

# *SEER*

A collection of Vignettes/Short(ish) stories  
involving

*Altered states, relationship, belonging,  
society, nature, seeking, and wisdom*

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## Entrance

They sat in a small wooden cabin, their bodies burned red by the candle flame, chanting a Buddhist sutra. The monotonous rhythm of voices harmonized with the cyclical motion of waves of the North China Sea. The waves hit the rocks of the small Japanese island. Their hands hit tin pans and sake bottles.

... KU FU I SHIKI SHIKI SOKU  
ZE KU KU SOKU ZE SHIKI...

An Indian Buddhist sutra, written in Chinese pictographs, chanted with Japanese words:

... Emptiness not different from  
form. Form is the emptiness.  
Emptiness is the form...

They found significance not in the meaning of the words but in the motion of the sounds. Voices and hands sacrificed one beat for a blue tablet.

Accompanied by the long low notes of a flute, a sparsely whiskered Japanese picked up a purple grape from the fruit plate and circled to his feet in the slow, rigidly defined movements of a

dance. Reddish-flamed hair of a caucasian girl writhed snake-like along the floor and coiled between his dancing legs.

The pink, slightly coarse tip of his tongue moved in ever increasing concentric circles around the grape's circumference. When he finished coating the skin with saliva, he slowly sucked it, then gradually sank his teeth through the purple into the gelatinous center, randomly spurting juices into his mouth, down the wiry strands of his goatee, and onto the body below him.

Wiping the saliva-soaked juices from her stomach, the snake-like figure coiled to her feet. She picked up an incense stick and, raising it imprecatingly over the flames, cast tarantula shadows onto the wall and the flute player. The spider crept up his body while she laughed mockingly beneath delicate eyebrows.

The flute player felt caressed by the dancing kaleidoscope of flame and shadow surrounding him. He played the notes higher and more piercingly until the form which had once been attached to the tarantula shadow caressed his leg. The notes again became low and deep. He swung his leg

over her hips, thinking, "She's only a sound on the way to the pure note," and his breath continued to vibrate the bamboo wood.

As the chant grew louder, the flute notes shriller and quicker, the sake drummer's left leg became increasingly enraged at being connected to his body. The quivering flesh began to pulsate uncontrollably, and he was propelled to his feet like a wooden puppet jerked from limpness.

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The flute hung limp at his side. They believed themselves inside the wide angle lens of a camera, and clutched at each other and the solidity of the door, afraid of the formless dark beyond the threshold.

He felt the pressure of tensed fingernails in his side as they took a step forward and her arm tightened around his waist. Tripping on a small rock they felt themselves stumble into the picture.

"We fall. But not from destiny or wax melting our wings. On a clod of dirt. Every-

where is trivia and impurity."

Her arm clutched his waist as she involuntarily whispered, "The grass is an ocean moving too fast. I'm afraid to drown."

They slowly eased themselves onto the ground and lay back to watch the stars which alternately disappeared and relit as the clouds flowed over them.

As she tried to adjust her hips, she felt dizzy. Gravity ceased to exist and the Milky Way was a white space river into which they were plunging.

She pulled his head tightly into her breasts and, like the motion of a falling bird's wing, they began to make love.

As he closed his eyes and listened to the grassy waves flowing against each other and the clouds crashing into the stars, he felt the insignificance and impotency of his penis floating in space. He wasn't aware of a climax, but of a landing. The bird's wing touched solid and lay motionless.

The wind blew open the door of a thatched hut several yards away, revealing a Japanese

opium den in which a Buddha, yellow-red in the candle's flame, was surrounded by misty incense smoke.

"Nirvana," she laughed.

"... is an illusion."

Cicadas hurriedly rubbed their legs together, as if afraid of the night's stillness. The waves broke on the rocks below. He picked up his flute. Naked, they walked to the top of the hill to watch.

He saw a polished jagged rock look up at him and heard it laughingly speak about clothing and other forms of civilization. The rock beckoned him to join it, adding, "Your vision has already exiled you."

But as the flute player thought about the words, the rock dived beneath the formless waves, shouting, "Tepid imagination -- it's already too late," and, laughing angrily yet indifferently, shot foam off itself into the sky.

The wind was blowing hard and when he tried to play some notes on the flute, it muffled and distorted the sound. They slowly walked to the entrance of the thatched hut, and at the door

looked back at the space river and the ocean of grass,  
from whose womb they had just emerged. The wood of  
the door felt weak and insubstantial, and as he pushed it  
further open, the candle flame made her squint. Naked,  
they entered averting their glances from the brown staring  
eyes, and walked gropingly into the formlessness of the  
room.

## *NAKED AND WET*

Marianne sat alone under a tree by the river, smelling the freshness of blossoming lemons which were growing in a nearby grove. The wind must be strong, she thought, to carry the scent so far downstream. Occasionally whirlwinds of dust were seen flying skyward, then vanishing. It was shortly before noon and the sun, surrounded by only a few clouds, cast short fat shadows.

She watched the waters of the river being divided by a large protruding rock downstream. Part of the river went one way around the rock, part another. Both parts flowed together on the other side.

A small branch fell to the ground next to her, landing in the shadow of the trunk to which it had once been attached.

Her cheeks became puffed, making her already roundish face even fuller as she began to think about Peter. The thoughts were familiar and she fell into them smoothly:

-- Taking off his clothes in the lemon grove, he dived into the water and his arms stretched over his shoulders as he flowed downstream with the current. Just as he passed this



tree he saw me -- trying to hide my embarrassment. Two years ago. I was such a child then, it seems so long. I ran upstream along the river. When I turned to look back at him running after me, his body naked and wet, I know he would eventually catch me.

-- Finally I fell, he on top, kissing me with his moist lips, shaking water over me. I couldn't decide and he was kissing me harder and the sun was shining off his brown hair, making it blond and the dirt felt soft beneath me as he laughing and his eyes gleaming I asked him to be kind and he smiled I can feel his hands running slowly over my breasts I pressed them harder against me my breath coming faster while the scent of the lemon blossoms so fragrant he began to run his hand down my stomach I was so young I held my breath so he wouldn't think I was fat he pulled up my skirt dripping water on me I was breathing so hard the sun whirling I had to close my eyes and yes it was right I know it was yes I know.

-- I must remember to walk slowly so that I don't trip over my gown. I'll go over the path again and again so that I can keep my head high for our celebration.

.. ..

When Peter reached the tree, he saw that Marianne had fallen asleep. . Noticing that his shadow was disappearing, he looked up and saw that the clouds had become thicker, temporarily obstructing the sun.

He knelt and massaged her hair, carefully brushing the school-girl bangs to the side. Marianne didn't awaken but turned on her side and pulled her knees up to her stomach, reminding

him of a childish unborn simplicity. He put his hand over her eyes, shielding them from the sun which was reemerging from behind the clouds. Since the sun was directly overhead, their bodies cast no shadows.

-- Now, when you are perfection, is the only time I could ever be happy with you. Innocence and purity -- the dream I demand from reality.

\* \* \* \*

Marianne partly opened her eyes and, focusing on Peter, reached gropingly toward him. He put her head on his lap and continued to stroke her hair.

"Let's throw stones into the water," Marianne said, jumping up. She ran to the side of the river, picked up a flat stone, and tried to skip it across. "Three skips," she said laughing. "Now you try."

Peter picked up a pebble and slowly got up. As he cocked his arm to throw it, he looked downstream. There lay the protruding stone. He watched the water flow, part to one side, part to the other. He dropped the pebble.

Marianne looked away, still laughing, and said, "Do you smell the lemon trees?" But as she said it, the wind died down. Silence crept through the foliage. The sun returned behind the clouds, casting all in shadowy greyness.

Peter had sat down again and was fiddling with the fallen limb to distract himself, but became angry at his weakness.

— For once, show her who you are.

He pushed the branch away and looked at Marianne. But when their eyes met, he looked back at the branch. He pointed to the protruding stone. Her eyes followed the direction of his hand. As she looked towards the stone, Peter realized that he had again begun tearing twigs from the fallen branch. Angrily, he hurled it into the river. It floated lazily out of sight.

"There's something dividing me, Marianne, that keeps me from acting. Everywhere is that stone forcing me two ways." Becoming conscious of his fingers tearing the grass from its roots, he clasped his hands until they were pale white. His fingernails cut into the flesh. Marianne saw the line of a muddy wet path along his cheek.

It was shortly after noon. The sky was dark, threatening rain, and the wind indifferently twisted through the branches.

Peter sat alone under a tree by the river. The blood on his palms smelled stale. He watched Marianne, crying, run towards the lemon grove. This time she didn't look back. If she had, she would have seen Peter sitting beneath the tree, as naked and wet as he was two years ago.

## Limb Bow

He believed too much. So, to protect himself he decided to become a hermit in the midst of society. Although his external character would use the games and conventions of society, he would keep his inner self tranquil and pure. Thus, fortified against the very people in whom he believed, he began the creation of a new person.

He became an actor, changing his face to fulfill the role demanded by the audience; a mirror empty but for the reflection of others. With the rich he was a debonaire sophisticate, sporting the latest gossip. With the young, wearing sandals and jeans, he laughed at bourgeois society. He knew, though, that he could always shed the hypocrisy, leave society, and still feel peaceful within. The external shell was necessary only for protection. His inner self wept at the artificiality, indifference, and hypocrisy of man.

.. ..

But he became tired from the constant strain and maneuvering to which he had subjected himself. He decided to leave for the provinces to spend the day by the ocean.

Going down a dusty road, he met a young peasant girl carrying a large basket of pan de sal on her head. He stopped her and, bowing slightly, politely requested some of the hard rolls. She gave them to him while looking askance at his refined movements.

After she was paid, she burst out laughing and walked on, whistling.

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The sand was black and too wet for footprints. He pulled off his white shirt and sandals and sat down to relax on a long flat stone. The glare of the sun reflected harshly off the sand into his eyes.

He got up to walk and began whistling as had the young girl. His heel pressed hard on the sand, discoloring it a lighter shade...The sun's reflection incessantly mirrored the speed of his pace -- until a small wave washed over his

feet. Absorbed by the water, the sun shattered into a thousand quivering pieces.

He stopped whistling and sought his reflection, but the waves vibrated too rapidly. The ocean sucked the foam back into itself, and his feet reemerged on the sand. As the water receded, the sun's reflection reformed itself into a smooth sphere which continued to glare at him. His feet kicked up pieces of water and sand which splashed onto the beach, then merged and dissolved into itself.

He turned around. The smooth black sand seemed virgin and unexplored. As he ran back toward the rock, the sun's reflection, unobserved, gave chase. The sand slipped through his feet and pulled his vanishing steps into the ocean.

He sat down to smoke. His fingers fumbled with the tobacco, dampening it; it wouldn't light. He slowly unraveled the cigarette paper and cast the tobacco into the wind, which was blowing towards the ocean. He pulled out a second cigarette. This one lit, he took a deep puff. The wind blew the exhaled smoke skyward in a large, circular pattern. He looked through the

circles of the smoke as the arched upward into the limbo of the sky's white clouds which now hid the sun

He laid the cigarette down and tore one of the rolls in half. After thoroughly chewing one bite, he walked to the ocean and again looked searchingly into the water, as if for the lost tobacco of his first cigarette.

When he turned, he saw that the sun's reflection had reappeared on the sand behind him. He dropped the half-eaten roll onto the glare. It looked like a dark hollow void in the brightness.

Accumulating a sizeable quantity of mucus, he spit into the sun and stepped on the roll. Another wave broke over his feet.

Having expressed his venom at the sun's external reflection and feeling that he had satisfactorily reaffirmed the purity and tranquillity of his inner self, he returned to the rock. Bread, spit, and wave were pulled into the ocean.

He swept the ashes of his unfinished cigarette onto the black sand, picked up the uneaten portion of roll and, whistling, began walking along the dusty road to the city.



## *CHANGE*

It was two years since he had left the melodious ways of the city. Although time had long ceased to have meaning for him, he knew that many days had passed since he had eaten. He liked the pain of hunger; it was all part of the ascetic life to which he had committed himself. He stood by the bank of the river and watched the two women approach. By the paleness of their skin he knew they were of aristocratic origin. The taller one wore a dark brown vested garment which accentuated the pale whiteness of her arms and face. Although autumn had dramatically impaled summer three days earlier, today summer had been resuscitated and he felt warm as he sat in the tip of the cassia tree's shadow.

"Look at the poor beggar... as if pierced by an arrowhead." Shielding her eyes from the sun she looked directly into her friend's face.

"I can't hear you. The river is too swift." She bent her neck to the upturned mouth.

"I don't want to point or turn my head too noticeably. Look up ahead, at that raggedly dressed old man."

The tall lady's pearl necklace fell upon the chest of her brown vest as she straightened herself and looked into the Yangtse River. Although the surface appeared calm and smooth,

she was aware of a hypnotically undulating motion as the water moved in mass past her. When she focused on a specific section, the current stood still and the surface rippled vertically. The sun's reflection irritated her eyes.

"More tragic than a hungry beggar is a wealthy matron who has nothing better to do with her time than shed condescending pity."

"...and money." She reached into her tan suede jacket.

"Is your money given from compassion -- or guilt?"

"Does he care?"

"Do you?"

She looked past her friend into the river, started to respond, but instead dropped the change back into her suede jacket.

"Don't, it costs so little to build a wall of noble sentiments."

"And you, what do you do?"

"I feel his pain."

"Can he eat the pain you share with him?"

The autumn wind blew harder through the

cassia tree, and caused occasional spots of white foam to appear on the Yangtze. He watched the backs of the pale white necks of two ladies engaged in animated conversation.

## NUMBER

It was raining only enough to moisten the ground but he was cold and decided to build a shelter in the dirt for protection. The mud was of exactly the right consistency: it was easily pushed aside and, when patted together, stayed firm. In minutes he was nestled within the warm dirt. When the ground began to shake, he was nearly asleep.

"Perhaps," he thought to himself, "it is raining harder." But when the ground continued to shake, dislodging some mud and exposing his anus to the sky, he realized it was barely raining.

The rumbling stopped. His exposed buttocks were cold, so he dug deeper into the ground. But each time he was nestled in the warm earth, there was another shaking, exposing a leg, a buttock, sometimes part of the head.

Repeated efforts and deeper tunnels were to no avail. The faster and more laboriously he worked, the faster one part would cave in and the more difficult the work became because his sweat made the ground harder to pull apart. Finally, from exhaustion, he was forced to remain motionless, even though his left buttock was being rained upon.

The rumbling ceased.

The rain soon became cold, and feeling rested, he once again crawled deeper into the earth. Almost simultaneous with his renewed effort, the dirt rumbled, exposing both his buttocks. When he stopped struggling, the rumbling again ceased. The rain steadily -- but not harshly -- pattered on his anus. The chill passed and soon he felt an enjoyable sensation, as if he were being massaged.

The downpour began to steadily increase but he was very tired and fell asleep without realizing he could no longer feel the rain.

## *EXIT*

Naciketas, the seeker after knowledge, heard of a brilliant Master who lived in the Tibetan Himalayas and decided to find him. After many days of difficult travelling he finally arrived at the entrance of the cave. The sun had long since gone down and as he entered the cave, the glare of a candle irritated his eyes and he was forced to close them for several seconds.

When he opened them, he was able to distinguish the form of a human body which was sitting to the right and in front of the candle. But the body was heavily shadowed and Naciketas was unable to tell whether his presence had been noticed.

In front of the candle was a small piece of paper. Naciketas, though always full of faith, was unsure whether the paper was really meant to be a message for him. After several minutes of uneasy hesitation and no sign of movement from the dark form, he decided to pick it up. On the clean piece of white paper was clearly and legibly written the following:

"In what are the worlds of Brahma woven, like warp and woof?"

"Do not ask too much," Yagnavalkya answered, "lest thy head should fall off."

-- Bradharanyaka Upanishad

A latticework of light illumated the fragments of a dirt path which hadn't been buried beneath leaves' shadows and fallen forms. In a hive attached to an overhanging branch, bees weer veing nourished by the honey which they had produced.

A caterpillar inched its way from one brown blade of grass to another until it reached the edge of the path along which Yagnavalkya's feet, though slowly and carefully placed, crackled the fallen russet leaves.

The leaves became silent and the caterpillar heard a beautiful song and an echo. He believed Yagnavalkya had stopped to avoid crushing him, but soon realized he had stooped to pick up a bird lying on the ground. A vine, long and silkily textured, was attached to the bird's foot. The bird gyrated along the ground, stirring up loose dirt by the flapping of its wings.

It eluded Yagnavalkya's grasp and flew skyward. But the vine was anchored to a mighty tree whose roots had buried themselves deep in the ground. The bird's neck was snapped back and he was forced to again land on the dirt path.

Almost simultaneously, Yagnavalkya and the caterpillar decided to continue their journeys. A lattice-work of light illuminated the fragments of dirt and fallen russet leaves which hadn't yet been buried by the shadows of the leaves remaining on the tree. A beautiful song and an echo once again filled the air.

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He carefully folded the paper and, now certain that it was intended for him, bowed to the Master and walked out of the cave. He spent the next several days wandering through the mountains, reading and rereading the lines of the text. One morning, shortly before sunrise, he understood, and was filled with laughter and joy like a small child. The story was so simple; only the complex involutions of this mind had made him seek for deeper and deeper meanings.



When he returned to the cave, the master's position was unchanged and his face was still covered by shadows. Naciketas didn't know whether he should interrupt the master's meditation, but unable to restrain himself, approached the master and said, "I have understood."

He imagined he saw the master imperceptibly nod his head so he continued: "The most difficult thing to understand was the song of the bird. Why did the text call it beautiful? Especially since the bird was imprisoned. But just as the poetry we admire as moving and beautiful often originates in the depths of the poet's suffering, this bird's song, which sounded beautiful, came from the bird's entrapment.

"Yagnavalkya tried to free the bird, but the bird misunderstood his intentions and tried to fly off, causing itself more pain. The Brahman Yagnavalkya knew it was impossible to help those who were not yet ready and sadly and silently walked off, listening to the bird's beautiful cry of pain."

Naciketas smiled inwardly but tried to keep his mouth tightly sealed and was even forced to bite his lips to keep a self-satisfied grin from his face while he anticipated the master's approval.

He thought the master, recognizing a prize pupil, might even ask him to join the meditation.

Instead, the master bade Naciketas to rise and motioned for him to leave. Confused, Naciketas walked slowly to the exit of the cave. He saw the master's shadow on the wall above his left shoulder. At first he thought he heard words coming from the shadow; then he realized the master was speaking to him and he was listening to the echo:

"Naciketas, how do you know that it wasn't Yagnavalkya who was singing the beautiful song which filled the shadows of the forest?"

Naciketas stared silently at the shadow for several more seconds until the last sound of the echo had completely faded. Then he left the cave and retired deep into the mountains, reading and re-reading the story. He read the text so many times that the paper became a dirty yellow and began to tear in several places. He was perplexed. What had once seemed clear drifted in to a hazy mist.

After several weeks, a haggard Naciketas again sought the Master's cave. The light from the candle was very dim and seemed nearly ready to go out.

"Master, I cannot understand. Bees produce the honey. Honey gives the bees nourishment.

The tree supports the bee hive. But why does the vine of the tree entangle the bird's neck and, while Yagnavalkya sings, force the bird to silently struggle against his imprisonment?

The words of the text do not say enough." He held up the crumpled piece of paper which would have been nearly unreadable even if the flickering candle hadn't been the only light source.

The master was silent.

Finally he spoke. "Naciketas, how do you know the bird isn't happily singing. The text never says the bird was bothered by the vine. In fact the vine was both long and of a silk-like texture."

Even though the master made no further motion, Naciketas knew that it was time for him to leave and walked to the exit of the cave. He waited with his back to the master, hoping for some final piece of insight before his departure. The shadow of the master faintly flickered on the wall of the cave but spoke no words. As he was

listening to the silence he looked down and saw the reflection of light off the hard shell of an insect which was just beginning to cross his path.

Naciketas looked up at the shadow and then turned to face the form. "Master, I think I understand your silence. The text is an early story of the Brahman Yagnavalkya, before he had arrived. He made the same mistake as I, and bent to help the bird, thinking it was in pain, not realizing the oneness of the world and that the bird was happily singing. In his ignorant state Yagnavalkya might have even crushed the caterpillar which was beginning to cross his path."

Naciketas awaited the master's response. This time he didn't have to bite his tongue to keep back a self-satisfied grin, although deep inside he felt the master was just about to wordlessly nod to him with a smile that would indicate approval.

Instead the master bade Naciketas rise and leave. At the exit he paused for a response from the master. But he expected none. He knew he would no longer be able to read the torn shreds

of paper upon which the text was written and there was no place left where he could go to meditate. As he expected, no words came. He stared at the last traces of the master's shadow hanging on the wall. With a resigned despair he smiled at the idea of a shadow speaking to him with a silent echo.

Suddenly he began laughing and burst into song. The shadow echoed his song and instantaneously there was a duet.

Naciketas turned and saw the white teeth of the master smiling in song through the hairs of his long grey beard. The master bade Naciketas to enter and sit beside him.

The candle was behind their backs as both sat facing the entrance of the cave, silently meditating on the shadows of themselves which slowly disappeared as the candle wick decayed into ashes and the last warm piece of wax hardened.