

Solace and Beauty

by Mehmet Kerem Türkcan

Louring clouds shrouded the moon. The stranger stood beneath the cold, red shadows, his face filled with ineffable disgust and gloom, and watched the distorted, aged house. Twisted branches of long decayed trees shrouded its foundations; hideous, black stones adorned its ruined walls. The stranger awaited in contemplation, seeking courage in wisdom, musing on the malignant nature of the master of the frightful house. Finally, losing against the burden of his obligations, he proceeded towards the house, his head bent to avoid the snow. Knocking the wooden symbol, he set his eyes upon the eyelet of the door.

"Where are you?" the voice behind the door asked in a soft tone.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"I think you are in rats' alley, stranger." The Maker laughed as he opened the door. "Please come in; I believe you will feel a lot more comfortable in the hall."

The grotesque living room was dimly lit with black candles, and seemed to be haphazardly decorated with various ancient pictures, hangings and drawings. They stood around the ivory table and sat on opposite chairs, waiting for the stranger to gather his thoughts. The Maker, a ghoulish man with a hoary head, was the one to break the silence:

"Now that we are warmer, I think it is time for you to tell me your name." He demanded.

"Didn't your daughter tell you?" The Stranger questioned. Obviously, he knew she hadn't.

"Well, boy, as you are surely aware of, my daughter and I do not really get well with each other." The Maker answered. Turning his eyes away from The Maker, The Stranger reluctantly revealed:

"It's Walter, sir. And you are..."

"Alexander. Alexander would suffice." The Maker smiled.

"Now that we are familiar with each others' names, we need to learn as much about each other as possible. What do you do?"

"I'm a doctor, father. A virologist." Walter innocently stated.

"You don't look like a doctor. I think you would make a good physicist."

"Yes, I had considered it as a sensible choice; however, I never had so much interest

in physics."

"A waste of potential, I would say. I am a game developer, by the way; I'm sure my daughter had told this." Alexander proudly announced.

"Indeed she did, father. She told me games have no place in a civilized state, and I agreed. A waste of potential, she said."

Alexander laughed.

"Civilization is an interesting concept, especially for children, I presume; but it lacks the foundation needed to produce an individualist intellectual. Intellectual growth needs more than books and arguments, if innovation, the only tangible measure of intellect, is to be attained - It requires a certain level of freedom to be acquired; that which the less capable individuals would inevitably fear. There is no place for leaps of faith in a civilized state, after all." He answered.

"And yet you are no intellectual; games are to entertain, not to make people think." Walter pragmatically questioned.

"There lies your misconception: Games are to solace grief, just as art is to seek beauty. One can afford to have only so much time for fun in his life; and one needs to have fun. Yet the sight of imperfection leads to disphoria in some, hindering the process of having fun, plaguing their minds with ghosts of unattainable pleasures. I consider myself to be among these poor souls. Let others smile and scream 'It's good for what it is!' at flawed gems and have their fun. I need complete satisfaction."

"This is not the talk of a game developer, father. A developer does not want the gamers to think about theories, but rather about the situations, rewarding the practice - I am myself a gamer, merely a bit casual as my job -and of course, your daughter- is limiting the time I can afford to entertain myself with childish indolence."

"Casual? That's a word that did not exist in the old days - It implies bliss of ignorance, reminding me of the religious fanaticism of the old. And thinking and understanding are different notions, and you mistake them for each other. A gamer, or a game developer in this context, does not think - only the artist thinks - but rather understands something the game gets to offer. This offer, and its fulfillment, is what tricks the mind into understanding it is having fun."

"I've never heard of any developer talk like this; you play with words, changing the meanings to suit your purposes, without thinking of the underlying reality. However, this is puzzling; for the other developers too, just like you, like the other artists, try to find solace through practice and failures." Walter betrayed his sentiments. Alexander, thrilled by his triumph, regained his efficacy and pressed on:

"No, my contemporaries think only practice is needed to understand. I, on the other hand, think both theory and practice is needed to comprehend perfect beauty. They conceive men as they would wish them to be. They think they succeed. They pursue an ideal, unrealistically following the footsteps of the ancient philosophers, adhering

to their own image to understand others. They think the wise must rule as knowledge is holy, as knowledge is one. But I know better. I know fear precedes reason.

"But I digress; pray tell, do you really love my daughter?" He asked, apropos of nothing.

"She loves me."

"You seem to be a good speaker, despite your silent nature."

"You exaggerate to make me talk, don't you, father?"

"You are here to tell me of yourself, Walter; not the other way around."

"I think you are taking this small meeting too seriously then, father. But please, tell me of the game you are developing, since your daughter hates you because of it, and didn't provide any information pertaining to this matter in this regard, perhaps because she somehow keeps loving you in her obscure ways. It seems you are somehow trying to bring art and games together to attain perfection. But pray tell, how can beauty, the expression of excitement and sadness, can be used to bring forgiveness and brutality only the games can deliver when not made for purposes entirely different and infinitely sinister?"

"Your mistake is thinking of art and games as separate practices, stranger. Art is made for its own beauty and not for brutality, you believe; I disagree – Artists are gamers, playing a game with no rules, thus gaining the chance to express ideas. What true artists are doing without knowing is that they are somehow playing the perfect game, the game I am trying to make. Think of it, boy: in all games, it is the cause that supports the gameplay; while in this game, the gameplay is the main objective and that causes the player to always achieve what he wants while challenging himself. Of course, you need to understand that in this game, gameplay will always change to suit the player's needs, and the game will inevitably contain all games that will ever be made. Only bounded with the limitations of the human mind, this game can become a perfect drug and torture device. People will play it- everyone will, living lives we live, suffering, dreaming but unlike us achieving. They all will serve a purpose, even those like you and my daughter – it will be majestic and we won't need any other games to comfort ourselves: no tricks there will remain, no lies and no necessities. I will succeed, and the world will beg for change."

"You will have to die for this dream to come true, father. People will trust this game only if there will never be a ruler."

"I have no fear of Death, Walter." Alexander sarcastically whispered; "A biblical hell could hardly be more torture than my life has been."

"I think in these words lies the nature of your misconception. You fiddle too much with abstractions to understand the mechanics behind your creations. I think that's why your daughter doesn't love you."

Alexander laughed.

"You are a good speaker. I'm not joking – I am sure you will be successful, even as a doctor. The world needs people like you, as you need people like me. A mutualistic approach can never fail, after all. Come see me once in a while, learn from my mistakes, for you seem to be capable of heeding others' words unlike my daughter. Until then, farewell, son."

The moon gleamed, illuminating the blue snow covering the road. The stranger walked thoughtfully, taking care to avoid the ice. Finding refuge from the storm in his car, he looked at the city from frozen windows, and starting the engine after some frustration, looked back onto the house among the wilderness before leaving the domain of The Maker.

"I should have been a physicist." he thought as the faceless clouds dispersed to reveal beyond the sheltering sky a phantasm of the Moldering Sun.