps to enormous stone pillars that met in a gothic arch below a large Cotswold slate roof. Set into one of the lower sections that made up the whole door was a smaller door which had been cut from its father hinged and latched in the same black ironmongery as the larger door. Heavily I leant against it and pushed both thumbs down on the time cupped wrought iron paddle that clunked as I urgently requested asylum from the gale and heavy blacken sky. The clunk followed by a creak the barn croaking her welcome and I entered the damp stillness of the cavern within.

Stepping out of the din, I stood at the door watching the storm outside and shook and stamped the wet from my clothes. The contrast was stark, like turning off a tap. Raw aggression and power became calm and peace. As I turned into the shadowy vault my mind flipped between the two worlds juxtaposed to each other. The doorway was the fulcrum between the worlds, as I move further in the balance tipped into remote detached silences, outside now the world felt removed a wholly different place. In the gloom I could make out some objects, oak pillars rising out of the earth and silhouettes of farm bric-a-brac and machinery. My vision impaired I pushed my feet forward feeling my way sliding each sole across the gritty floor, every small divert and undulation giving me a sense of connection to the earth beneath my feet. Beyond the smell of my own perspiration and wet clothing, the barn identified its past; a venerable constant aged past of musty damp floor and moist and dusty walls and a forest of ancient oak. Nearby I could smell hessian sacking and plastic fertilizer bags. The bags, sharp noxious odour competed with the earthy aged aroma that made me feel connected and at one with the barn. I moved away from them and into the open space, as my eyes adjusted to the dim light and my hearing tuned into the not so silent space. Above me a pigeon shook out his feathers and chuntered his disapproval of my arrival. Calling up to him sat in the rafters I greeted and assured him I meant

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no ill. His reply was most pigeon like with a bob of his head and a near miss dropping. At the far end of the barn to the west another set of immense doors banged and clattered and fought with the wind that raced rumbling over the roof and whistled through the slits in the stone walls left by the masons centuries back, kicking up dust to hang in the air illuminated by light that stabbed into the gloom like gleaming lances through the slits, to be sent scurrying and swirling about into still dark corners with each blustery ram raid that buffeted the doors. Unlike the trees and the leaves, wood and wrought iron refusing to capitulate and give into the wind. Preferring to flex inward till large swaths of light flashed across the barn revealing its content in sharp detail akin to the passing of a lighthouse beacon and chased the dark to gather in unseen corners before creeping back out to reclaim its realm when, with a loud bang, the great doors meet once more to prepare for the next onslaught. In this space light and dark duelled for supremacy. In the dark recesses of my minds reasoning my own small torch searched its cavernous space and like the light in cahoots with the wind in the barn, for brief moments highlighted inert understandings kicking them up to illuminate them in shards of informationâs light that flooded in via my senses, igniting them into conscious thoughts and realization.

Stood in the barn removed from the cushions of modern life, the pillars of natureâs law vividly demonstrated themselves. Everything no matter how small or large is subject to the cosmosâs rules of equilibrium and revolutions. Everything competed, everything was dragged over the centre point by one force and then back again by its opposite. The seasons simply occurrences of opposites reacting in unison within a continuous cycle dictated by the orbital revolutions of our earth. Comparable to a stick oscillating in a rolling oval hoop, no one point in its journey can be predicted, as too no one moment in time can ever be exactly the same no matter how often they cycle is run.

As I contemplated this thought my eyes were drawn to a rough planked wall, maybe ten feet tall, affixed to its face an array of large rusty nails driven into vertical slats where hooked up were an assortment of expected objects, orange bailing twine, a block and tackle dangling below carefully measured loops of rope, an old pair of green overalls and various items of tack and hand tools. When the wind snatched its short lived victories at the barn door light too took its advantage and crept across the floor to be halted by the screen, only able to poke its fingers through the toothy gaps where decaying timber had one met the floor. At one end a sold vertical joist rested in the dirt, the upper end crudely rounded off above a cross member, a hefty plank. Its tennon inserted and doweled into a mortise on the vertical strut, then ran across the top of what appeared to be old elm floor boards that made up the wall, to meet with another vertical stanchion a rough match to its twin. This however was fixed to an oak cruck that curved up and in to the high roof, supporting the tonnes of stone bearing down from above. Each time the light slashed at the wall and retreated once more, each time the barn doors bellied and allowed the wind to rush through the gaps the wall lunged forward a bit then back with a creak as the doors flattened again as the wind retreated.

It was more at the top of the frame where something had caught my eye. In between a relatively newly diagonal strut fixed higher up on the cruck to intersect with the horizontal plank, seemingly to take some of the weight of the dilapidated wall, was something prehistoric in design, framed in a blanket of light cast by a missing grain door just out of the range of the rain that spat through the opening in the rotting frame. Within a triangle of wood, one of most common of natureâs wondrous things, a large orb web crafted out of strands of spider silk. Natureâs own steel and Kevlar hybrid. In relative terms this web being stronger than the oak crucks and stone of the barn where the spider had weaved its home. The spoke and wheel form from the ampullates echoing my thoughts. As the panel rocked to a fro it distorted the web. Round deformed into oval as the stay lines stretched seeming limitlessly before symmetry returned never losing it tautness. A testament to natureâs ingenuity the web hung ghostly grey in the patch of light in peace with the dogged stiffness of the cruck and rickety pitching of the panel; the web a symbol of the fulcrum between them. The orb form a reminder of natureâs equilibriums and cycles, and more. A new ingredient to add to the mix, another plate to keep spinning by my minds thought sticks. The webs physical attribute plain to see, but this circle of life and death represented a different aspect to those I had considered to date. These opposites are not as all others. They are opposites, as in dark is to light, summer is to winter but there is a natural shifting between these that

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has a undermined length, in that these are measured in relation to our tolerance and past experiences of them to them. Not a point where one starts and the other ends. Life and death has only existence between and has only one direction, each ends recognizable absolutes. Its cycle is different in natureâs law. Trade is not a pushing between one vague point to the other; it is more brutal than that, it is suasion of one for the good of the other: The web a microcosm of this truth. A common garden spider, a female hung head down on the web, near to the end of her life, the web missing spars and in slow decline with its maker. Her young safely wrapped in their egg sack to burst in teeming miniature life forms from their shells at the end of the spring, now her lifeâs purpose was spent, her work had been done. She had taken life to give life to her young and now waited on death herself. This on or off, life or death cycle inextricably connected to the fluid cycle of the seasons with the pushing and pulling of opposites within them gave the web a deeper meaning. The seesawing of opposites and cycles have the power to begin life and take it away and to repeat this predictability over and over again. For the onlooker this is true, for the being deceased, death is the end and be all. Cycle or balance extended beyond their ability to survive. Death could be brought on by natural cycle planned and expected or by a dramatic change in direction of balance or continuation beyond an organismâs tolerance to exist.

These thoughts put me in awe of it all, the fragility of our lives, the great unforeseen forces that looped throughout all of space and time. The enormity of the swirling winds of space, the brute power of the wind that raged around the barn rumbling and thundering. My mind seemingly infected by this wind, a strange madness came upon me. It was as if I could feel all of nature pulling at me. Pulling me from civilization and I wanted to run, run like the wind into her arms. I crouched at first enthused and trembling excitedly, digging my fingers into the earth, feeling her, taking her in my hands, cool and moist. Quickly she gave herself to me and I ground her in my hands and let her pour from my fists. Her tepid touch was not enough, I needed more. So like a small child clumsily I fell to the floor, the clattering of the barn door and the dancing of dark and light as they fenced driving me on, deeper into a primordial state. Tearing at my laces and pulling at my boots until off I hurled them into space and scrambled to my feet pushing the balls of my feet gleefully into the dampened dust that scrambled up and spilled out losing my toes below the surface. Grit and small rough flint mixed in the earth jabbed at my feet and pressed buttons in my brain that spurred me on rekindling some long lost reckless insanity. Or was it sanity? It felt sane to me as I planted both feet square on the ground and gathered up full hands of earth and held then up to my face. I could smell her, taste her. Closing my eyes I pressed my palms into my face and rubbed in the cool earthiness which set off a delirium I was unable to arrest. I belonged to this world of grit and rotating oceans and rocks, as much as the oak crucks belonged to the barn. I was part of mother earth, she and I where opposites of the same thing. I had been so distant from nature and now I yearned to be engulfed by her. The wind outside roared and beat at the door as if some great god commanded entry as my madness continued. I was aware I was breathing short and deep, panting. It struck me, I felt like an animal caged, trapped under all my clothes, cut off unable to experience the truth of nature. With deep gutted growls I shed my clothes as if they had been set ablaze. Urgently, wildly until I stood naked feverishly staring at the barn doors straining to hold our mother back. I was experiencing real life as never before. Drunk on this freedom, this primeval connection, this crazed and cathartic moment I began running toward the west door howling to let her in and all her might. I craved it all, the full caress of nature in all her raw glory.

Blindly stumbling I met the straining doors my hands binding with the coarse plank locked solidly in wrought hooks that I was powerless to move. Rain filled air coughing through the split where the doors parted to relieve autumnâs determined and destructive will. As if she knew I was inside pushing upward with all my might she relented, the doors banged shut and I fell hard on the ground; the plank that had refused nature her right of entry left its bonds and bounced with deceasing thuds. That vibrated through the ground in front of me. For a moment it was becalmed, eerily, expectantly impatiently. I could feel her draw her breath deep and foreboding. I did not rise, just recoiled back away from the door. A rasping gust way from being bludgeoned to death by the solid plank that had fell with me to the ground as it was propelled over my head. Ferocious in her victory she entered the barn slamming the doors into stone walls as great balls of dust rose up to the high rafters then carried away as tails of her cloak as she passed over me chastising me with a torrent of freezing

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rain. On my hands and knees I watched her as she swept through her vanquished realm tearing down all that displeased her. At the far end of the barn at where I had entered there she boomed her rage to the sound of defeated wood splintering. And then she was gone leaving behind a constant cruelly chilling wind that funnelled through the once protective place.

Adrenaline exhausted, the rain dowsed me like a bucket of ice water being thrown over a foolish drunk, stung like a spent autumnal leaf my madness subsided. It was cold, so very cold. Retreating from the opening where the doors hung tentatively by sheered and twisted hinges I searched for what clothes I could find. Semi dressed in recovered clothing, hessian and a fertilizer sack I scurried from the manmade sanctuary I had played my part in advancing its decay. I had walked out of civilization to the very edge of the world our minds can comprehend, stared into the jaws of the abyss and seen the inevitable ending of man and all living things on this planet. My time on this planet infinitely short as too mankind's. Earth will continue around our star long after all mankind is gone, which in time, all her fuel spent will plunge this solar system into frozen darkness till, when billions of light years away earth and her sisters will eventually meet their demise and succumb to unknown powers that churn their parameters so great that they are beyond our planets ability to exist as they are. This left me to consider the futility of existence. The pointlessness of the instinctive ingenuity of the garden spider and her web, and this natural ingenuity that is the platform to reason and learning which enabled the monks to build the barn. It begged the question, why bother at all, why should we care if we use up all our resources and poison our environment? After all we are only shortening the distance in time mankind will travel. What are a few centuries in terms of the overall length of mankind? As a smoker who draws on his cigarette and accepts his own death it is the choice of all of mankind at what point we accept the end. But we don't accept the end; we continue to invent and find new ways of adjusting to the world that is ever changing. Why? Because we have a life force, not just an existence but an existence capable of thought! It is thought that sets us apart from the physical world. It is thought that allows us to reason and to manipulate our surrounding not just live within the parameters they permit. It is this that makes us human. There is no purpose to life, only purpose in thought. Life is an accident of equilibriums and revolutions. It is thought that sits outside the physical laws of nature. It is this that provides the reason for continued existence, not fettered by physical restrictions. Thought has a different realm, one easily as mind blowing as the infinity of space. When we, as individuals and the whole of mankind are done, we have to believe that which is not reliant on water and air to survive lives on. We have to have souls and that thought is born of those not simply electronic impulses of the brain don't we? We have to believe our souls are connected to each other and that of Mother Nature and others less tangible. Or else, really what IS the point!

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