

“A Recent Dream Vision”
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I awoke, not in panic, but with a sense of a full day’s work to do, the waking of any man about to do a job in which he takes delight. Even the sense that some of the tasks awaiting me would be hard didn’t color that waking. I awoke in this manner fully clothed, thinking that it was a strange dream from which I’d awakened or perhaps was still in. Whatever I awakened to, I noted that I was dressed for a day’s hiking. The scene I found myself in fit, too, for around me in the pleasantly cool air, the fresh smell of pines and aspen groves, I stood on a worn trail leading into a grove of aspens below me. I stared at them a while, smiling. The dappled light under them shadowed the path that I could not remember climbing to get here.

Behind me, a somewhat raspy voice called out, “Hey! Over here.” The voice, good natured, had a smile in it, and I turned to find that further up the path, which reached a bald summit, a man was helping a woman into a zip line harness. He turned his smile to me and beckoned me over. I hurried to the pair. Around 5’10” or so, the man’s rust colored hair and mustache complemented his jeans, boots, and flannel work shirt. We were dressed in similar fashion, appropriate to the trail scene. The woman, with Asian features, her jet black hair whipping across her startled eyes and mouth as she looked around her and back to the man, did not look at home there. Her delicate slippers and thin pants and blouse might have been fashionable, but I doubted that she hiked up above the aspens in such apparel..

“Just get those straps adjusted at her back,” the man said, “She’ll feel more secure.”

The sun warmed my face and hands, as it does in the mountains when the cool breeze drops for an instant. I turned to look at the rig that the woman was in, and I saw that, as he said, her harness lay rather lax against her small frame. Guiding her hands, I urged her to grasp the handle and stand up straighter. She did, and I got the harness snug around her. She smiled and said something to me in a language I didn’t know. I knew the look of excited gratitude, though, and it warmed me. In the mean time, I saw that the man had gotten into another harness beside her on another zip line that ran parallel to hers but a little lower. He wasn’t as snug in his harness as she was, and I saw that this was so that he could reach her, steady her. He would take the trip with her. Giving me a quick, smiling glance, the corners of his merry blue eyes crinkled the skin on his weathered face. He said something to the Asian woman in a soft voice, and then said to me, “I’ll see you soon.”

He showed her how to lift her feet from the ground and let the cable take her weight. She giggled a little as she leaned back against the straps I’d tightened for her, turning a shining smile toward the man as her weight took her down the line slowly at first, then picking up speed. He went with her, leaning towards her in his harness to steady her from time to time. As they passed down the mountain, I could hear her low, delighted chuckle and the man’s rich laugh.

I stood alone then on the mountain top. Around me, I saw the tops of other similar summits, as though I stood atop one peak in the midst of many, in a range that stood below the tallest peaks, their distant heads disappearing in the snow dazzle or clouds that scudded across the range. But when I turned back to look at the zip lines,

they were gone. That seemed odd, but it offered me no misgivings. I paused to reflect that I had never been on a zip line, despite the fact that I seemed to know all about how they worked—based on such simple principles as they were.

Looking around, I decided to walk on up the path to the bald rock of the summit, which wasn't far off, less than fifty yards, I guessed. The day was grand, so, despite having very little sense of how I got there or what I was doing, I followed my feet to the summit, looking at the wild flowers that grew on the borders of the aspens. Those trees stood all around the top of the mountain, ringing the summit with their bright green dancing heads, showing me the path of the breezes. Below, in the midst of their dappled, ink spotted trunks, the light had a greenish cast from the leaves above. I longed to go and sit among their trunks, follow the tracery of their joined lives, the common roots they shared, to sit with them all and know that they were all one life.

Reaching the top, I saw that on the other side of the mountain, along the path that ran into the aspens, a small man walked, his tired steps bringing him slowly toward the summit. He wore a white dress shirt and baggy grey dress trousers. His polished black shoes fairly glittered in the sun. Seeing me, he shaded his eyes with his left hand, for the sun was above and behind me. He waved at me with the other, and I saw his smile even across the forty or so yards of path that separated us.

Hurrying to meet him, I could hear him calling to me in what I thought was Italian, I recognized fragments of sentences, picked out a verb or two similar to French words I remember from a translation exam long ago. Drawing closer though, his words became clear in their meaning to me. Maybe he was speaking English; maybe I was hearing in Italian. I don't know which of those were true, but one was.

Proffering my right hand to shake, he grasped it quickly in both of his. His lined face, with its deep set, hooded eyes, its wrinkled apple skin, had a dark, healthy tint to it yet. His black hair, shot through with silver, scant on the top and combed back in neat lines, did not lift to the breeze. On the wind, I caught the scent of brilliantine and after-shave. I returned his smile as we shook hands, and he reached up to pat me on the cheek with his right hand.

“So,” he said, and smiled wider still.

“Yes,” I said, “So it is.” I simply knew that if I turned around or looked overhead, I'd see another set of zip lines running away across the tops of the aspens, down from this summit. I took his hand and turned to lead him to it. He bent a bit as he walked, so he adjusted his hand grip to hold the crook of my left arm for support as we made our way to the harnesses. Once there, he looked a little apprehensive, his mouth going slack and his eyes drooping.

“I don't know,” he said, his voice cracking, “I left so much work to do. Should I be larking around here like this?”

“Well, I'm sure that this” I gestured to the zip line above our heads, “is set up for you. I'm here to go along with you, see that you make it okay. I believe that it will be alright.” I smiled as I said it, because my heart knew it to be true. He stared at me for a long moment, as a smile spread across his face, the wisdom of trust.

I put my weight on his harness to pull it down, make it easy for him to step into, and offered him my shoulder to lean upon as he slowly lifted his left leg into the harness loop.

“Let me help here” I said, adjusting his clothes in the straps. I could tell that he would not want them to wrinkle, “I think that you’ve earned this treat in some way. I think that it’s your turn. We all get one. Now is yours.” I said it softly, discovering each word come to me as pure inspiration. “Besides, I’ll be with you.”

I had bent down to make sure his trousers were straight, and I wiped off the dust from the polished wing tips. When I looked up and then stood in front of him, his full smile greeted me. He touched my face and said, “You’re a good boy. Thank you. I’m glad you’re coming.”

I slipped into my harness beside him, keeping it loose enough so that I could reach him if his grip failed, hold him up. Glancing behind me, I saw the man whom I had seen accompany the Asian woman on her zip line ride. He came striding over the rock of the summit. He looked over both mine and the old fellow’s rigs and said, “Looks like you’re good to go!”

My companion in the harness looked over his shoulder, his hooded eyes opening in surprise. “Who’s your friend?” he asked.

“A co-worker, I guess,” I said, my mind focused on my companion and our rigs. I called back to the rusty haired guy “Yeah, we’re good to go.” He nodded and strode back up the path toward the top, giving me a quick smile and a ‘thumbs up.’ It sent a wave of warmth through me, that thumbs up sign, as though my whole existence had been approved, accepted. I turned back to the task at hand, placed my hand on my friend’s back and said, “When you’re ready, just lift your feet, sit back in the harness, and off we’ll go.” His face relaxed. He closed his eyes and breathed in a deep breath and let out a satisfied “Ahhhhh.”

“Yes it is time,” he said and sat back in the harness. I let him take the lead, and we both took off down the line. My weight was considerably greater than his it seemed, for I had to control my speed on the line by a hand brake of sorts that put pressure on the cable from the top and bottom, allowing me to stay with him. I reached out my left hand to touch him and stayed with him.

The old fellow’s face, at first, had a tension about the mouth, and his eyes were squinted. As we picked up speed, though, he began to relax, to trust the harness, and as he did so, my heart became warm again, as it had when the rusty haired fellow had given me the ‘thumbs up’ sign. I looked at the old fellow, rushing along beside me, and that warmth swelled to love. Doing so, letting my heart swell with love for this fellow I had never known, I began to know him. I began to see his life. I saw everything he had ever done, ever dreamt. I saw every love, every passion, every fear and dislike. The depth of this man’s life was open to me, things that had changed him, the damage that had occurred to his body and soul over his long life. As I surveyed it all, the wonder of his creation swept over me. I had the feeling of looking at a work of art that I could see being created before my eyes, the artist shaping everything, elements of light and dark, into patterns of such surpassing beauty that I laughed aloud in the pleasure of seeing its shape and patterns, even as the tears from my eyes blurred them all.

I lost track of the landscape beneath us, even lost the sense of downward momentum, in the dazzle of seeing the truth of how this creature was loved far beyond my ability to appreciate or comprehend. All the colors and shapes of this man’s life, the dark and jagged, as well as the bright and smooth, began to shine and transform. Soon, I could not stand to look at the brightness of it all. The light around us grew so intense that

I had to shut tight my eyes, though I could hear the old fellow's laugh, still, merry and satisfied. I reached out to touch him, but he had sped ahead of me into the light, I guessed, and when I opened my eyes, I was back on the summit, no longer in my harness, the memory of the beauty of his life singing in my mind. I dropped to my knees for a moment in gratitude, placing my hands on the dust of the trail to steady my giddy thankfulness.

Opening my eyes to the brightness of the cool mountain top, different from the one I'd awoken to before, I saw the rusty haired fellow squatting down on the trail in front of me. He had plucked a long blade of grass and had it between his teeth. Looking around at me, his wide grin making his mustache lift at the corners, he said,

"Some ride, huh?"

"Yeah," I barked in a laugh, "Sure was. That's what we do, huh? Help them?"

"Yep," he said, standing, "Sometimes it's harder than others. Some will run rather than take the trip. Some are just about frozen stiff and you have to help them a good bit, but even with the hard ones, the trip is...well, you know."

"Truly awe inspiring?" I offered.

"That, plus a bajillion times 'awe inspiring'," he said, chuckling. I nodded in acknowledgement. He clasped his right hand on my shoulder and asked, "Do you need anything?"

I paused to think. I had no thirst to speak of, no hunger. My body had never felt as strong or capable. I was warm enough that the breeze cooled me just right. The only thing I looked forward to was another trip down the zip lines into that dazzling brilliance.

"Nope. I'm good to go," I said. Then something occurred to me. I stopped him as he turned to walk up the trail. "Hey, what's your name? Can you tell me that?"

He stopped and asked, "Can you tell me yours?" He wore a quizzical smile, his blue eyes squinting. I said, "Sure. I'm, er, um, my name is, um..." I could not, for the very life beating in my veins at that moment, come up with a name. I had never understood so much as I did about myself at that moment, yet the name I bear, the identity that I think of as me, wasn't there for me to give to my friend. He was smiling and nodding, as though he knew.

"It just isn't who you really are, who I really am, those names. We'll have them when we need them, I 'spect, but here, they aren't important."

He was right. In the light of our creation, such as I had witnessed in that old fellow on his ride down the zip line, such as was the case with the extravagant love that created me, all of us, the name I had been given at my birth couldn't possibly do the job. It would be like looking at a snow capped mountain bigger than the world and calling it a bump. It might be a bump, a mere speck, in the totality of the universe, but like every other speck, it stood as a distinct creation of love.

"Just call me 'Beloved' then," I said, "as I will you."

It drew another smile from him, that name, and a nod. "'Beloved' it is then," he said, giving me a wave and heading back to the hilltop. I saw him many more times, as well as many others like him, like me, men and women, old and young. I soon lost count of the number of others like me that I greeted, like the rusty haired fellow, like Beloved. We all knew what we had to do. The greeting seemed just a way of beginning things.

I lost count of the time I stayed there. I had countless people come up the paths on a myriad of similar but different summits. The temperature never varied. I never had

a sense of fatigue or hunger. I was good at helping people on the zip line. I was as good with the first person as the last. I lost count of them all. I even began to lose track of the fact that I had a life other than this one.

It's true that some of the folks who came up the path from the aspens would not leave the shadows within the trees. They would not be coaxed, and often I waited for the longest time for them to leave the green shadows of the aspens. They'd disappear or run. Some even approached first and then ran back, screaming and yelling. I didn't experience anger at them or think that they were lost, for I saw that they would have to want to be lost in order to leave. Some ran to meet me. Some glowered at me in anger as I approached them. My simple job, though, just getting them into the harness, deflected anger and suspicion in them, and I shared countless rides down the zip line, seeing the different shapes of loving creation in each life I shared. Most folks who walked out of the aspen grove toward the summit would come thankfully, happily. My own thankfulness—a deep and abiding gratitude—became my surest sense of identity, like knowing the words and tune that come back to you in the first note of a song that you thought you had forgotten.

On one occasion--maybe it was the last--I don't think first and last mattered so much then—I went to a woman who stood at the edge of the aspen grove, shaking with fear, quivering like the very aspens in that grove. I saw that she wished to come forward, but her fears were so intense that she could not will her feet to move. That's why I was there.

I walked up to her, offered her my arm and led her to the set of zip lines that appeared above us, further up the summit. She leaned on me, her voice quiet except for an occasional sob. She seemed so sad, so fearful. She got into the harness easily, not fighting it, even as her tears continued.

“It's okay,” I said, “I'm here to let you know that it's okay.”

“I, I want to believe that,” she whimpered, “But I know that I...that I've been such a failure. I've tried and tried. I even got tired of trying and gave up so many times. I lost my faith so often. I know I'm not worthy of being...of being...” her words faltered.

Instinctively, I stooped down and took her face in my hands and offered her some of the only words I knew:

“Of being the beloved?” I asked, to which she nodded her head ‘yes,’ tears falling. “It's okay. You are. You have been from the beginning. You are Beloved. That's your name here, like it is mine.” Wiping away her tears with my fingers, repeating, “It's okay. Trust me. You are Beloved. You always have been. When you're ready, just lift your feet; trust the harness. I'll go with you. All of it is so beautiful.”

I slipped into my harness and started down beside her, watching her tears dry, her excitement rise, and listening to her sobs become laughter. I shared the doubts she had had, saw her struggle through them, past the barriers that she had learned, had fought through all her years. I watched her fears dissolve in the face of the love that had worked all through her life, had sought her, even while she thought that she was alone. As in every trip down the zip line, I witnessed the dark and jagged places become smooth and light, watched the creator seek her out, find her pattern in the whole of creation and make it distinct and beautiful. The light that emerged, still too bright for my eyes, became something that I could not turn from or close my eyes to. I had to look, to let it burn

through me, let its thunderous joy shatter every particle of me, every shred of fabric that bound me to the tapestry of life. It did.

I awoke laughing, my head on a wet pillow, in my own bed, still clinging to the name 'beloved' and remembering how it felt to tell that woman, 'It's okay. It's all so okay that you can hardly believe it.' But believe it, I do.