



Wandering through life with an
old man.

Langston Harris

Time Was

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"What happened?" Mrs. Armstrong, my first-grade teacher, exclaimed nervously. I heard Judy reply, "I don't know. I just pulled his head back a little and then he just went limp." As I pulled my head up from the desk behind me, I remember seeing the ceiling of my first-grade classroom. Then, suddenly, I was sitting in a rocking chair on a porch looking at a beautiful blue sky with a few fluffy clouds floating past. WTF? The breeze was blowing quietly through the trees in front of the porch and, although confused, I felt very calm and relaxed, as though I had not a care in the world. I glanced down to my feet propped on the railing of the porch and realized that I was now a tall, old man. I turned my head to see a woman sitting in a rocking chair next to me. She appeared to be old as well, but very beautiful, and serene, reading a book as if she did not have a care in the world either. Although curious, I began to feel a bit anxious about this predicament. Should I ask my porch mate any of the questions that were beginning to fill my mind? Maybe I'm going crazy. "When would you like to have dinner, sweetheart?" she asked.

Dinner? I had just returned from what was presumably a dream about an experience from my childhood school days. The only problem was that I felt myself as that boy more so than this man on his porch (I wasn't even sure it was my porch). I felt sure that I had heard Judy tell Mrs. Armstrong about my blackout. My porch-mate suggested that we have drink before dinner and I began to realize that this old man was me as well, because I suddenly craved a good martini. "Sure" I replied and off we went to the kitchen.

As we entered the room, I became dizzy and almost lost my balance. When I regained my composure, and looked into the kitchen, I saw my mother standing by the sink. This has to be a dream, I thought. Then Mom, realizing that I was there, turned and called me by my childhood name, Rusty. Then, she asked "How was the ball game?". Apparently, I was a child again, although a bit older perhaps. Then I remembered playing baseball with some buddies recently. In addition, I recalled seeing a baseball heading toward me at second base. "Rusty, are you OK?" Mom asked. "I think I had a little accident" I said. Of course, after I told her about the baseball coming at me, Mom insisted that we go to the emergency room in town.

As we were leaving, I began feeling dizzy again and must have lost consciousness. When I woke up, I was now driving over an arched bridge, presumably toward the emergency room. Shortly before we reached the top of the bridge, the car shuddered to a stop and I hit the brake to avoid rolling back down the incline. I tried starting it again, several times, to no avail. Fortunately, the traffic was sparse and it gave me time to think about what to do next. The car had a standard transmission so I was able to start it with the clutch engaged to slowly start moving toward the top of the bridge. Once over the top, the car would roll downhill and I could safely move it off the road. Just then, I looked into the rear view mirror to see a large truck heading straight toward me. The driver apparently didn't realize my car was stopped right away but was able to swerve perilously around. I continued my quest toward the top of the bridge when I realized that Mom was not there and I was going somewhere other than the emergency room.

Finally, I had gotten the car to a safe spot on a side road and was able to consider what was happening to me. Then I remembered that I had experienced a similar situation on that bridge many years before, or was it after, while on my way to a camping trip with some buddies. I discovered the problem that had caused the engine to die and was able to fix it. So, although confused and a bit frightened, I started driving to my newly discovered destination.

When I arrived at my friend Perry's house, it occurred to me that I had driven right to it, although it was not at once recognizable. However, I parked the BMW in front and walked to the front door. Perry answered the doorbell and invited me in. We talked for a while with his wife Kate then continued to transfer my camping gear, which was somehow sitting in the trunk of my car, into Perry's Jeep. After loading up the gear and saying goodbye to Kate, we headed off into the mountains to begin our backpacking trip.

When we arrived at our designated meeting place, the campground in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, we waited for about a half hour until our buddies Bernie and Pete showed up. After a short hike around the area, we returned and began to set up camp. Our plan was to start hiking tomorrow about ten miles into the wilderness, camp out for the night, and hike back the next day. After a peaceful night sleeping under the stars, we awoke to a beautiful, although progressively warmer day. We broke camp and prepared our packs then began walking. At around noon, we stopped for lunch near a small mountain lake. My friend Bernie was anxious to finish lunch and take a swim in the lake, something he always tried to do if the opportunity presented itself. I had often been tempted to try it myself but had not felt sure about jumping into an ice cold lake after hiking all morning. However, because it was a hot day and I was refreshed after having lunch, I decided to take the plunge, so to speak. As soon as I dived into the water, the shocking cold literally took my breath away. As soon as I came to the surface, I swam furiously toward shore in order to get out of that ice bath.

I realized that I was not in a lake, but I was being helped out of the ocean by a crew member of the expedition ship that had brought me to Antarctica. How could this happen? Was I dreaming? It was actually a Groundhog Day moment when it occurred to me that I had been here before. Of course, I had no idea what year that had happened. What year...is this? Time seems to be unimportant right now.

As I began climbing onto the ladder from the icy water, my foot lost its grip and I fell back into the sea. Once again, I lost consciousness.

Suddenly, I was back on the porch, martini in hand, leaning back in a comfortable rocking chair. Life can be very strange sometimes.