

ALTERED AMBITIONS: *A chronicle of changing Aspirations*

There was a season
when I craved beauty's bloom,
but body, bone, and being
waded through time's relentless loom
and the mirror made the erosion of my days
clear through its silvered glass's gaze.

For a while I wandered, wanting gilded gold
but became worn and weary until realizing
aureate things become lifeless and cold.

Later, with lofty longing,
I tried to achieve a modicum of wisdom,
but eventually I recognized
foolishness is a part of the human vine.

Now?

In quieter moments
I desire
not to desire
and simply ob-
serve what passes
breath by breath
the emptiness of space
manifests again & again -
death tucked be-
tween life bet-
ween d-
eath

Now
I desire
not to desire
and simply ob-
serve what passes
breath by breath

the hush between each heartbeat,
each pause before each fall,
a silence softly saying
there was never much, after all.

The room remained silent for a beat, the cadence of the poem still vibrating in the room. Outside, the city's gray pulse throbbed, but within the stacks, the air felt suspended. Miok leaned forward, elbows anchoring her to her knees; she stared at the shadowed shelves as if they were monastery walls. "What's inherently wrong about desire?" she asked, her voice sharp, slicing through the digital daze of customers scrolling in the coffee shop.

Chris shifted, the cracked, dry leather of his chair groaning like a tired bone. "Exactly," he muttered, brow furrowing. "What's the moral mandate? Must we renounce everything? Are we tasked to just... stop thirsting?"

All eyes pivoted to Tim. He sat huddled over a scarred notebook, looking less like an author and more like a survivor of some old shipwreck. He threw his hands up in a gesture of weary, washed-out surrender. "How should I know? I merely wrote the poem. That doesn't mean that I understand it!"

From the corner of the room, Cantara spoke, in a voice that was calm and grounded. "Perhaps we should remember that not all desires come from the same soil," she suggested. "Some are mere mindless hankerings, chaotic static in the brain. Others? Others arise from a deeper divine depth that actually promotes well-being."

Chris added with a cynical, sharp smirk. "Doesn't the problem have a more primitive source? Most men are governed by two 'brains': one trapped in the skull, and another thrashing between their legs."

Miok didn't smile; she looked at him with a curious, analytical intensity. "Only two? That seems dreadfully dim. Don't we host a chorus of contending voices? I hear hunger rising from my gut, and wisdom whispering from my throat. My feet speak a language of their own when they strike the earth."

Cantara nodded, her eyes bright with a inner joy. "Indeed. And why stop at the skin? There is an intelligence that inhabits the air outside our frames. Have you never stood still enough to converse with a cedar, or felt the resonant vibration of our planet's own path?"

Chris let out a dry, jagged laugh, his eyes tracking dust motes dancing toward the ceiling. "I'll concede we are compartmentalized, but I refuse this cosmic delusion. We aren't vast; we are finite. Only our arrogance is infinite."