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The Song of Sedona

Although chipped and felled, its lone arm proudly pointed to the sky: a solemn, simple gesture towards the clear blue expanse where seldom a bird and never a cloud flew. Through the stillness, shards of light broke from the sun's pane. Yet, the shattering of glass didn't ring the air; rather, low bongo thumps rhythmically fed the land. The beat of beauty pulsed across the Arizonan desert and soaked into the crinkled foliage and chalky earth. The soft red clay cradled the post in its final days as director for lost souls or tourists--whoever happened to wander by. Two young travelers were privileged to the imperceptible rhythmic incantations of the director. They saw the post, but were numb to the translated musings. "David, take a look at this wild old sign post."

The twelve year-old stooped to peer at the worm infested wood. "I bet it used to point up to Devil's Arch."

"Yeah, back in the day when people flocked every evening in holy pilgrimage style," said Henry. He madly threw his arms up into the air. Three arms lifted to the sky; two of the flesh, one of the spirit. A lone spire hovered above them all in grave stateliness as if it never sang. "This whole scene, man. It's nuts. You won't ever want to see another sunset again." His pack pulled him to the ground, and he plopped himself on a rock. "It's only a little further up. Wait'll you cross the ridge. You won't believe how beautiful it is," said Henry as he adjusted the clasps. He jolted his back to better rest the pack on his shoulders; pops and creeks soothed his rotating neck. Henry's younger brother bounced from rock to rock. From a distance, his excitement looked like a crazed dancer, twisting and curling to the rhythm of the earth.

"C'mon, then" squeaked David, "I don't wanna miss a bit of it." He ran around in a circle, and hopped upon the old wood. It gave a sigh, and David looked heavenward. The even blueness was just starting to develop shades of violet. And the

violet complemented the reds, yellows, and oranges in all the massive rock formations surrounding the immense valley. The dry walls sparked his dry mouth. David walked over to his brother and unclipped the water jug from Henry's pack. As the water dribbled down his sweaty chin, he blinked at the orange and violet contrast between the spire and the sky. He was suddenly humbled and whispered, "Henry, we should get goin'," and he clipped the caribiner back on the pack. David knew his older brother was slow up from a stop, so he excitedly bopped up the north face of the butte that eventually connected to the totem pole by way of a natural stone bridge. Close to a thousand feet above ground, the thin rock crossing gently swayed to each breath from the earth.

Beneath the butte, sounds subtly grew louder as the sun fell. The boys felt the orchestra in their hearts, but failed to recognize the sounds. Henry rose and followed his little brother. The butte was covered in Sedona's foliage: maroon and olive rubber trees, ten armed cacti thousands of years old, and sprightly rusted bushes. This garden drank the water far beneath the staggered walls and boulders. The water that used to fill Sedona valley had evaporated over millions of years allowing wild greenery to erupt from the ancient ocean floor. Now, only pulsating sound waves of nature separated the sky from the sand instead of the forgotten rocking sea. The lack of water couldn't grant His reflection, but there certainly wasn't a lack of rippled faces amidst colors, crooks, and crags. Pillars of natural expressions erupted from the desert; some laughed, some cried, while others smiled a secret smile understood by but those lost souls looking for a wise old sign to guide them. Guide them like it did the earth; the area grew and died in cyclic rhythms directed, channeled even, by an ancient conductor that never ceased to gesture for crescendo. Every day, the beats pulsed louder and louder until nature erupted in song.

Henry hummed a tune and thought of all the great sunsets. At nineteen he thought he had seen every sunset in

Sedona from every possible vantage point. Of course, he wouldn't treat his brother to anything less than one of his favorite spots--especially for his first one. No one came to Devil's arch; it was such a long hike that even the most adventurous were deferred. Fewer and fewer people scrambled the 12 mile gradual incline. As of late, the young pure hearted seemed to make it to the end. David and Henry were the first people in two weeks to make it to the base. They crossed the top ridge of rock, and David scrambled atop a boulder. In the falling sun, he appeared as a wild creature, gawking at the streaming rays with piercing blue eyes. His light brown locks wrapped and clumped in a gentle breeze. Round and round in a shower of gold. "Here we go," whispered David, and almost bowed to Cathedral rock, aptly named for its appearance. A sight no less than majestic was the distant cliff formation bathing in the falling shards.

Henry was suddenly overcome by a strange feeling in his stomach. It was like a band was playing through the valley--a band composed of marching drums. And the thumps penetrated his chest, and entered those well guarded areas of the soul. No light sounds, only the sudden pounding from below. Henry had to drop his pack. The Pentax fell out of the top compartment. His left arm wrapped itself around his stomach. He tried to think, he tried to control the pounding, and it hurt so bad. He clenched his teeth and they vibrated to the thunderous sounds. His knees started to buckle, and then...it eased up. Just a bit. Just enough for Henry to raise his head and look at his brother.

On top of the curled rock, David danced. He was not in pain. And there was a smile on his face. A secret smile. Like freeing himself from a great weight, the smooth boy twisted his neck and cocked his arms in awkward gestures. The young boy allowed the rings of color to pour over him as he swayed back and forth to the beat of the earth. His movements became smoother as glass hula hoops spun wildly round him. The sun spewed its crystal forms as the earth let loose a swell of beats for

the entire valley. The more Henry watched, the more the pain subsided, and the more he wanted to follow the rhythm of nature. The band marched on, and the old conductor continued to point straight up. Louder, it gestured. Louder for these boys to see the world as it was. Yes. And maybe they will hum this tune to all of mankind.

Henry's body rocked to the booms and thumps that seeped into all of his crevices. The sun blew shapes of glass that floated on the earth's orchestra of drums. The heavy sounds permeated the entire valley. Only two humans danced that day. But they certainly danced. The earth pounded on its chest and the sun blew red, gold, and silver bubbles that bounced, popped, and seeped into every living thing. And then continued to seep into things that people don't believe to be living. They, too, woke for their annual jaunt.

Henry bent down and picked up the camera. He placed the strap around the neck with ballet grace. He pressed the eye hole to his right eye where it would remain for the duration of this celebration. He traced David's movements. A tall, wiry figure bobbed in identical fashion to his small companion. Movements all around and beneath them caused David's head to twitch violently back and forth. Henry followed his brother's crazed movements. He, too, saw the scurrying shadows. The valley was dancing an ancient dance to an ancient song. For the next few moments they were both frozen as a tidal wave of beauty washed their spirits away. Henry's index finger rhythmically pressed and released the shutter. He followed the rhythmic jerking of his brother. Neither could see the creatures creating the streaking shadows. They didn't care though. They just followed the swirls of rhythm and the shapes that floated down from the sky. A sky that beckoned the violets and reds to waltz on the mountains.

And the sun blew a final glass ball that slowly drifted to the two boys. Below it all, the conductor stretched his arm even further towards the sky. One loud boom for 'em. The orchestra

gathered all their strength and together, in one final sweeping motion, as the beautiful swirl of purple floated down amongst the crazy shadows on resonances of past beats, the musicians pounced on top of solid bongos and bass drums. The boom was heard throughout the valley, and the swirling beauty funneled back into the earth like a flushing toilet. The shadows retreated down the slope and back into the crumbling kingdom, and two brothers fell limp on the echoing earth.

Curled in a little ball of exhaustion, David drifted asleep. Half an hour later, Henry's index finger twitched on the shutter that had incessantly clicked through nature's party. He rubbed his eyes and shook his head. Nope. Didn't happen. Couldn't happen. He looked at his peaceful brother. Without a sound, he gathered his things and woke David. They smiled at each other. A secret smile only the faces in the cliffs recognized. Well, maybe it happened. Ok, it certainly happened. And the boys marched to the beat that most people never groove to. They marched down the butte with rejuvenating feelings coursing within and without their bodies. Spun and hung to dry, their spirits were starchy clean. At the base of Devil's Arch, they paused. Darkness was enveloping the entire area. Although darkness would eventually give way to brightness, the post looked a little sad. It hoped it did the right thing. It hoped it showed them the way. And it hoped they would remember the song. The song it directed. The song it conducted.

--- *Thomas Reale*