

A Gift from the Tumbleweed

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I'm still looking back, still reflecting, I can't seem to get that scene, that experience out of my head. An epiphany of sorts, a simple one, did strike me so suddenly.

My journey started three months ago, in July, in my living room. I had had the sudden, random, and classic craving for an American road trip. But more specifically, a drive into the unknown, at least that's how the poetic, dreamer side of me saw it, and described it, to those inquiring of my plan. It was something that I needed to do, I needed the freedom, I needed the temporary solitude, and I had just enough money saved up. I hadn't actually saved the money for this trip, but when the idea broke, the cobwebs had already gathered quite heavily over my savings account, so much so that, at times, the bank employees started complaining about spiders stealing coin after coin but were too afraid to reach in. The description doesn't need to be complicated though, the concept, or to some, "the plan" was simple: fill up the tank, hit the road, and guess what, that's exactly what I did, just like that.

I didn't have a specific destination in mind, but focused solely on the fun of the drive, the fresh air of freedom, the exploration of the blank. I felt as though I was finally punching through the tall curtain that cut off the western half of the United States, the half I hadn't yet seen, the half I could only experience through the photos I found in Google images, and in the Ken Burns documentaries.

I had too much blazing through my mind, an ecstatic anxiety, each telephone pole a new musing, like a T.V. with all the channels on at once. My journey was greeted with the best weather possible, blue skies, robin's-egg-blue, as far as my eyes could see, not a single cotton-ball cloud to occasionally cover the blinding intensity of the summer sun. I definitely could have used the aid of a few of those clouds as I descended through the broiling golden-brown plains and plateaus of Oklahoma. I noticed the extreme differences in landscape from that of my home state, and appreciated them, but didn't have any particular, sparkling aspirations to spend any quality time there.

As the highway twisted and wound through gently rolling farmland, it reminded me of why I had even stepped foot in the car at all. I thought of it as an escape, not merely something I could afford, no, it had deeper meaning. The stress of everyday life had started chipping away my calm exterior, like the years of heavy travel and desolate heat had done to the highway I was carelessly speeding down. I really thought that whatever control I had was soon to be smashed by the hands of someone else, maybe the darker me, the side I have to shoo away from time to time. Another reason was the god-forsaken tendonitis ravaging my wrists and hands, retarding my once stealthy fingers, and throwing in mercilessly, a sting of pain, my only relief coming from cracking my knuckles, which I'm sure fucked the situation even more.

I used to be a great musician, unknown, but great, and I had style, and that special touch, unlike those spoiled, tit-sucking metal-heads in guitar centers world-wide, who think that the idea of a good album is to play the same song over and over for thirteen tracks, achieving ear-drum rupture. Of course, all art is subjective, and I can be quite the ass. I just started playing too much, up to six hours a day, sometimes in a row, I loved it too much, at least that was my diagnosis, but life is like that. I feared that I would never play again, started to really understand the meaning of wasted time, saw the black hole forming beneath me, and everyday when I awoke, the quicksand was a little further up, slowly but surely squeezing the air out of my lungs, the will out of my heart.

I guess that the inevitable light of wisdom touched me, filled me, because I began, for a while, to see past it, started looking to the future, not wanting to waste any time, and another door soon appeared. That door opened, and I found myself in a car, on the road, free to take the time I needed to recuperate, to "re-feel." I was still quite saddened by my reality though, still deeply concerned about the craft, the talent I had sharpened soon becoming dull, and disappearing completely. I couldn't let it slip away, I was determined to stick out the wait, and of course the cravings to play maintained their intensity.

I had to drive mostly with my right hand, seeing as my left one was quite weak, not to mention the pain that filled it when I tensed its muscles. My large aviators kept that harsh sun from burning my retinas, and the wind cooled my head, aching from the heavy thoughts that concerned my most unfavorable predicament. One positive was that I could maintain, for the most part, a good seventy miles-per-hour, and the roads just became increasingly flat and parched as I crossed the border into Texas. The fine dust that covered the cracking roads would pelt my face as I sped through. Once again, a big thank you to whoever designed the aviator sunglasses, to him I owe my vision. At some point, after having traveled so far south, the cloud-like humidity made breathing quite the exercise, not one I favor personally, as far as exercise goes.

My first gas stop was interesting, or scary, depending upon the time of retrospection. I just happened upon a little station in the middle of nowhere, aka: Northern Texas. This station only had two pumps that appeared as though they hadn't been of service for at least two decades, so I pulled up anyway, eager to stretch my legs. As I hit the brakes, a large cloud of dust was stirred up all around the car, entering through the half-cracked windows, dusting my dash and seats, lightly, my fault. As I got out and stood up straight and tall, the sun seemed even more intense, now well past the threshold of unbearable, and knocking on the door of hell. I couldn't see how people could live here comfortably, and I'm sure that the temperature, with humidity easily winded one hundred. I had to check my shoes, (Asics) to make sure they hadn't melted into the dirt. I half expected to look down and see a black and white puddle around my burning feet.

I took now a moment to scour the landscape, but there was nothing interesting to notice, just thousands of small shrubs littering the dirt, and a snake-like highway winding far back into the horizon. When I saw this, it occurred to me how far I had come. I had never driven so far on my own before, and I felt the warmth of accomplishment take the place of fatigue and nerves. Then I looked at the station, every inch of the place was rusted, broken, and just plain Podunk. I suddenly felt thrust into a teen slasher film, you know, a dumb kid, or group of dumb kids take a road trip and find themselves lost, miles from sane folk, and in the hands of a lonely, probably ugly inbred cannibal. But then-again, I had followed the map precisely, and knew for certain that I couldn't possibly be lost. As I approached the small mobile-home-type-building, I couldn't, and hadn't yet seen anyone around. The door was open, and rocking gently in the breeze, making a rusty, down-home, demented creaking whine that nearly relocated my balls to my throat. The screen door behind it was shut though, and appeared quite solid and intact. I moved forward cautiously, and as I did so yelled, "HELLO! ANYONE HERE?" Of course, like I had expected, no one, not a single sound.

The whole scene just didn't seem right to me, my right brain was screaming at me to leave, but my logical left said: you need gasoline if you want to keep driving. I thought that the last thing an outsider needed to look like in these parts is some uppity, Catholic bean-pole. My next venture was to try out a gas pump, and it had to work by the way, cause I was almost out, in fact, I thought there might be more sand in there than gas.

Upon inspecting the pumps, I saw how old they really were. They had the old rolling numbers, and the frame of the pump itself was made up entirely of smooth metal, and rounded at the top two corners resembling the refrigerators from the fifties. They had, in their rusted way, a certain antique charm; they looked like they had been plucked straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting. This charm soothed me; it delivered me from my paranoia. I still felt like hurrying though, and topped off my tank with thirty dollars worth. For a brief moment I strongly considered stealing the gas, but it just didn't seem right somehow. I felt deeply for the poor fuck that had to survive day to day out here, in this dirt, under this sun, the likes of which I had certainly never experienced. I pulled the collective thirty from my wallet, gripping the bills tightly so that the wind couldn't claim them. I ran over to the building,

pushed open the screen door; it flew back quickly upon my release of it, slamming into the doorframe with a quick smack. I laid the bills (fanned out to show the full amount) on the counter next to the register, took a quick roundabout survey of the shop for anything of interest, found nothing, and walked back out. When I got back into my car, I slammed the door, to assure myself that it was closed well, and locked the doors. With the air of paranoia still about me, I took a second to check my backseat for ill-mannered stowaways, and upon finding none, revved up that engine and peeled out, spraying dust and dirt and stones probably as far as twenty feet behind me.

As I re-joined the old highway once more, some ethereal force unbeknownst to me turned my head up to look into the rear-view, seeing the station grow smaller behind me, I noticed a tall, lanky, almost skeletal being step out from behind the station I was just in! Tremors of adrenaline shot from my brain, down my spine and over every remaining inch of me. I could feel my pupils dilate, my muscles tense. I was shocked, no more, no less, just supremely shocked. I honestly tried with all of my potential to understand the intentions of whatever was back at that station. Were its intentions malicious, or just curious? Could it be that it hasn't seen many people, and that it simply shied away, or, was it planning something. Who knows, maybe I just didn't give it enough time, but I know it had had the best possible chance to corner me. It disturbed me that if it had done something to me, or with me, no one would have known, and it most certainly would have had no problem hiding any evidence, aka: my remains.

The weightless relief of having a full tank and a working car now held a higher level of prominence in my life, and it seemed as though I would never stop accelerating, I just needed to get far away. I knew now, for certain, where exactly I wouldn't be stopping on the way back home.

As the once baking sun regrettably resigned its strength and sank down, melting into the earth, a beautiful tequila sunset took its place. I was relieved, physically, mentally, and spiritually by the drop in temperature and unbearable blinding light, a light that could drain you to a crisp in a second if you found yourself out in the open. Luckily for me, the roof of my car had saved me for most of the day, for I am fair-skinned. The wind that had blasted through my open window and through my hair had definitely helped with the temperature, but someone help (not me) the poor soul who breaks down.

The once mighty sunset now gave way to increasing darkness. The cooling down of the land was so extreme that I swore I could see steam rising from the road and sand surrounding me, and I questioned the possibility of any creature surviving here. I knew for certain that I had been following the map correctly, and was indeed on the right road, however I had expected to come across some amount of life by now, maybe in the form of a town, village, hamlet, trailer-park, whatever, just something, anything, because now I needed a motel, somewhere to stay.

I thought I might smash my head against the window, because obviously, being in a car, I couldn't kick myself. The thought of having to spend the night in my car made my brain churn, adding to the churning of my unsatisfied stomach. I knew it would be virtually impossible to find much rest, and that I wouldn't have sufficient-enough room to commence with my usual tossing and turning, and that I would be nothing short of exhausted for the next day's drive, and a long one it would be. So, in the now pitch-blackness, I strained with the insignificant aid of my aging headlights to pan my surroundings. Every now and then the silhouette of a saguaro cactus would come looming toward my car. I would often, through the power of my imagination, mistake them for tramps, and not knowing for sure what they were upon first glance scared me a bit. A quick flash of deep green back to black, and then they'd be gone. These seemingly simple sights set my dendrites ablaze, and I was soon swimming, and floating among millions of images, all of them malleable and bending around me so to pass on and become something else. Some would replace each other in brilliant flashes or streams of color, still some would build upon others, and eventually fizzle out. At this moment I realized the beauty of my position, the understanding that I would probably never be in that exact location, at that exact time, seeing that old cactus in the same light ever again, or the stars matching the afternoon sun in brightness, billions of them, I could see my entire galaxy around me, and I felt very small.

Soon enough though, the concern for decent lodging became a much bigger priority, my anxiety rising once again, and it was a stupid anxiety, because the whole situation, in retrospect, really wasn't a big deal. I mean, it could have been much worse. The thing at the gas station could have decided that my skin would've made good jerky, or, my car could've completely broken down miles from anyone or anywhere! But, just like in any good ole' heart-warming story that doesn't take a turn for the worse and leave you suicidal, a faint light shot out from behind a hill way far in the distance. The road was winding around that hill, it had to! Hopefully the road passed beside whatever was producing that beautiful, beautiful sight! I immediately thought it a god-send, but I, not being in any way, shape, or form, religious, quickly dismissed the possibility.

It seemed like I would never reach whatever it was that I was seeing. I guess that because the landscape was so vast, everything that came into sight seemed a day away. I reasoned that the only reason I could see the light was because the land was so flat and devoid of any kind of obstruction. Then I thought maybe the light was attached to a sign, and that maybe I was near a town, or a store, or a motel, or at least another, more regularly used gas station. But if the light was attached to some sign, it had to be huge, for me to be able to see it from so far away. I thought that if it was a sign depicting a motel, the owners probably intended for it to be enormous. I mean, out here, you have to draw your business to you, you can't just wait. They probably intended it to be like a beacon of hope, for wayward and weary travelers, like myself. I likened it to a lighthouse, set precariously on a dark, moonlit, rocky shore, filling homesick sailors with peace.

My mind counted hours but my radio clock showed that fifteen minutes had passed as I entered the vicinity of the light. Just as I had guessed, it was a sign, and indeed it was a tall sign, like the ones you see along the highway as you drive through small towns. I noticed also that the light I had been seeing circled a large oval billboard reading: The Tumbleweed Inn: Stay a night and See!! Then I noticed that just down from the sign sat a small motel with neon lighting that illuminated the parking lot with patches of green, pink, and yellow. I have to say that it looked both dangerous, quiet, and quaint all at the same time. However, by this point I could definitely have been pronounced famished, clearly on the verge of brain-dead. I had spent an entire day trying my best to regulate my body temperature, and watching the lines in the middle of the road get sucked down alongside my car, every now and then I would count them, never getting past seventy or so before being distracted by something else.

As I pulled up into the driveway, I noticed immediately that there were no other guests except for me. There was one other car however, well actually, it was a truck, a Chevy, and it was parked right up beside the front door, and I just assumed that it belonged to the owner, or owners. I looked up at the big sign again, and underneath the name and phrase a blinking neon sign said: VACANCY! I noticed also that the lights in the office and lobby were on, but quite dim, so I started across the parking lot toward the door, the heavenly door. As I came closer, I noticed an elderly gentlemen peering out through the window at me. He looked tired and concerned, like a grandpa. I entered the lobby slowly, taking in every inch of my new surroundings, just merely deciding whether or not I liked the place.

The room was dark, the corners black as pitch, with a few coffee tables, an old puffy couch, and two broken down recliners. Near the doorway, where I was, stood an antique grandfather clock, an inch of dust on top, and I seriously thought about grabbing my pocket knife to see if I could cut it, but I thought it might be offensive to the guy. Everything here just seemed ancient, nothing within my immediate view looked like it belonged anywhere within the last two decades, not to mention the wood-paneling on the walls. I began feeling a slight unidentified discomfort, a tingling up and down my spine again, but as I turned to the front desk, and the old man, (whose edges were illuminated green by a Heineken sign) I noticed his very true smile, a kind neighborly smile, the smile of a grandfather who has spent a long day fishing with his grandson. His teeth were quite yellowed, which at first disgusted me, (in my tendency toward vanity) but then I saw his smoking pipe sitting on the counter top, which also explained the old, dingy

air that I was breathing.

As our eyes met, the old man spouted off a quick, high-pitched "hey!" By that time I had absolutely no energy left, and barely made it over to the desk, probably a total of five steps, just to give you an idea of my level of tiredness. I was annoyed by, and questioned the importance of the check-in process, for what I really wanted to do was collapse into the recliner. But as the process ensued, and all of the mundane technicalities checked off one after the other, I realized that I would indeed make it through, and the outcome, my reward, would be very worth the trouble.

During the transaction however, the old man was very friendly and patient as well, but neither of us said much above a few grumbles here and there. At times I could see his old wife going about her random tasks, moving around in the office behind him, but he didn't seem to notice her, and she never once acknowledged my presence, not that I really cared though, being as tired as I was. What I did notice about her immediately though, was that she looked occupied, overflowing with heavy thoughts, and I guessed, judging by the expression on her face, they were sad ones. The old man had a red-eyed look about him, like he carried with him a barely-manageable melancholy, but somehow peaceful at the same time. These observations made me more uncomfortable, twice as exhausted, and I felt an intense physical urge to escape to the privacy of my room.

I glanced quickly at the old man again and flashed a fake smile, the kind you serve to relatives who buy you something you'll never use. As I exited the lobby I noticed a significant chill that seemed to hang in the air like a fog. The smell of old carpet, (trampled under foot for generations) and various cleaning solutions filled my nose, aggravating my sinuses and constricting the capillaries in my head, and voila, instant migraine. The buzzing, dim, yellow fluorescent lights that seemed to be wedged into the ceiling didn't help either, and soon I was seeing spots. For a moment, I considered the possibility that this might be the real Motel Hell, and that the old man Johnny-Bo at the front desk might slit my throat in the middle of the night, using the extra key he has to get in, cook my entrails, and bake a beautiful, golden, and prize-winning young stranger pie. Soon though, my left brain kicked in, quickly dismissing these thoughts as non-sense, and once again, I was too tired to care.

Upon first try, the key didn't work, and the thought of having to walk all the way back to the desk made my balls want to retreat back up into my body. But I simply had to push it in a bit further, and it worked. The room was nothing special inside, looking much like the rest of the motel, and smelling particularly of cigar smoke. I realized that one satisfactory component of this room made nothing else matter, made everything else almost non-existent. The bed was soft, warm, and sat perfectly within the parameters of what I considered to be a good bed, thus making it perfect for me. I didn't unpack anything, I didn't take a shower, and I didn't even get undressed, I simply yanked back the covers, and fell in.

My first sight, as I awoke, was an older digital alarm-clock that displayed in dark red: 8:42. I knew I had slept hard, the first indicator being no dreams, the second being that it felt as though I'd laid down for a second. But none-the-less I felt rested, and my muscles less sore. As I rolled over onto my back, I noticed numbness in my left hand; I had probably been sleeping on it all night, and in a second, was reminded of my fading status as a musician. This was definitely not the way I would have liked to start the day, and as the feeling came back to my hand, it was, of course, an annoying dull ache, from the tip of my middle finger, to my wrist, and through my forearm, not to mention it felt weaker than before. I was overcome with an anxiety and dread from the realization that my situation was getting worse. Of course, of the two arms I could have laid my weight on, the injured one was chosen, by the universe, or god, or life, or whatever-the-fuck makes these psychopathic decisions! Forget me starting my day off bad, now I was pissed, and even worse, bitter, cold, and now devoid of joy! I'm sure that if one would have snapped a picture of me at that moment, my face would have appeared as grayed-out, smeary fog, with two black caves where my eyes should have been. I felt that, without my talent, my craft, that I had obsessively sharpened, I had no identity, thus explaining the disturbing picture.

I honestly didn't want to get out of bed, and I certainly didn't feel like going anywhere, no more long drives, no nothing. The thought of small talk with the creep at the counter churned my stomach to the point of regurgitation. It wouldn't have upset me if I had puked all over the sheets; after all, they weren't mine to clean. The refreshment that I had felt upon my immediate waking now sat like a turd amidst the pathetic steaming pile that was my once so vibrant dream.

I know that it must sound strange, or even ridiculous that I was so bent out of shape over something so miniscule, but no one can imagine what it's like to have your legs blown off seconds from the finish line, unless of course they've been there. This whole predicament was much more than a "big deal" to me. Not to brag, but I was damn-good on a guitar, I mean I could burn the inlays out of any fret-board. But now I was damn-good at regulating ice and heat.

The effort needed for me to get outside of my head was building to the point where I thought it smart to maybe take a walk. Once again I didn't bother with a shower, but at the very least wetted-down my bed-head and cleaned out my eyes, at least making the effort to project the illusion that I was more awake than I really was. I slipped on my tennis-shoes and dusted off my shirt, sprayed-down with a bit of Old Spice (my favorite) and left the room. I was halfway to the lobby when I realized that I hadn't locked my door, but giving my mood, said fuck it, in a slow, early morning, almost drunken slur.

As I flip-flopped my way into the lobby, and then to the breakfast area, I noticed the old man sitting at one of the little round tables near a window. He was sipping some coffee and peering up at a television, which was suspended up in the corner of the room. His neck was at such an angle that it occurred to me that he might be in pain, but whatever the level, if any, he was certainly straining. At once I asked him, "Why are you sitting so close when there's a perfectly comfortable recliner with a painless view back here?" motioning with my eyes and my right hand. He turned and said calmly, "Because I wanna leave room for my guests, I'm not gonna take the best, most comfortable seat in the house when some po boy who's weary from the road might need it more." He ended the sentence in a higher pitch than what he had started with, and he said it in a matter-of-fact way, with a sing-songy tone added.

At this statement I turned, looking all around the room, then looking out through the window, straining to see any car except my own, which, to my great relief, was still right where I had parked it. I turned to the old man saying, "Uh, no offense sir, but, there's no one else here but me, I think." I was afraid that he might be offended, and that he might lash out, something I definitely couldn't handle right now. He responded saying, "Oh I know, but there will be sometime." I have to admit that that was one of the saddest things I'd ever heard. But the old man still had an old spark of hope still-a-gleaming in his eyes. I really wanted to ask him how he'd kept the place open so long, but I just couldn't bear to put him through that, and although he had that spark, it was quite small, and probably couldn't afford any more draining.

Suddenly my overall angst morphed to intrigue, suddenly this old man appeared so interesting, just as though he were surrounded by a different light now, and I had a million and one questions ravaging my mind. After gathering the random assortment of items that would be my breakfast, I joined him at the table. The sun was blasting through the window, and I knew another scorcher was on the way. The old man was curious about my journey, or, as he put it, "why's such a young man like yourself so far away from ya home?" So then I decided to enlighten him, figuring I had nothing better to do. The whole time he kept a big smile on his face, a truly engrossed and infectious smile. His smile was so exciting in fact that I came close to laughter several times throughout the course of my dialogue.

I realized though that I was running out of detail all too soon, and coming close to an end, nearly sliding over the edge. But he just kept pumping more and more out of me, so much so that my mouth was dry as the dirt outside our window. I began to feel like the poor lizard, scampering across those lava sands, searching in vain for even the smallest patch of shade. It seemed like he was putting me on the spot, or testing me in some way, but not out of disbelief or disrespect, I guess he was just a really curious guy. By the time I reached the dark section of my tale, his eyes were brighter than I had yet seen them, and I hated to yank him

below baseline again, but I had to, for I was still feeling the ripples of my new reality.

Just as I had done before, I sped through the intricate jargon describing my medical ordeal, showing him where exactly it hurt, and describing to him how it had happened, my words spat out with a tail of disgust. I know I had to have been red in the face, smacking my bum hand against the table, the tears building in my eyes. I told him, "It's just not right, and it's certainly not fair, I had so much going for me, such an enormous future, I had the chance, the rare chance to do what I love for a living." I told him I was toying with the notion of cutting the fucking thing off, to just wipe it away, hey, it never existed anyway, I never had the chance! By that point I was nearly screaming my frustrations, spit probably landing on his shirt and in his coffee, I mean, my vision was blurry! As I sank back down into the recesses of my chair, my face started turning from red back to a sickly, pasty pale, I could feel him staring at me, studying me, questioning the validity of my sanity. I could tell he wasn't taking me too seriously, but then again, it could have just been the old self-pity kicking in. I briefly considered busting his lip when I looked up from my crossed arms and saw that old, wise smile. I could actually see the wisdom pouring from every orifice in his head, and it pissed me off.

All he said was, "Now I'm gonna tell ya a story son, and it's gonna help ya, I swear, so listen up." This grabbed me by the teeth, the whole scene now turned slightly surreal, like maybe I was on a stage, a movie set, a world within a world. His presence was commanding, because his eyes never parted from yours, and for some reason, no matter how uncomfortable you were, you couldn't look away, either. Not to mention the color of his eyes, a kind of light metallic blue, which gave him, in my opinion, a ghostly appearance, while also resembling Obe-One-Kenobi, only without the silly robe. He had also, a wispy-white, stretched-out cotton-ball beard that seemed to add to the paranormal experience. So much so, that I thought he might float up off his seat, up through the ceiling, and be blown away by the desert winds to his rest.

He assured me that I had absolutely nothing to worry about, nothing at all, making a slicing motion in the air with his hands. He explained that, while he wasn't, and had never been a doctor, he knew that what I was "suffering" from was merely temporary, and that if I could hold on just a little longer to amputate my hand, it would surely get better. He explained that he knew exactly how I was feeling, for only a few years ago he had lost his wife, the love of his life, to breast cancer. He said that they hadn't seen it coming, and that it had consumed her far too quickly for even a thought of treatment. He told me that after her death he couldn't do a thing, couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, couldn't cry, couldn't even get off the couch let alone go about his duties in the motel. He said that a brief stint in a hospital was all that had kept him from losing everything else. He said, teary-eyed, that long after her death, he could still smell her perfume throughout the motel. He said also that sometimes, when he was standing in front of the mirror, he could see her right beside him. He told me that months of therapy and years of simple life experience were able to turn him the right way round, and that I would surely find my way as well.

I couldn't tell if he was finished, but I didn't want to say a thing, not even move. He had been staring down at his hands, twitching nervously on the table top, but then he raised his head once more and finished his story. He said that now he was dying, cancer, from smoking, and soon he'd be reunited with the only person in the universe he gave a damn about. For a moment, as the awe-inspired drool ran down the corners of my mouth, I could see the joyous tears roll down his cheeks as the hazy memories of his beloved flooded his brain, his tired brain.

I was stricken with disgust, disgust for the universe and its workings, its random ways. But through these ominous views I felt I had gained the perspective of an intelligent being three times my age, and the pressure that had been squeezing my chest now slowly dissipated. I couldn't help but stare at his face, still gazing at the sky; he resembled a soul, ready to exit a shell too small. It was nothing short of beautiful, although I tried to find a more deeply expressive, elegant, or intricate word, I couldn't, and decided to keep it simple, classic, sensible. My outlook had been completely changed in thirty minutes; a new face now covered the scars of the old one, the skin clearer, brighter, and more resilient. I shook the old man's hand, paid him the thirty-or-so bucks, got back in my car, and hit the road.