

Dissociation

By Ryan Senese

The boy wandered alone in the darkness. He was bereft of friendship, of light, of family and of love. An empty vessel filled with an unfeeling nothingness, the boy trudged onward, knowing not where the path would take him, only that he must continue. He must, for he had forgotten all else save the reassuring movement of putting one foot in front of the other.

Things have not always been like this. I had a family once; people who loved me... The boy shook his head in disorientation. Such thoughts were... confusing. It was as though his mind and memory were separated by a glass wall, foggy and imperceptible. Try as he might to run his fingers along its edges, he could find no fault nor crack that he might penetrate; no path to follow through the curtain of obscurity to distant recollection. The boy much preferred the path before him, though he knew not his final destination. It was easy and effortless. Nothing could hurt him anymore.

The path wrapped around some vacant benches. The boy thought that at one point, he had not been alone... there had been others. But this was such a long time ago, he had begun to doubt himself. There was nothing but the path and the hazy dark gloom enveloping his vision, and his soul. He could never have been loved, the boy determined.

"You're wrong."

The boy glanced about, half certain the voice he had heard was his imagination. He had often made this mistake before, but not this time. It was a girl. A girl with pink hair. This was the first time the boy could remember seeing anyone on the path with him. But no... she was not on the path, but beside it. A wave of elation that had been building inside him was quickly squelched. Glumly resolute, the boy marched onward unchanging. The girl walked alongside the path with him.

"You were loved. And are loved, because I love you. I love this world and everything in it!"

This was nonsense, the boy decided. How could a person love so indiscriminately? She had to be lying. She was trying to hurt him, just like all the others. But it had been so long since he had heard another voice from his own that he didn't attempt to dissuade her from speaking.

"Why won't you talk to me?"

"Because you can hurt me," the boy mumbled, eyes downcast.

"But how can you live without talking to anyone?" the girl inquired pointedly.

The boy looked at her wearily, "I don't even know who I am or how I got here. There's no point in talking to anyone, because I have nothing to say. Because I am nothing. And because I'm nothing, I can't be hurt. That's why it's pointless."

The girl stopped, looking pensive. The boy, for the first time that he could remember, halted his advance on the road.

"You deserve happiness, just like anyone else," she spoke quietly, somberly, "More than anyone else. You need to stop walking along this path. You don't even know where you're going, do you?"

The boy's eyes were haunted. "To my destiny," he replied. He began walking again, leaving the girl behind.

She called after him, though, and her words were emblazoned in his mind like a fiery talisman.

"Don't ever say that! I love you, this whole world loves you! And you gave your love to save this world, to save *her*. It's scary and you can be hurt, but you have to live. You have to remember. You have to *love!*"

The boy said nothing, but thought on her words in the silence of his heart. He didn't know what to do... He continued onward, as ever, but his steps were filled with a new rhythm. The boy didn't know what was different, only that the path seemed more sparse and barren than before. Perhaps it had been the girl's presence, reminding him of what he lacked. Much as he'd like to, the boy couldn't find it in himself to hate the girl. There was something to her words that both comforted and terrified him.

Abruptly, the boy became aware of a split in the path. Adjacent to the main road was a narrow and twisted trail, choked with briars and wreathed in cobwebs. It was dark and the boy could not see the trail's end, unlike the main path ahead. The road he had been following terminated in a soft sable glow ahead; it somehow carried a weight of finality. The boy deliberated for a long, long time.

Maybe it's my fate to end here, as nothing, he thought sadly. His own emotion surprised him. When had he allowed himself to feel? Feelings were dangerous; he could be hurt. If he continued on the path ahead, he would never have to hurt again... the boy knew this with implacable certainty.

But deep in his innermost heart, the boy remembered the smallest inkling of what it had been to love, and be loved. He grasped at the feeling, trying to recover more of his lost self. Full comprehension eluded him, though, and the boy realized that he was exhausted. He looked about and saw that he was traveling the twisted trail, and had been for some time, lost in thought. Small cuts and lacerations had scored his arms from the briars. The weight of the pain in his body and the growing pain in his heart made the boy want to cry, but he had forgotten how it was done.

He laid down on a blanket of leaves in an alcove alongside the trail and drifted off to sleep. The boy had a dream, then. An immensely powerful dream. He struggled to recall everything, but it was difficult. The dream had been oftentimes confusing and disorganized;

abstract images and memories had cascaded over him like a waterfall. Closing his eyes again, the boy became drowsy again. His last sentient thought before sleep took him was a profound mixture of desolate sadness and growing hope.

The boy dreamed the same dream again.