

There was once an old man that lived in the body of a boy. They would walk together daily through a violent world, every footstep contributing to the entropy from which the beauty of existence is predominantly derived. In their travels they encountered greed, gluttony, sloth and lust, and at times they participated in the sins of man in an attempt to achieve a greater understanding of his plight. This collaborative character represents an entity which many fly-fishermen can identify with, and that which some may refer to colloquially as an “old soul”.

The protagonist reaches out to us with pen and ink, a dated medium in the eyes of most of his peers. He writes at the same desk where he wraps feathers to steel to fabricate the tools of his trade, or rather his passion. The original owner of the desk lives on in the wood grain, in the form of sweat and dirt deposited over many decades by the seasoned elbows of his late great grandfather. He ties and writes with as much reverence as he can muster, and his intentions show through his work.

Nobody can say for sure where the old man called home, but the boy grew up in the land of lime. The river water that ran through his veins was the very same that cut the gorges hundreds of feet deep through the calcium carbonate bed of his home, and he would make his bed there too, on the bank, and sometimes stay long enough that he could hear the hills growing around him. The bank upon which he made his bed had only been exposed recently, for the river which he held so dear had once been an ocean, with surface fathoms above his imagination. The old man in him laughs, and reminds him that all things may diminish with time, especially those which we have no interest in protecting, but still he was restless. With these thoughts on his mind, the boy closes his eyes, and slips into the sounds of the river...

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This is a story about now and then, of new and old. If it weren't written now, it wouldn't be told. The boy struck out and broke the mold. He dove into that river, and it was cold. On a single lungful of air, the boy entered a world separated from our own by a thin film of tempered elemental equilibrium known to science as water, and decided to stay. What he saw there began to catalyze the union between the old and the new that lived in his heart, who he was, and who he so desperately wanted to be. But what he found has until today been kept secret, for if it hadn't men would have coveted it like riches, and adulterated it's true value.

As the boy dove ever deeper, he began to be afraid. The further into the unknown he traveled, the more his internal timepiece unwound. The darkness pressed against his eyes as the pressure did against his ears, and his heart beat like the hide drum of the Susquehannock

that cut glyphs in the rock of the river before his time. Deeper and deeper he dove, into that old locker of Davy Jones, to entomb his imagination among the shadows and fossils of the riverbed. Delirium veiled his visage as the oxygen to the boy's brain trickled thin, and where the water gave way to earth below he pressed against it, and the bowels of that old sea gave to him their secrets. Through a crack in the floor of the world he struggled, into a glorified anthill of dissolved tunnels of lime, and he took breath. The boy had entered into the headspace of an expansive carbonate aquifer. Bubbles of ancient air had been trapped here in the gut of time, but it still tasted sweeter than the fumes that his lungs had been fed above.

This lime labyrinth struck him as being starkly taciturn. The denizens of this world moved as the intricate inner workings of a clock, each on an undisclosed individual mission that represented a small cog in a vastly larger machine. Swinging shadows cast by square tails that cumulatively designated the existence of an absent light paced the halls of the void, perceived but unseen, the staccato tempo of their strokes being the only metronome to keep time in this inverted, archipelagic ark. And an ark it was- scarcely habitat, but a vessel to wait out the Anthropocene. Subterranean brown trout the length of the boy's leg paced its halls, sucking through their gills a breath filtered by the many meters of bedrock separating their chambers from the pre-apocalyptic pollutants of the world above.

The boy himself was a young fisherman, full of vigor and spit for his discovery- but the old man in him stayed his excitement. The boy tempered his nerves to be as still as the stone that surrounded him so as not to disturb these soldiers of time as they cruised through their tunnels of aggregate lime.

For a duration the boy lingered, meditating on this revolving door of evolution in which organisms seem to favor avoidance of each other over interaction, and he asked himself how it came to this. For what kind of world must it be that a non-sentient resource is itself aware of its predation and imminent extinction? To what ends would a perceived prey species go to avoid his humanity? It struck him now that the fish he so loved to chase and so longed to hold had abandoned his juvenile game of hide and seek for this deliberately catholic subterranean purgatory. Maybe the difference between a tomb and a womb came down to who knew about it, and the purity of the intentions that they held in their hearts. With these thoughts on his mind, the boy closes his eyes, and slips once again into the sounds of the river...

The boy awakes on the riverbank, with the sun on his front and the old man standing over him. The boy describes to him the treasured secrets of his dreams, and the old man smiles. They shrug off the difference in time between their mutual existence, and make pace in tandem down the abandoned railroad tracks along the river heading home. As their matched stride imbues tempo to their journey, the boy shares a verse from the depths of the aquifer of his mind. He says:

Wash away my rhyme and reason,  
Send them downstream with the leaves of last season.  
Where nobody watches I'll ride the rain,  
to let it mend my mind and heart again.  
Wash me down to the river so cold,  
For it is the only place that restores my soul.

When the boy gets home he takes the collar and tags of his dog and hangs them over the knob of his front door every night as if they were a dreamcatcher. He longs to return to the land where his imagination flirts with reality, and the fish exist in the manner that he believes they can. But the old man in the boy remembers a time when things were different, when the below wasn't so far separated from the above, and the backs of the fish were so thick and near to the surface that the two worlds may have been unified as one.