

THE TUNNEL

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*SPEAK OF ME AS I AM; NOTHING EXTENUATE,
NOR SET DOWN AUGHT IN MALICE: THEN MUST YOU SPEAK
OF ONE THAT LOVED NOT WISELY BUT TOO WELL*

(WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE – OTHELLO)

It is a morning in late spring and the chromium sun is already warm.

The pale blue sky is cloudless. As I walk lightly and freely high on
The hillside I watch the rooks circling over the skeletal nests in the pine trees
And I can hear their raucous calling. There is a ceaseless murmur of
Honey bees as they seek the yellow gorse flowers. Far below me lies
The ocean with its white-tipped waves and I am happy in my isolation.

The hillside is rich with the green of sea-blown turf. But, as my eyes
Explore the slopes; ahead I see an outcrop darkness of bare rock. Its bulk
Bars my intended course. As I approach I hear the music of soft breezes.

A strange fragrance fills the air as if I walk in a forgotten garden of
Delicate flowers. And now I see ahead of me, recessed in a face of black
Basalt and pierced by a shaft of sunlight, the narrow entrance to a cave.

I have roamed the hillside many times but I have never seen this cave
Before. Its black stone arch seems newly formed. There are no signs of
The ravages of ten thousand years of ocean storms. No plant-life grows on
This smooth and polished surface. As I stand before the opening in the rock,
I am caressed by gentle currents of air as they whisper past me, warm and
Perfumed, from unknown depths into the freedom of the sunlit world.

The archway to the entrance is low. I must stoop to see inside, but the
Angle of the sun is opportune. The hollow is illuminated. Its floor is
A carpet of dry straw that shines like cloth-of-gold. The wall and roof
Are flawless-black and mirror smooth. And again I hear the music of the
Light breeze; flutelike and almost imperceptible. What is this place?

Why am I so seduced that I cannot walk away?

I have passed through an invisible curtain. I stand inside the cave.
Through its arch I can see the world outside and hear the chattering of
Birds but I am possessed by where I am. I am not afraid and I feel a
Sense of anaesthetic peace. A low rock ledge projects from the west
Wall and I sit here now and casually survey my room. The sighing winds
Flirt with my body like living breath; soft and warm. I am enchanted!

From where do these narcotic breezes rise? Carelessly my eyes search
The black rock walls; smooth as polished ebony. I feel no urgency, for in
This place time has ceased to dominate my life. The ghost of sunlight
Slowly and forever moves. Part by part it strokes all contours on the
Surface of the stone. And now it has reached the back wall of the cave

And here the gold straw quivers and fine sand rises like a mist.

I must go there now! I must follow the path of the moving sun and seek
The source of my seduction! Where the straw moves and the sand is blown
Lies the secret to the zephyr wind. As I approach the rear of the cave I
Am aware of the whispering of mountain-grass and the cry of sea-birds
In the world from whence I came. Now they do not seem like the music of
Wide and carefree spaces. They are the weeping agonies of endless sorrow.

I have found the source of the zephyr wind. Here in the sunlit back wall
Of this place I have discovered a ragged-edged crevasse in the basalt rock.

Now as I kneel on the soft yellow sand and peer through the breach,
I know that my life must change for ever. I am unable to return. It is
Possible only to advance for I am lured by a strange and powerful force.
I am but a pawn of destiny and the tunnel awaits me. I *must* proceed!

And so, I am in the tunnel! I have defied all the warnings of my own
Judgement and experience. I have allowed myself to be enticed like a
Bird that cannot escape the snake's hypnotic eyes. Even as I feel the
Present pleasures of my existence, I ask myself "will that which is now
Be worth that which will be"? And deep within my heart I hear the softly

Spoken answer . . . but I do not listen for I choose to disregard.

But as I stand upright and look about me I feel a new confidence in my
Fate. The ceiling of the tunnel is formed of mica rock, and soft sunlight
From the world of my memory filters through the strata. Quartzite beads
In the passageway walls sparkle and a rose-pink marble floor is smooth
As glass. I can hear the musical trickle of running water and I feel the
Same warm scented breath of air playing sensuously with my face.

The marble pavement descends gently. Its path winds back and forth in
The manner of a mature stream. My footsteps create no echoes. I touch
The surface of the walls. They are silk-smooth and warm like living
Flesh. I look behind me. I can no longer see the rugged opening through
Which I committed myself from the hillside cave. I cannot regret my
Situation. It is the result of the passions which make me what I am.
The ceiling of the tunnel becomes higher. The pathway widens. The
Light is more splendid and accentuates the quiet colors of my new
Existence. Quartzite in the walls reflects like innumerable precious
Gems. My steps become lighter and my confidence in my future grows.
The music of falling water intensifies. I pass beneath a massive arch of
Pure white marble. I enter a basilica, so vast that I am overwhelmed.

Stalactites and stalagmites of white calcium spiral towards each other.
A thousand galleries line the circular walls. Everywhere is the rush of
Moving water. Lakes and fountains and rivers with bridges of sculptured
Marble abound in this underworld landscape. My body aches with the
Beauty. I am consumed with happiness and light strikes and rebounds from
Brilliant white surfaces and playful winds make music amongst the columns.

And yet, in this pure world of stone and water I sense a void. I feel my
Aloneness. I am the sole representative of life. I cannot share my soul.
Nothing lives here except myself. Now my happiness diminishes and I
Hurry to depart. I must cross this desert. And, as I move between the
Waterscapes where no lillies have ever bloomed, I hear the echoes of
Silent mockery. I rush blindly forward to escape the anguish of my mind.

Where now is the warmth that accompanied me into this tunnel? Where
Are the seductive caresses now? I have left the sunlight for *this*! My sense of
Loss is terrible. I am dazed by it. I stumble my way along water-filled gullies.

I do not see where I am nor in which direction I must go. My body is
Cut and bruised. My blood stains the white rocks upon which I fall. And
Now I am afraid! I am in a white marble cathedral but no God lives here.
As I crawl at the base of a summitless marble cliff my eyes are burned by
Searing lights which pierce the basilica dome. I long for the soothing of
The dark. I see a fault in the cliff and I sense that my tunnel descends
Once more. I cower inside and feel the comfort of a blackness for no
Light penetrates where I now rest. But I must continue. Now there is no
Retreat. I will never find my way again across the marble labyrinth.

I move onwards within the tunnel. I feel my way along the walls. They
Are no longer dry and smooth. I feel a strange sensation of dripping slime
Against my finger-tips and the air is dank. The floor here is rough with
Cruel stones and my clothing is torn and wet. I am immersed in total
Darkness. Behind me I hear the rumbling of falling rocks and I know
That that basilica entrance to the tunnel has been blocked forever.

There is no sound here now except that which I make myself. There is no
light and the air is no longer pure. The roof of the tunnel is uneven and
low and I am unable to stand upright. The pathway continues its descent.

I am no longer afraid for I have resigned myself to fate. I have
Been an architect in the creation of my destiny. I deserve no deliverance.
I peer into the blackness. It is unrelenting and I consider my entombment.

But I shall struggle once more to seek the zephyr winds. Again I creep
Slowly forward. Every movement of my body gives rise to pain. My mind
Is exhausted. I have closed my eyes to avoid obstructions piercing them
In the total obscurity. My imagination creates creatures of horror.

They have soft bodies with writhing tentacles which entwine around my
Arms and hands as I feel my way along the uneven ground.

I have rounded a bend in the tunnel. As I strain to see in the blackness
I am surprised by a tiny pin-point of light far, far away. My whole being
Is rejuvenated. I am uplifted. I am hopeful of my future. I am able to
Draw upon reserves that do not exist. My speed increases and I do not
Heed the pain of progress. Nearer and nearer I approach the light. It
Exists! It is not the cruel creation of a tortured and battered mind.

I am exhilarated. I bathe in a new happiness. All will be well.
Soon I shall experience anew and forever the secret of the zephyr
Breeze. I shall live within its soothing breath until it and I pass
From the earth into infinity. As I rejoice I hear the thunder-roll of
Moving rocks deep inside the mountain; growling and groaning like
Some primaeval beast. In the tunnel ahead the light has been extinguished.

I am crushed by absolute despair. My mind is paralyzed and dead of
Thought. I lie in an obscenity of oozing filth but I no longer care to
Struggle free. I beg to be sucked away into the bowels of eternity. I
Was a fool to believe in the light! There was no light! It was but a
Mirage in a desert of misplaced faith. What Superpower creates its toys
Of clockwork men and watches their puny desolation with cynical delight?

My body aches from the torments of my mind. I hear the silence and see
The darkness and now I know that I am drifting almost peacefully through
The final gap in my existence. When the bridge has been completed I
Will return to the vacancy from which I came. I have been an example
Of futility. I have created nothing and I have been the willing instrument
Of my own destruction. But, - even now, I shall strive again!
I drag myself to the rock-fall face. The Superpower analyzes the game.
He watches the movement of every ant and every cockroach simultaneously.
Ever blade of grass plays its part as it grows towards its death. All
Movements of everything are related to each other within the total frame-
Work of infinite time. What part do I play in His game? Does He smile at
My struggle or with a sneer of vexation will He clear the board of play?
Rock by rock I wrench from the detritus pile. Hour by hour I work. My
Hands bleed freely but I do not see them in the darkness. I feel my way
Backwards and forwards as I crawl along the ground. I have become almost
An automaton. But I realize that I can breathe and my hope comes from the
Source of air. Sometimes the rocks fall over me but I struggle free.
And I am rewarded. As I prise away a substantial stone I see its shape!
I push my face against the gap that I have created and there, far away, I
Think I see the natural light of the tunnel's end. Daylight! Sunlight!
My heart pounds with the anxiety of disbelief. For my faith has been
Diminished and I am afraid of hope itself! I claw the gap wider and still
Wider. I force myself through the hole that I have created like a child
Being born and thus I experience the pain and pangs of my own re-birth!

I have wormed my way through the rubble and I stand on the other side.

I have fought and I have won. The tunnel floor is white and smoothly
Paved. In the faint light I watch my own blood drip from the many sores
And stain the ground. But I do not care, for in my numbness I feel no pain.

Energy returns to me and I start to run towards the light. Faster and
Faster until I feel that I am floating through the air of freedom.

The light becomes larger as I speed through the tunnel. I sense my future!
I will live again! Nearer and nearer lies the end to torture and confusion.

Closer and closer lie peace and tranquility and purpose!

I rush towards the light. It becomes intense and blinding; exaggerated
By contrast with the previous totality of darkness and despair. Soon I
Will burst into the sunlight. Its warmth will tranquillize me forever.

Now I am only a dozen steps away. I will emerge into the sunlight like a
Butterfly from its chrysalis and I will fly! No matter if my wings melt like
those of Icarus. But as I crash onwards to the light I have abandoned
caution. I have failed to see the yawning shaft of eternal blackness,
and now, one step from the sun I fall twisting and turning forever.
Down and down. And the Superpower smiles, and his game is over!
