

The Search

Gabe Garcia

The light grew dim as the heavy sun sank behind the protection of the distant mountain range. Almost at once, the seared ground began to let loose the pent up heat of the day in much the same way that a drunkard parted with his coins at the tavern each night - with a reckless abandon that insured he would have no more long before the nightingale made her last call.

Many a creature sprang to life even as countless others sought protection from foreboding darkness. As the sky overhead glowed a purer blue, and the light of the first stars did not yet touch the radiant valley floor, new and vicious predators stretched their long, lithe limbs and yawned away the balmy day.

In the distance, two female lions were stealthily tracking a male armadillo. With his keen senses, so beyond that of any human, the armadillo knew that something else shared the close, sultry night with him. The furry, 5-foot long creature frequently looked up and paused in his hunt for termites. He frequently glanced in the direction of the lionesses, but not seeing, smelling, or hearing anything definite, he carried on.

Such is the way of the world. Each crea-

ture has its purpose and each fulfills it dutifully. If the armadillo was more clever, the world would become overrun with the creatures. If he was duller, he would already be extinct.

Near the town, most animals took a wide berth, much the way a shy person would not penetrate a crowd of partygoers. One nameless creature walked through the streets of the frontier settlement. Boldly prancing down the center of the dirt avenue, his feet left a cloud of dust in his wake. The sound of human revelry did not startle or deter him. On a hunt of his own, he stalked onward.

In his large, knowing eyes a hunger lived. It was not a hunger for food, although his ribs stood a little too close to the surface. It was not a search for knowledge, although that was closer to his prey in much the same way that a shoulder is part of a body but is not the whole body. It was not a search for companionship, although that was closer still to that which his solemn heart desired.

Before long the night stretched into the ghostly early morning, the paltry moon sunk beneath a distant horizon, and the stars shone like a hundred million fierce diamonds in the large bowl of the sky. Like a great sponge rung

dry, the ground radiated all of its stored heat back into the heavens from whence it came. The temperature plummeted, and a chilly breeze blew into the broad valley from the East.

The cold did not bother the creature in his quest. The cold served to remind him of his supreme discontent. Nor did he fear other hunters. It would be better to be hunted down and killed by a lion than to continue wanting that which he did not have nor have the apparent skill to acquire.

With the sad grace of a fallen hero, he pushed on. His hands were dry and cracked, his throat dry and parched, and his heart crest-fallen, but he strode on through the night. The town in the distance could no longer be seen,

but it was no matter. At this early hour, the last lights had been extinguished, the last drinks served, the last card game dealt. Soon the lark would sing, and the lions would doze near the watering hole.

Weary, the creature sought his answer, but it was difficult to undertake a journey when one knew not the destination. Acting on instinct, he found himself back at his shelter. He found little comfort in the familiarity. It simply served its purpose as a place to lay and rest so that he could continue his journey the subsequent eve.

In the East, the sky bled, wounded by the hot sun. Overhead only the brightest stars marred the violet sky. The creature fell into a restless dream.