

SUNDAY, UP AT LOUIE'S PLACE: REFLECTIONS ON AN EPIPHANY

by **Timothy Fullerton**

As I stood on the porch of Merton's hermitage, I realized that a circle had closed, yet in the mysterious way of circles, it had just opened. Its clarity was as simple as the celebration of the Gethsemani crows overhead, and as complex as quantum physics.

I came to know — to see very clearly — that the unique gift given me by God over the past thirty years was the ability to see Him through other eyes, to feel Him in my heart as others felt Him in theirs. Ten years ago Brother Patrick Hart had told me that my experience in so many religions was really a “wonderful journey” on which God was leading me. In spite of that reassurance, I chose for many years to feel like a dilettante — until this rain wet morning when I dismissed my self pity.

Standing there holding a cup of hot tea in a Bailey's mug, listening to the million moist voices was a new stranger facing a new day. An achy-jointed, gray beard, Baptist born, Buddhist priest, pagan, Hasidic Jew, Rushin' Orthodox, Roamin' Catholic, would be monk/hermit, yellor of annoyances, teller of God only knows how many tales, poet, searcher after pearls in his sty, social worker type. Me — totally unutterably noelsewhere but here, on this slab, at this time, on this day. I hear Tom's laugh. “He's got ya now — you're really in for it.”

KWATZ!!! cried the Roshi.
I sipped my tea.
Said hello to the door.
Cried.
The crashed trees
dip their crooked fingers
into pools and puddles —

and so it all begins again for me.

What is so different now, Tea Man, wondering at the salty rain dripping from your own eaves? Is it the silence — a silence made deeper by the spring wet bird choir celebration, or the quiet munching of the two does at the side of the “Hermit Hatch,” who flick their tails at noon? Perhaps it is the utter absence of clank whoosh whine man noise. Perhaps it is the quiet within this one so full of fears and wonder, a silence that wells suddenly up, taking me by surprise and ravishing me like a hungry lover.

Questions Questions Questions . . . bubbling to the surface of my mind berethere everywhere in rushes and bunches. I finally turn them right off, and just breathe in . . .



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. out in . . . out in . . . out becoming breath Zenbreath breathing, my Bailey's teafull teacup in hands which have unexpectedly caught death and time and judgment, suspending them between sips.

The rain begins to abate as clouds jostle in their fluffy ferocity, racing off to water places west of here and now. There is a sweet hushed hope in the sighs of the winds as my eyes find the end of the valley, down past the hallelujah tree to where the mists are gently parted by the deft fingers of their sun-lover, exposing the greening hills. It seems that I can see their quickening respirations — fecundity at the lovetouch of spring.

Oh God, here You have put me, in the middle of your heart, at the place called the Center by Louie. You have dropped me whole into the center of the center and I am being eaten alive by the Love that seeps from the walls of Tom's place.

I go in through screen and door, replacing Bailey in the cupboard. Thence to the small God Knowswhere place, kneeling before Him who keeps dragging me out of pit after pit after pit. Silence. So where are your words now Tea Man? They are hushed abbreviations crushed by the sight of crucified Godflesh, nailed there by my own hands, his bloody eyes staring deep into the secretplaces where I hoard my sins like a miner. Lashed by my pustulent angers and morbid fears He loves me yet, and has pursued me relentlessly. I touch my bleeding heartspace, here in this holy place away apart, and am wrought silent by His truth. My fingers trace Lord Jesus Christ Son of God Have Mercy On Me A Sinner on wool knot ropes from Orthodox hermit nuns of Alaska.

Time and Christ pull me back to Tom's desk, and I struggle to give shape and substance to the persistent Love that brought me here where Louie labored, wrote, loved, ate and prayed. This place where he met his demons and tied tight little knots in their tails.

Tom's laughter, his sighs, confusions and exaltations — they are all here, they permeate the walls, the chairs, the desk, each crack and cranny. I talked to him as I touched and sat (I spared his rocker — my fanny is just too large . . . “Would-be hermit stuck in Trappist writer's rocker — film at eleven”) and lay on his bed. This little cinder block place apart speaks him loudly though gone these twenty-five and one half years.

I camera'ed around for a bit, the deer laughing, trees praising, hermitage posing, and a disembodied kibitzer telling me good shots from bad. “Stop shooting the building! Shoot the soul if it, Tea Man, shoot the SOUL! There, crystal sap from logs dripping, held gentle in place by God's own finger — shoot that!” I get a great shot of him, the Trappist roshi, shikan taza on the wooden meditation chair — my feeble effort at Hermit capture.

Replacing my trusty Nikon hermit catcher, I re-enter the sanctuary of the porch, and just stand, doing no-thing in a most productive manner . . . Zenbreath again, this time soul breathes along with husk. More tears? Lord awmighty man. Nowness placefound and this song, long unplayed becomes soft lilting blue notes from God's own sax. I am astonished. Wherefrom such music — methoughts I was but a hollow cacophony of shallow squeaks and beeps, but this is a real fine blow. My God! The notes linger long and sweet on my tongue, their richness softkisses my heart. Smiling be-bop beret sunglassed in the front row, the audience throws roses.

Mercy and Grace. Grace and Mercy. How long oh God have I ducked and dashed and hidden my face, racing northsoutheastwest crying out for You, seeking You, fleeing from you? How much patience have You had with this crazed racer-with-the-madman who runs afar with a wholly different motive than his Lover? The keeper or the kept, I never knew my name, my secret name, the name I heard from Your lips this singular day. You knew how I feared You. As much as I cried out for Your peace, I fled, having been told from babydays that you were a really swell guy, (if a tad labile) who delighted in smashing ants with a sledgehammer. Well, Tim, you better be really really really good or ELSE!!!! I knew that You would send me to

utterlosthelleternalagony darkness cold full of pain pain pain place if I EVER ticked You off, even accidentally. I feared greatly, taking this ugly distorted picture for real, until today, herenow this Tomhermit hill, approached as a stranger to Your love, Jesus, I was tired of running and fear, so I came here through the kindness of Brothers, and fell at Your feet alone. Here with deer crow hawk and bee called to witness I opened the concretehard space called heart, and in Your arms wept down this valley like the rains which greeted me.

Mercy within Mercy within Mercy. No paradox, just the lumen of Christ risen and kissing my split and bloodied lips. A fierce peace rose up and smote me as I laugh laugh laugh through my tears. Time for me to go.

I pack my few things, check the rooms, and lock the door to the hatch where birth came again. So full am I that I am utterly empty, wholly clean, and deep inside glows the light that is so very bright that it swallows all else, and leaves the vast velvet blackness of the Abyss of God where dwell all my days to come in its dark and fecund deep. So vast — so simple. No bells and whistles nor choirs of Angels. Just is. I turn and look again, content to wait in my emptiness. I wave to the hatch.

All things
No things
Only Christ
and Christ
and Christ . . .
and the bald guy in
the denim jacket.
Home.