

The Man of the Forest

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“Find the Man of the Forest. He is a very wise man and the only one who can save our village.” That was all I was told. I had never been in the forest before, or even step outside of our small village. I didn’t know where to find this “Man of the Forest”. I didn’t know what the “Man of the Forest” looked like. I didn’t know what was wrong with the village. I didn’t know how the “Man of the Forest” could save the village. All I knew was I had to find him.

I had entered the forest early this morning, and now the sun was setting. I placed my bag down by a small pond, as I stared into it. I saw a young boy staring back at me. His pure blue eyes looked pleadingly at me as a single tear rolled down his cheek. And before I knew it I was crying uncontrollably. Knowing I could go on no further, I placed my bag down and made myself a nice place to sleep.

I lay down and tried to stare at the stars like I usually do, but the treetops were covering my view. The sound of crickets chirping filled the background as nearby insects joined them in a chorus. I never liked bugs – they were creepy and pesky, but now they were all around me. I took a deep breath trying to calm myself. Finally, I forced my eyes shut until I fell asleep.

My sleep was poisoned by subconscious attacks. The moment my eyes shut, dark mysterious figures approached me as I ran to take cover. I couldn’t recognize their shape or form, but all I knew was that they were going to kill me. And there were too many of them. I ran as fast as I could and got temporary shelter from trees. But each one I managed to dodge, more of them found me. No matter where I ran, I always felt watched by these creatures, and my heartbeat never slowed. The sky was dark black, and lightning flashed in the distance. I could not escape this attack until I opened my eyes into the next day.

Arms weak, I struggled to pick me up off the ground. As I stood up, I wiped the tears that were still in my eyes. As I looked into the pond again, the young boy’s previously flawless skin had been bruised with cuts and bug bites. His intense blue eyes were no longer pleading, instead they looked filled with helplessness.

“What should I do?” I yelled at the pond, “What do you want me to do?” I stared at that boy’s face in the water, but it never responded.

So I walked away in disgust. I walked in the same direction as I started in. But as I got deeper in the forest the bushes became thicker, and I could no longer walk in a straight line. I found certain bushes would prick my skin until blood came out, while others would give me a rash. I cried out in pain every time I came in contact with these plants, but there was no one to hear me. I was all alone.

Many days later, as the Sun began to set, I found the closest pond, and put my bag down again. I cupped the pond water in my hands and sipped it, trying to satisfy my thirst. When the water entered my mouth, a horrible taste accompanied it, and I wanted to spit it out. I forced myself to drink it, but after I was done, I felt even worse than before.

A boy similar to the one I had seen in the other pond appeared, but he looked different. Rather than just small cuts and bruises, this new boy had thorns covering his skin. Parts of his

skin were also covered by the deadly rashes that looked just like the ones I had gotten from the bushes. And unlike the other boy, his eyes were not pure blue, as streaks of red contaminated them. His gaze was filled with anger and desperation, almost that I was afraid of him. I tried to turn my gaze away, but it always returned to his frightening figure.

“Stop looking at me like that!” I shouted at it, “What did I ever do to you?”

Once again, there was no answer. But this time, I wanted him to answer. He might have been a wretched figure, but I needed someone to talk to. Any horrible thing he could say would be better than nothing. But he didn’t say anything. He just glared at me until I decided to leave again.

As I returned to the journey, throughout the months, I started noticing the patterns in the bushes. Some bushes had thorns, and those were the ones that would hurt me, so I avoided them. I also recognized the leaf pattern of the horrible leaves that kept stinging me. After getting hurt so much, I knew I had to find ways to avoid it.

One day, a few weeks later, the forest started slanting upwards. After a few hours of walking, my legs felt heavy and they strained to go up. Rather than just trees and bushes, rocks started populating the area. It felt like a nice relief from the muck, but rocks were tricky. Just as I was regaining my confidence, I jumped from too high of a rock, and my left leg failed to support my body weight. It collapsed under the pressure and I lay there with the rock behind me.

“Noooo,” I muttered to myself, “Can’t you just be careful?”

And it got worse. Soon it wasn’t just rocks, but whole rock slides. I put my fingers in the edges of the rocks, and pulled myself up. I placed my right foot on the side rock, and then my left foot next to it. But my already injured left foot failed to produce the strength to support my body. This time I fell from a greater height, and knowing how fatigued I was, I just lay there until I lost consciousness.

When I woke up the next day, my arms and legs felt extremely sore. But knowing my duty to the village was to continue, I looked up at the terrifying rock slide. Before I climbed, I rehearsed my plan in my head. It was a series of small steps that combined to form a complex process that would get me up this rock slide, even if it took many weeks.

And it ended up taking a few months, but then there was another rock slide, even larger. Frustrated, I took the pebble next to me and threw it as hard as I could. I tried to take deep breaths to calm myself, but I was beyond frustration. Even if I made it to the top of the mountain, who even knew if the “Man of the Forest” was here? What if I was going in the opposite direction the whole time? Why was I going on a quest where I didn’t even know what I was supposed to do? Why did I have to find the “Man of the Forest”? Why was I sent instead of someone else? Why did the village need saving? And what made me the one special enough to find this mysterious entity that could supposedly save the village?

As I kept walking, another pond attracted me to it, and I noticed another figure staring at me from the pond water. His face was wrinkled, skin was stained, and his eyes looked like he would destroy everything in his path. But I couldn’t be afraid of these figures anymore. I took a large rock, and threw it right in the center of the figure’s face. The water around it rippled,

making the face temporarily unrecognizable. When it returned to its normal form, I threw another rock at it. And I did this again and again until my arms could not lift another rock.

“You had enough of me yet, huh?” I yelled at the top of my lungs, “You are nothing to me! I don’t care about you at all!”

But still no response. I didn’t know what that figure was, but it was a creation of evil. I wanted nothing to do with it at all. When I woke up the next morning, I didn’t even look at it. I had to climb the rest of the mountain, and I know this face would only hurt me.

I looked up at the next rockslide, and pondered. After staring at it for several minutes, the path seemed to emerge. It was not one huge rockslide – it was several smaller rockslides each with particular steps to climb them. Each step may take a day or a few days, but in a few months, I would eventually make it to the top. And so I started. I didn’t think about how long it was taking or how much I had left to do. I focused on the step I was on, and eventually I reached the top. And after a few more minor obstacles, I reached the top of the mountain.

I looked down at the scenery all around, and for the first time, this nasty forest looked beautiful. From above, the magnificent mountainous terrain had green vegetation at the bottom and sheets of rock at the top. As far as I could see, there were no traces of human life, and for the first time I started to ponder how vast the world was.

But there was no “Man of the Forest”. There was no one at all. There were a few boulders, a few pebbles, and a puddle of water. But nothing that I was tasked to find. Helplessly I approached the water.

From the puddle, a man glanced up at me. His face seemed similar to the first figure I had seen on my journey, but this figure looked older. The blue eyes stared into mine, and I felt a surge of power at this prolonged moment. This man’s eyes weren’t weak or helpless. While anger still dominated them, the main thing I saw was power -- unlimited power in the form of experience and knowledge.

“So what now?” I asked, “Who are you?”

No answer.

“I came to find the ‘Man of the Forest’?” I asked, “Where is he?”

No answer.

And then I shouted as loud as I had ever shouted before. I picked up the rocks off the ground, but this time I didn’t aim for the puddle. I threw the rocks at everything. I threw them at the trees, I threw them at the bushes, I threw them at the bugs, and I even threw them at the squirrels. Eventually I threw them into the air with all my might just to see how far I could throw. I did this for hours, with my arms not tiring. I wanted nothing more than his horrible forest destroyed. Beautiful or not, I didn’t care.

Clouds started covering this sky towards the late afternoon, and then it started raining. It was a drizzle at first, but before sunset, water was pouring from the sky. I was at the top of a barren mountain; I couldn’t shelter myself. So I just put the pebbles down and let the icy water freeze my body. After a certain point, the pain stopped. I stood under the pouring rain with nothing left to lose, until I felt sleepy and closed my eyes.

I woke up to a bright sun shining in my eyes. As I tried to raise myself, my arms finally did not feel sore. I looked in that puddle one last time before grabbing my bag. The figure had changed from yesterday. Although he still looked very powerful, he had a smile on his face. That was something none of these figures had.

“Goodbye,” I spoke kindly to it for once, “I don’t know who you are, but goodbye. I will miss you.”

And so I continued down the mountain. If I was meant to find the “Man of the Forest”, I would find him. I couldn’t set a time limit on it. I didn’t just walk in one direction. I took whatever path that seemed appropriate to take. I can’t say how long I walked through the forest for, but after that time, I found the edge of the forest. As I made my way into the empty space, I found myself in the village I had left.

I went back and found the one who sent me on this quest. I told him as much as I could remember about the journey and he seemed strangely satisfied, despite how painful it was for me.

“...But I never found the Man of the Forest.” I concluded, “So what’s going to happen to the village?”

“In that case,” he sighed, “You’ve misunderstood the point of the journey.”

“How so?” I asked, “I thought I was supposed to find the entity that could save our village?”

“Walk with me,” he instructed, “Let me show you something.”

We left the small shack, and we walked back towards the forest. We walked in a different direction, though, so it would be a part of the forest I hadn’t journeyed into yet. I tried to say something, but the silent expression on his face intimidated me. I didn’t know where he was taking me, but part of me was afraid again. He stopped briefly by the edge of forest and pointed to something.

“Now look into this,” he instructed, “And tell me what you see.”

I looked to the right where he was pointing, and I saw another pond – a large, magnificent pond that calmly reflected the blue of the sky. But from the reflection of the pond, I saw only a single figure. This figure resembled the figure I saw on top of the mountain – it still showed power, but it seemed to be mourning a deep loss.

“I only see one figure...” I started to say to the guy, when I looked up. There was no one there. It was only me standing alone by myself in front of the pond. I walked back to where I had found him previously, but nothing was there either. There were no shacks, no buildings, and no signs of human life in the area. That’s when I realized the place I was in now was not my old village at all. And so I returned to the pond and stared into it once more.

I spent a very long time in front of that pond. But during that time I figured out many things. I was never going to return to the village that I left from. The village could never be saved – I just had to leave before it got destroyed. I was now in this world all alone – I would have to figure out everything for myself and there would be nothing I could rely on to protect me. And lastly, I had found the Man of the Forest.