

THE BOOK
OF NOTHING



HJ ALDEN

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H.J. Alden
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For Nora

SECTION 1

Chapter 1

In a quiet valley where the roses swayed, I met a man on a dusty road. Though the man was old, his eyes were bright. I asked him to walk with me and tell me what he knew.

This is what he said:

“From the nothing we arrive. To the nothing we return. In between, the nothing teaches us, and we become, if we work, the shining forms of its potential.”

“Once I woke up with a rose in my heart. I have never been so happy as I was that day. This rose is a great privilege. As it bloomed it burned away everything that kept me from seeing clearly.”

“In that clarity trees laugh. Clouds sigh, and mountains breathe. Air is the only thing that does not divide.”

“What we call the world is actually quite small. It is able to fit entirely into a human head.”

“Things are distractions until you learn how to use them. Until that moment, they are using you.”

“Life is supremely valuable, but only if you know what it’s for.”

“Fear is the greatest enemy. Division is it’s way.”

“To be alone is to be happy with whatever lives inside you.”

“To be lonely is to be anxious about whatever lives inside you.”

“This world is a story written by those who have forgotten their origins. Underneath their dead words is a truth so radiant no one who experiences it is ever the same.”

“Nothing isolates like the judgement that the gap between you and those around you is real.”

“If you wish to understand yourself, pass through your fears and unsatisfied desires until you reach the other side. Those fears will appear to you as a monster that pours out of your chest. If you are able to stand the sight of it with-

out losing your mind, you will eventually be able to see what can be known, though this wisdom will not come without the help of the higher ones.”

“As you pass through this mirror of yourself the terror will be more than you can imagine. Stay with it. Do not succumb. In the end its whispers will fade into nothing. Your mind will be lucid, supple and clean.”

“To survive in the space beyond the monster is not easy, but it is work that humanizes whoever takes it on. There, one must become responsible for one’s own equilibrium.”

Chapter 2.

That evening I stopped under a twisted tree. When it was time for sleep I pulled my blanket around me. In the darkest part of the night I dreamed this dream:

I was lying in a coffin made of ice. I lay there a long time, shivering in the cold. I wasn't at all sure I could break out of that prison. I was weak with fear and the ice was thick.

When my fear gave way to desperation, I pushed up hard into the ceiling with my fist. To my great surprise, there was not ice, but snow, and it gave way.

I saw a sky of a trillion stars. Everywhere around me there were coffins of snow and ice. They were spread out in all directions to the edge of the horizon. I saw a set of foot-steps and sensed I should follow.

When I arrived at an unbroken grave of snow, it occurred to me to free the person inside. As I leaned down to begin, a voice said:

“NO!”

So I continued on my way way alone, and the stars were like glitter spilled on black felt.

The next morning I ate quickly and began my walk. About mid-morning I was surprised to see the man I'd met the day

before. How he had gotten ahead of me I could not say, as he was much older and I had left him far behind.

He fell in with my step and this is what he told me:

“There are levels of dreaming. The lowest dreams are of the bodily functions. The highest are of a state in which one is free of the body. All objects in such a dream are metaphors for states of mind, desires, forces and invisible beings. Such dreams can have the force of prophecy.”

“When light appears in a dream it is a very good sign.”

In the course of our conversation that day, I asked him how God justifies the violence in the world.

He answered this way:

“Why look to God for answers about violence? Violence is the responsibility of each human being. Look into yourself and you will find Hell and Heaven. Exactly where is it you would like to live?”

I said , “but there is so much misery human beings heap on other human beings! It must be stopped. The perpetrators must be blamed, they must be shamed, they must be punished.”

He looked me in the eye and said: “The only perpetrator is you. Do not be concerned with others. That way brings death. And remember that sanctimony is the scourge of the privileged. In the end, it will break this world.

Finally, remember this: the crime is its own punishment.”

Overhead the day was blue, and the air was dry. I thought I saw tigers floating by like clouds. We stopped to eat, and I

asked him why he was willing to talk to me. After all I knew nothing, and had left my friends behind.

He said, "I will be with you for a time because the wind has brought me. When the wind changes, who knows where I will go. It is even possible I will be back again."

"To know why one person receives and another doesn't takes a special kind of sight. Only the elect have such vision, not I."

"As for life, what it owes you, it has already given you, and this it will continue to give. You can return the favor by becoming more and less of what you already are. What you are able to make of yourself will be your gift to the world."

We had been walking all day. The stars blinked in the pale blue of twilight. The man said: "If you look carefully, you

will see that the world is rising from its sleep. The colors have lifted from the objects they once adorned. The old forms of life survive only in the air. Not a single one of them remains tied to its origins. So it is with people. They have no place to call their own, even if they never leave the place where they were born. It is the end of everything, and the time of the nothing. For a while, in the nothing, good and evil will appear interchangeable.”

“One frees one’s self from memory only by remembering. Without remembering in this way-- cathartically--the memories live on as if they were you, while you exist only in parentheses”

We talked for a time as the darkness fell, until all I could see were the old man's eyes. These are the last things he said before he lay down to sleep

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