

Down the Road -- Part One: The Rider

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A tale of fiction...

A story from down the road.

Gerald opened the door. He looked out across his porch to the dust cloud trailing behind a black dot off in the distance. It had been one moon since the Rider came to him. Fear and hope swam within Gerald's body. Would his daughter Alice be with him? Would his daughter Alice still be pure? He had kept her disappearance quiet from her fiancé. Gerald didn't have much money and the promise of wedding his daughter to a prominent man in the town would assure a good life for his daughter and a peaceful retirement for himself and his wife. His daughter even enjoyed the company of her fiancé. Which Gerald couldn't even say for himself when he first wed his wife at the ripe age of 14. Over the following 15 years they learned to love each other and carve out a hard life within the dust. They put aside their animosity for each other as a result of their forced marriage. They put all that focus into their only daughter Alice. After she was born, dirt mites had ravaged her mother's womanhood leaving her barren.

Dirt mites...

They ate most everything. They crawled along the ground. They traveled with the wind. A Brown wind could eat a field of crops, shave the skin off an arm, or eat holes in one partner on the bed while leaving the other one alone. They had eaten the holes in the bed they slept in. The holes passed through the fabric and the feathers leaving perfect the smooth patterns like weathering to a rock. The holes led up to Linda's back. They'd bored through one of her kidneys. They'd taken residence and eaten her inside. Only by miracle did she survive. Only by miracle did anyone survive in the dust. That morning they looked into each other's eyes as Gerald saw the fear in hers. A small trickle of blood ran from her mouth. Gerald was untouched and unblemished. Sheets in the bed around him were eaten. The window open only a crack that evening to let some of the summer breeze in as they slept.

Alice...

She had knelt before the map of life three months ago with Gerald and Linda. They knelt on their knees on the hard wood floor staring at the map. It was a jumble of lines. A moving, bisecting maze. Together they must follow with her eyes in quiet contemplation, else get lost to each other. They must all follow one line with their eyes in quiet contemplation until it reached the end. It was their religion. It was the religion of the road. They must follow the lines together so that their paths may meet at the end. If they did not do this they may become lost to each other forever. Gerald could sense that Alice wasn't at all in the same path with them. He could not say anything but he could feel that she was following a new path. He should have stopped her, he should have began again but that day he didn't, that day when she traveled to the market to meet her fiancé for a chaperoned social call she was lost.

Gerald and Linda...

They followed the map. They tried to follow where she went. They followed the roads in spirit. They walk the roads in flesh as far as they dared. The roads led off in new places each day. If they traveled too far the road might not lead them home. She was lost to them. Would they find her alive? Would they find her pure? Without her they had no life of their own. Each day she was gone on their knees before the map, they followed the road. Each day the road they followed was shorter. As the road got shorter so would their lives.

The walkers...

The walkers were those who walk the road lost to the world and lost to themselves. They were hired as field hands and laborers. They would work a full day and at the end only ask for a new path to follow. They spoke as if screaming from far away. They had not seen Alice. Gerald wondered if she was now among them. But Alice wouldn't run away from herself like they did. He was sure that she was taken.

Gerald...

That evening looking at the map alone he tried to find her. He called upon the goddess of the road and heard nothing. He pulled out a knife and began cutting the map. He traced in his path through the map preventing the map from shifting and changing eventually as his blade reached a blocked road and he cut through. When he did so he heard a knock on his door.

The travelers...

He was wearing a dusty cloak, underneath it billowed objects he had gathered from his travels. With him was his guide. A small boy dressed only in a pair of oversized overalls. On his back were dirty gossamer wings. The traveler reached inside his coat and handed the boy a small black box. The boy opened the box and began to play with the levers inside as it made noise. The boy sat quietly in the corner as the men talked. He offered a Gerald chance to find the fate of his daughter. If he traveled back down the scar he had made upon the map and repaired what he had done. Gerald had begged and pleaded for his daughter to be returned whole. But the visitor did not offer that. Gerald told the visitor to leave if he was not going to return his daughter. The visitor told him the daughter was not his to return for he had not taken her. As the travelers left the little boy approached Gerald and spoke.

Phylo...

The boy's name was Phylo. He told Gerald that to bring his daughter back was to take her from her own path. Their paths no longer crossed. But if he were to repair the damage he had done then perhaps he could once see his daughter again and know her fate. He cast them out of his home into the night. He cursed them and he cursed the road upon which they walked.

The map...

Gerald stormed to the map with its ugly scar. He grabbed it and held it above him not kneeling before it as he should. He ran with it above his head screaming at it in sacrilege and cast it into the fire shouting that roads and travelers be damned, he would have his daughter returned to him whole or he would have nothing.

The Rider...

In the distance in the night showed the glowing eyes of a dragon. It bumped and growled its way down the dusty road towards Gerald's home. In all the commotion Linda all woke and stood by Gerald's side on the porch of their dusty ranch home. The dragon spun out in front of them kicking up dust. Bill had only heard of them in legend. He heard that they ate the bodies of dead animals and that they farted black smoke as they traveled down the road at speeds five times that of a running man. Gerald was shocked to find that they were made of metal and had wheels like a wagon. A man stepped out of the dragon and closed the portal from which he came with a slam. He shouted to Gerald that if that if Gerald wanted Alice returned he could have her in one moon. Gerald asked for the price. The Rider would not tell him. Gerald looked at his wife with her ravaged womanhood. Gerald looked at his horrible farm half eaten by dirt mites. He looked at his crappy wooden house that long for a tipped over a candle to put it out of its misery. Gerald agreed to the price.

One moon later...

It was dawn and Gerald stood on his porch watching the dragon ride closer to them. It again spun out before them kicking up a cloud of dust that made Gerald choke. When the dust cleared before him and there stood his daughter next to the Rider. Shock and fear was upon her face. Gerald beckoned her inside and shouted after Linda to check her purity. The Rider approached the porch and Gerald stopped him from entering. When Linda shouted that Alice was still pure Gerald let the Rider into his home.

The dinner...

The Rider spoke of how Alice cared for the fiancé and loved him as a sister would. For Alice's fiancé did not know the love along the agreed to path. She had longed for the shopkeeper's boy and had traveled down their own path together. They had been given enough shiny sand as a gift from her friend the former fiancé to purchase their own life map together. Alice sat at the table, sullen. Gerald was in high spirits as he opened his only cask of wheat spoils. Gerald listened with fascination to the Rider's tales. The conversation ran late into the night as Linda retired to her bed taking Alice with her to make sure she stayed.

The price...

The wheat spoils took their toll on Gerald's mind. He began to make up stories that didn't happen in an attempt to impress the Rider. Deep down in his mind Gerald knew the Rider wasn't believing any of them. But he kept telling them hoping that he could impress him. The Rider just smiled at him wolfishly. When Gerald was finished and the buzzing inside of himself louder than a dirt mite nest hit with a stone, the Rider got up and walked around the table to Gerald's back. He ran his fingers through Gerald's hair. He ran his fingers down Gerald's neck. Gerald recoiled only for a moment with disgust. The warm feeling from the dirty liquid he drank that evening had vanished. Fear had overtaken him as he remembered the pledge he made. Was he now to lay in the Rider's bed for one night? As the feelings of disgust intensified inside him he released his fear. He felt himself accepting the price he must pay for the return of his daughter. Gerald then felt tap on his shoulder as the Rider asked him the outhouse was. He pointed that it was downwind-ward just within lantern in light of the house. The Rider left him sitting at the table. Gerald, now completely sober, sat alone at his table to contemplate what exactly the price would be. A few minutes later the Rider reentered the dining room adjusting his britches with a wild smile upon his face. As he stepped aside he saw Alice behind him with thick tears streaming down the sides of her face. The tears were nearly as thick as the blood that ran between her thighs.

The rage...

Gerald ran forth at the Rider, screaming all the while. Screaming that he was promised her whole. The Rider allowed himself to be pushed towards the hearth with a blazing fire. All the while smiling with the shiny black teeth. He whispered in Gerald's ear that he had delivered what he said. He had delivered her whole. Bill looked up from the Rider's chest into his glistening black teeth. His arms slacked slightly as the Rider quickly turned and threw him into the fire as easily as if he were a split log. The fire took him instantly and burned him like he was nothing more than a shriveled piece of map paper.

Linda...

She enter the room without tears. She told Alice to go to her room and wait for later. She looked at the Rider. She leaned against the table and raised her dress to show him her weathered and half-eaten sex. The Rider looked at her flatly, at her naked plea for something. She had no husband. She had no shiny sand. She had no whole daughter left to her to marry off. The Rider told her that he had promised her nothing and would leave her with nothing. Because she wanted nothing. He walked close to her and leaned in to whisper in her ear. "You wanted nothing and that's why you left the window open so that the dirt mites would consume you both." With that the Rider left.

The watchers...

On the Hill overlooking the farm and ranch, the travelers watched. Phylo looked up at the old man expectantly.

The old man with his dusty cloaks look down on Phylo and patted at his head. The dirty gossamer wings hummed behind Phylo's back. "One day we'll find the man who is willing to stand up to the Rider. One day we'll find the man who can stop The Rider."

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