

## The Lone Wanderer

The Lone Wanderer walked the trail to the lost city every day. As he walked, he pondered the wonders of years gone by. He wondered at the tall buildings and bright lights that used to blot out the stars from the sky. He wondered at the roads that wound from town to town paved with white stones like a clear stream running down from the western mountains. Now faded and sinking into the ground. A city lost, a road forgotten, except by The Lone Wanderer.

Up and down the trail he walked for days, weeks, months, and years. Thinking on the past, on what was lost, on what was forgotten. He remembers his city, the glorious capital, exquisite in every way. He remembers the innovation, the technology, how the future had arrived with all of its glorious predictions fulfilled. No more was there fear of walking in the night. No more did the shadows hold dangers untold. No, beauty prevailed over all senses. But now it was lost and forgotten, except by The Lone Wanderer.

Cold rainwater flooded the trail forcing The Lone Wanderer to take shelter in a desolate building, empty and rotting, as he had many times before. He sat at the cold hearth and looked over the room. He remembered this place, a tavern, brimming with people every night. They would crowd around the stage in the corner waiting for the music to start and the dancing to begin. The floor echoed with the stamping of shoes and the joyful voices of patrons enjoying a night free from the burdens of life. Now the floor was broken and crumbling. No more would people dance its boards. No more would people sit and enjoy. Now it was lost and forgotten, except by The Lone Wanderer.

*What is the place? Where am I?* The Lone Wanderer woke with a start. He saw lights! He heard laughter, music, and song. But the dream faded like the trail buried by its own weight,

sinking evermore into the dark recesses of his mind. The Lone Wanderer wept as he tried to remember what was lost and forgotten, even by The Lone Wanderer.

“Hello? Is someone in there?” a voice called from just outside the door. The Lone Wanderer shook his head to dispel the delusions, but the voice continued talking as if to another outside. Another voice responded though the words were muffled. The Lone Wanderer huddled down as he heard sounds; sounds he had never dreamed of hearing again. Sounds he had thought lost, sounds almost forgotten.

He looked in fear at the door, at what might lie behind it, of memories that came crashing through his consciousness. With a gasp he cried out in a cracked and quavering voice. “I am here.” The voices fell silent for a moment before the door slowly was pushed open. Three men entered looking around cautiously. One man stood out he was tall and carried an air of leadership he locked eyes with The Lone Wanderer huddled on the stone hearth. They were dripping wet, and the sound of rainfall continued louder now from the open door.

The man walked over to The Lone Wanderer careful to avoid falling through the floor. He knelt down in front of him. “Hello sir, you have been here a long time, haven’t you?”

The Lone Wanderer took a moment to process the words before responding. “For many years I have walked on the trail, never once have I seen another.”

“I am Gathron of New Tricle, what is your name?”

“My name?” The Lone Wanderer thought back to the time before. When the city still lit the sky each night. But he could not remember his name, all he could remember was what he was. “I am The Lone Wanderer; my name has been lost for many years.”

Gathron nodded gently, "How did you come to this place?"

"I wander the road to the city as I always have." The Lone Wanderer responded in a low voice.

"When did you enter the forest?" Gathron asked, a confused look on his face.

"I told you; I have always wandered this road... Always." Gathron did not respond to this but turned and walked back to the other two men and began speaking with them. Soon they broke up and began opening their packs and laying out supplies. One of the men left for a while and then returned with a bundle of wood which he placed in the hearth beside The Lone Wanderer. He did not stir from his position but continued to sit and remember.

The man who had carried the wood in earlier came back with a small box filled with dry grass and twigs. He placed a handful of the tinder on the hearth and brought out a stone and a knife. With the back of the knife, he struck the stone sending sparks flying into the tinder. A flame grew from the sparks and the man pushed the pile back into the wood he had placed earlier. The Lone Wanderer shuddered as he watched the flames grow consuming the wood. Memories burst into his mind in a sudden overwhelming flow. The Lone Wanderer turned away from the fire, but it was too late, and he felt himself being taken back to the night of the fall. He felt the heat of the fires and smelled the putrid odors of death.

"Hold him down!" A voice broke through muffled but growing clearer. He felt the memory sliding back as the burning city began to disappear back into his mind. The Lone Wanderer opened his eyes. The three men stood over him concern written on their faces.

"Do not worry, I haven't died yet." The Lone Wanderer said in his muddled voice. Gathron knelt beside him.

“Wanderer, do you know what happened here?” He asked hesitantly.

The Lone Wanderer considered the question. “Sometimes, sometimes not, my mind is broken, I remember many things at times and nothing at others. But I must not forget, if I forget it will be forgotten, forever.” The Lone Wanderer responded.

“Then tell me your tale Lone Wanderer, I will write it so that no mind can forget it.”

At this The Lone Wanderer felt hope lift in him. *My city will not be lost, my road will not be forgotten. They will remember its rise, its fall, and the many years since.* “Yes, I will tell you of the city, of its glories and wonders, of its failure, of its destruction. To be forgotten is my fear even as I forget myself.”

“This paper is strong, and my pen is sure. All you must do is tell us your story and it will continue.” Gathron urged.

The Lone Wanderer hesitated. “My story is not one to be taken lightly, it is not a tale for entertainment to be simplified to the minds of children.”

“No, your story is history that should be recorded and passed down from generation to generation, always remembered.” Gathron responded adamantly. “We have stories of the city but no one alive has seen inside it. No one knows how it fell only that the walls darkened, and smoke rose from its center. Once the rain stops, we are going to it. We will enter the city and discover how it fell all those years ago. Your story will guide us on our way, we never imagined there would be anyone left.”

The Lone Wanderer felt shock roll through him. “You are going to enter the city.”

Gathron narrowed his eyes. “Yes.”

The Lone Wanderer was again bombarded with images. The cries from within, the gates closing. Him, standing outside on the empty road watching as the red glowing smoke blotted out the stars. He remembered screaming into the night as he saw the gates clang shut for the final time, never to be opened again. Successful but no less a failure for letting it come to this. He saw it again, the gate open, spreading from the city's heart, covering the world. *No, No. I cannot let that happen.*

He gasped, thrust back into consciousness. "I will not tell you my tale."

"Why not?" Gathron asked sharply.

"I can not help you to enter the city. The gate is closed, and it will remain so."

Gathron voice turned pleading, "But your story. It will be lost; it will be forgotten. How will your city be remembered if we cannot enter it?"

The Lone Wanderer looked down, thinking on his life. "Some things are better forgotten, better lost. My city was forgotten a long time ago, save by me, its time I also forgot. All you must know is that it fell to its own depravity and was destroyed."

Gathron stood silently and walked toward the door before speaking. "The rain has stopped, goodbye Lone Wanderer. You will be forgotten, your tale forever untold as you desire. Your city will continue to be lost to the world."

"Goodbye." The Lone Wanderer stated quietly. Gathron turned and waved to his soldiers. They turned left down the old road heading south, deeper into the forest. The Lone Wanderer watched until they disappeared among the trees. He then turned to the north and began to walk once again, as he had many times before. Though this time it felt different, his mind less

burdened then when he had first come to the old tavern. He wandered on without stopping. His city was lost, his road forgotten, as they must be.