Born Anew

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The Lone tree rises before me, its branches forever pointing eastward as if proclaiming that no matter how often the sun sets it will rise once more. The green grass of the meadow sways gently, coaxed into motion by a gentle midday breeze. Alone, out of place and yet at the same time more belonging than anything else, stands a steel drum, old and weathered. Burning from within is a fire that proclaims its own beauty, burning vigorously and fueled by something my eyes cannot see, yet my spirit knows of its presence. Its golden glow radiates warmly and brightly from holes that have developed in the sides of the drum, as if the fire were trying to break out of the container and brighten the whole meadow. I sit up against the tree, confused by the sight before me, trying to comprehend this eternal flame that burns from no source my eyes can see. For days, I have kept vigilant watch over this anomaly, afraid to approach and somehow knowing that fear was unnecessary.

Then one day the clouds come, and I think to myself, "If it rains, surely the fire will be put out and all my questions left unanswered." And it does begin to rain, but to my surprise the fire does not go out. The rains come and come, and the fire burns and burns, and without shelter my clothes are drenched and a chill enters my bones. No longer fearing the fire but deciding to seek out warmth, my body moves slowly toward the flame, struggling against aching knees and sore feet and muscles that want to collapse—warmth is the priority. So I trudge forward, and as I do, I notice how the rain increases and shifts so as to come directly into my eyes, blinding me and keeping me from the warmth that will save me. No longer able to go on my own, I collapse and weep, knowing the death that now awaits me.

Out of nowhere, a hand comes forth, beckoning me to take hold. I cannot see the face of him who owns the hand, yet love radiates from him who beckons, a love I've never known and always have known, and without hesitation I reach for the hand. Grabbing onto it, my strength fades, and I no longer hold myself up, but the
owner of this hand, which gentleness fails to describe, gives me my strength. I allow myself to be carried, not knowing where I am going but trusting this person to take me to the warmth that my bones now cry out for.

Suddenly the rain ceases, and I find myself in the presence of a warmth that removes all chills from my body. I open my eyes and find myself staring into the face of a man who shines with an indescribable beauty, and I have no need to ask his name, because his name is that which is inscribed in all like the mark of a maker. I fall on my knees and bury my face in the grass, afraid to kiss even that because of my unworthiness.

This, though, the man does not allow to continue, but instead picks me up, producing a bowl with perfect water, and begins to wash me clean. He then takes me to the fire and guides me into it: I am unafraid because I can do nothing but trust this man. As I enter the fire, only warmth consumes me; not anything is burned on me, not a hair on my head is burned. I can feel the warmth seep inside of me, and I invite it, call out for it, and am overjoyed for it.

Then my rescuer, my savior, speaks to me. “Why do you continue to carry that burden on your back? Is it not enough that you battle the rain, that you should continue to carry that bag?”

I look, and there upon my back is a bag of such immensity that I know not what to do with it.

“Give it to me,” the man says, and I hand it over. He opens it, and inside is all of my dirtiness, and I find myself unable to be in the man’s presence any longer, so I begin to turn in shame. But before I can, his hand stops me, and looking into his face I am again perplexed, because I find him smiling on me in warmth. Still smiling, he turns, and there on his back is the same bag as the one I was wearing, filled with the same dirt. Before I can ask, I notice that coming up from underneath the bag is a wooden cross, and upon it many other bags, some of which I recognize, many of which I do not. And there upon his hands I notice two holes the size of stakes, and in his side another hole. He turns back to me, smiling, and everything disappears again, to be replaced by the face of beauty that had first appeared to me. “What you have seen is what I have already gone through that you might not, that you might become a new creation through the fire and the water. I have already borne upon my back your bag and the bags of all others so that they too may receive the same gift as you. So I call you to go and tell this to all others that they may also feel as you do. And when you see others straying go to them and lead them back, knowing that not you but I am doing the work. This day you have been born anew—remember this place when you need to see me.”

And before me another marvelous sight—my bag, with all its dirt, thrown by the man into the fire, where it is consumed in a blue fire of holiness. And as it burns, I hear the cry of the loser, the one destined to lose, and I look at the man in fear, knowing that the loser would once again attempt to give me bags of dirt. As I look at the man, he smiles at me and takes my hand in his. “No, you will not ever have to walk on step of this alone.” Off we walk, following the pointing branches of the tree, searching for those the rain continues to pour on—those who have not yet been warmed by the fire.
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