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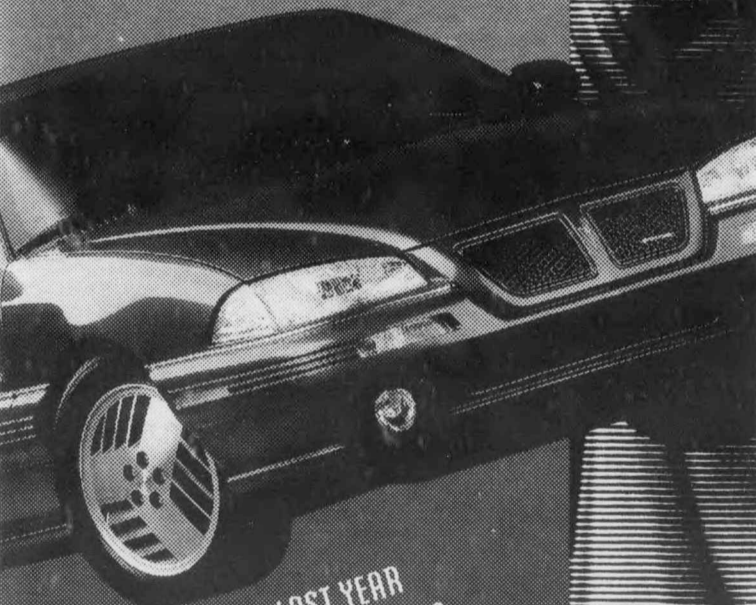



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...more distractions

Wise guy, eh?: A Study in Enlightenment

by T. Andrew Clarke

innocuous little exercise in creative writing might have given birth to what, at first glance, appeared to be little more than a perky little piece of distraction, but which, upon further examination, revealed the foundation of — dare I say it — an entire metaphysics. Consider the piece that let fly the apple:

The Perfect Day.

"My perfect day would begin with the most delightful exchange of affections between myself and my love at an hour of the morning unacknowledged by any alarm clock, nor hemmed in by the duties of work, in a cabin rustic enough to sit tastefully perched between alpine ski slopes, yet modern enough to sport all the modern conveniences. Add to this a mellow breakfast chatter, a strong coffee, the private immersion into the pages of a most stimulating book, a vigorous afternoon on the slopes, a chance encounter with another couple, fabulous ensuing conversation, a Spanish coffee or three extending into dinner, a timely retreat to the cabin, a fine comedy complimented with equally fine snacks, perhaps another read, contemplation or conversation before a satisfied return to warm embrace and flight into never-never land."

And then, as innocently as it began, I assembled what seemed to me to be the key ingredients of this most pleasant scenario. And setting them forth before my weary eyes in list-like fashion I beheld the essence of what I consider worthy, and it looked like this:

- right companion
- right lover
- right friend (Note: the above three ideally defining the same person)
- right food and booze
- right conversation
- right roof
- right sports and entertainment
- right books and ideas

My god, Eureka! There it is, Buddha's "eightfold path" coddled, as it were, in the arms of my own unsuspecting prose, and swaddled in the latest prejudices. Could it be that just as the Buddha had his eightfold path to enlightenment, so too do I have mine — to contentment. Am I just a sod, or need our views be considered mutually exclusive. Might there not be points of commonality between his path and mine, between the great sage and myself? Might I really be a wise guy? Let's see, what was his formula?: Right views, right intend, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

By golly, it seems to me that in places they overlap, or are at least complimentary. How account for the differences? I'm not him, you say? Indeed! After all, he was, and is, considered one of the greatest and wisest of men. And it's true that his "way" was a form of training designed to subvert the claims of the "self." I suppose that upon closer examination, I am forced to admit that my list is just swimming in "self." But dam it all, you can see it for yourself, there's some overlap, however minimal. True, I'm not quite so inclined to asceticism, nor so compelled by visions of nirvana as I might like to think. No, I suppose not. I had better make do with my makeshift revision and save the profundity for the true seekers of truth.

Or so I thought until recently. Until I related the entire story you have just heard to a whole host of psychologists, psychiatrists and philosophers. To each and every one of them, in the most excited state (sensing the real truth of my status) I put forth the question, "I'm a wise guy, aren't I?" And the resounding and unanimous reply was "Yes, by George, you are". I feel fulfilled.

Garden Growing Old

The weed had grown
between my toes;
We had stayed
Too long, too slow;
Even love was tired,
sitting on our porch
Drinking beer and warm milk.
Then to bed,
Like the weed again,
Not the rose I gave you
Now pressed between the page
Of your Bible
Instead of blooming in a garden
Or at least hanging
On to life in a see-through vase
Filled with dirty, stale water.

The weed had grown
Between my chest
And I've grown too tired
To pull it out.

by Jason Meldrum



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