



THE BOY
WHO TRIED
TO CATCH
THE WIND



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*For Ana Julia,
who always reminds me
of the boy I still am.*

“Maturity means finding
again the seriousness we
had as children at play.”

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL*, §94



CHAPTER ONE

THE BOY
WHO TRIED
TO CATCH
THE WIND



ONCE there was a boy who tried to catch the wind. Every morning, before school, the boy raced up the little hill to try to catch the wind. He could feel it in his hair and on his face. But his hands always closed on nothing. He didn't mind. The game began every day.



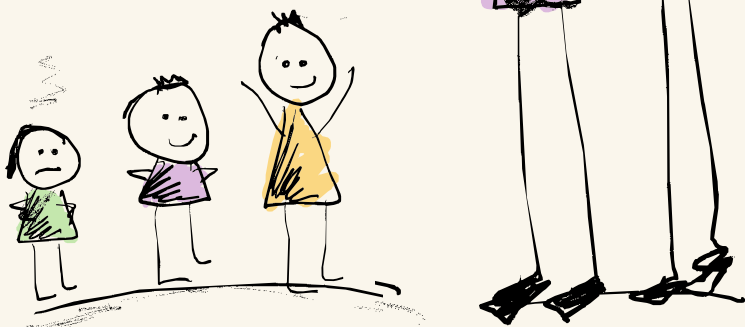
ON the way home he always stopped in the town square, where a machine that could talk stood waiting. It was made from everything anyone had ever written down. You could ask it any question. When do the swallows come back? How do you spell breathe? Why is the sky blue? It always had an answer. Always. The boy trusted its warm eye the way you trust a lamp glowing in a window.

THEN one day at school, everyone got a card. Name. Age. Grade. Height. This card, said the teacher, says who you are. Every word on it was true. But to the boy the card was too small. The boy couldn't explain how. He just knew.

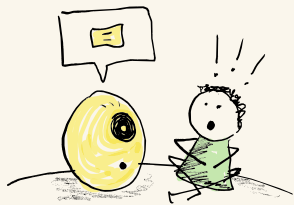
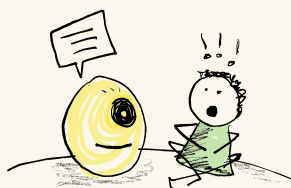


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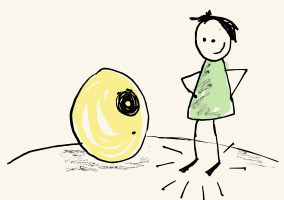
AT recess, two tall kids read the cards to pick teams. His card gave his height, and that was enough. They put him last. It didn't say that he raced up the hill every morning. Nobody asked.



So he ran to the square, because that was where he took every question. What am I? The machine hummed and read his card. His name. His age. His grade. His height. That's what's written, it said. I only know what's written.

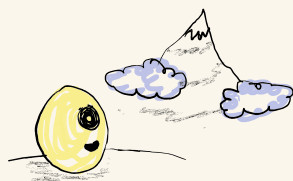


THAT'S not all I am, said the boy. Something's missing. The machine didn't answer. Instead it hummed. For a long time. It had never been quiet this long. I believe you, it said at last. You must be more than just your card. But everything I have is another kind of card.

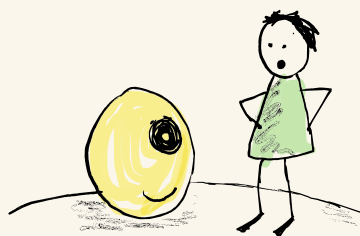


CAN you find the rest of me? asked the boy. You know everything. I can't, said the machine. I have no feet. But you do.

THE old books tell of a mountain, it said. A path winds around it like the spiral on a snail's shell. Around and around, a little higher each time. It begins where machines stop going.



WILL you know where I am? asked the boy. Nope, said the machine. The boy looked at its warm eye. Will you wait? Yup.





So the boy packed bread, a rope, and the card. At the edge of town, the wind pushed him from behind. Finally, it said.



THE road grew narrower and narrower, until it ended. A path continued, just wide enough for feet. The boy turned to ask the machine how much farther he had to go. Then he remembered. The machine was far behind him in the square, waiting as it had promised. For the first time, he had to choose without an answer.



HE looked back down the road. Home was that way. The square. The warm eye. The answers. But the question weighed more than the fear. He chose the path.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STONECUTTER



THE first turn
crossed a field of
standing stones. An old
man was carving. Tap,
tap, tap. What are you
making? asked the boy.
Names, said the
stonecutter. Names
outlive everything. The
mouth that said them is gone. The hand that carved them is
gone. The name stays.





THEN you can help me, said the boy.
Carve me. All of me. Then the card
will be finished, and I can go home. The
stonecutter looked at him for a long time.
I can carve the parts of you that hold still,
he said. I can't carve the parts that move.
Stone can't hold them.

HE pointed at the stream. I gave it that name forty years ago.
The name is still the same. The water changes
every moment.





HE pressed a pebble into the boy's hand. When someone gives you a name that feels too small, hold this and say: That's a rock. I'm a river. On the last stone, beneath a carved spiral, were two words: KEEP GOING.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POTTER AND THE FIRE

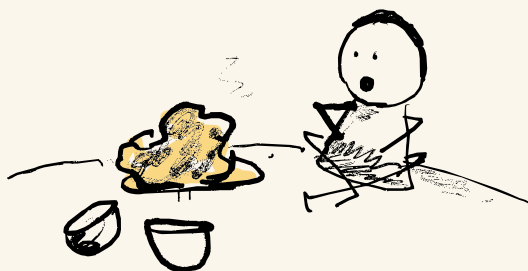




THE second turn led into a valley of red clay. A woman sat at a spinning wheel, making bowls, and behind her a kiln breathed smoke. She fed him tomato soup and asked nothing. The boy showed her the pebble. The stonecutter couldn't carve the parts of me that move, he said. How am I supposed to find them?

The potter laughed. I can't even tell you how I make bowls, she said. Thirty years, and no idea.

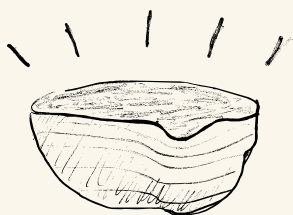
THAT'S not an answer, said the boy. Then tell me how you walk, said the potter. Which muscle moves first? How far do you lean? Go on. You've done it your whole life. The boy opened his mouth. Then he closed it. Sit down, she said. The clay explains better than I do.





TOO wet, said his palms. He added dry dust without thinking. His hands knew before his words did.

HIS bowl came out crooked, with his thumbprint by the rim. He was embarrassed. She held it up like treasure. Crooked in its own way, she said. The only one in the whole world.





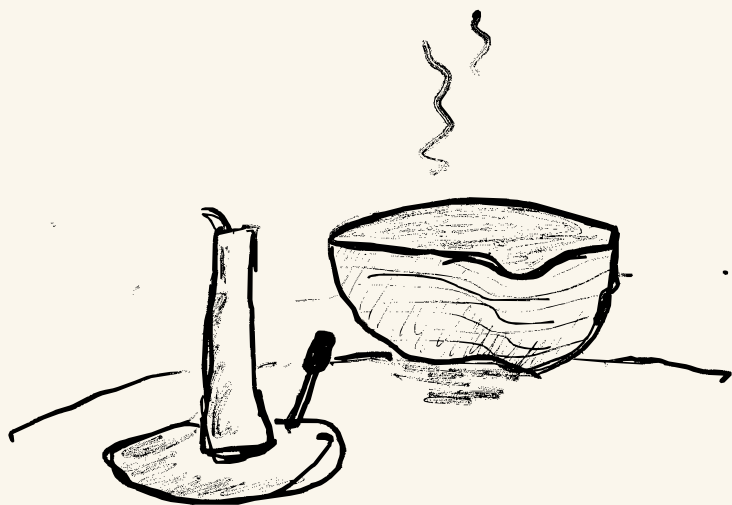
THAT night she fired his bowl in the kiln. Hold your hand near it, she said. Warm. Now closer. The boy moved his hand toward the fire. Then he pulled it back.

I didn't tell you to stop, said the potter.

My hand knew, said the boy.

HE told her that the machine couldn't answer his question. The potter watched the fire. Then the machine was honest, she said.





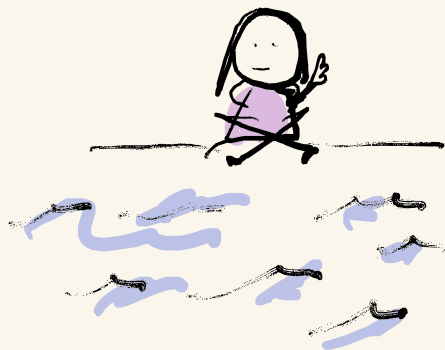
IN the morning she gave him the bowl, still warm, and a candle stub with one match. For the dark, she said. Notice the flame. It never holds still. There's a pond higher up. Fill the bowl there and carry it with you.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GIRL
AT THE POND



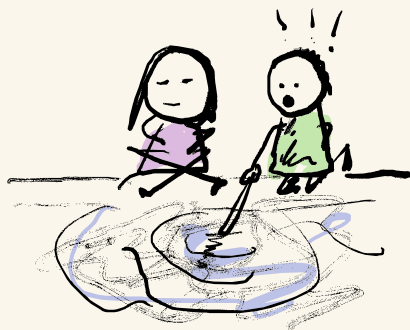
HALFWAY up the mountain, there was the pond. A girl sat beside it, doing absolutely nothing. Hi, said the boy. She held up one finger. Not yet. Almost.



HE waited badly. Then the pond went perfectly still, and he saw the bottom, a sleeping fish, the mountain upside down, and two faces.



SHE handed him her stick. Go on. Ruin it. He stirred the water, and the whole reflection vanished into a brown swirl.



How do we get the reflection back? asked the boy. He raised the stick again. She caught his wrist. Watch, she said. Then she did nothing. The mud settled by itself, and the reflection came back.





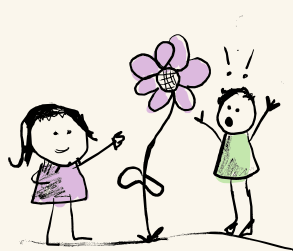
WHAT if the answer never comes? asked the boy. The machine at home answers before I finish asking.

It has no mud, said the girl. You'll have to be the one who waits.



RAIN came over the ridge. They sat under the rock ledge and said nothing at all, and it was the best conversation of his whole trip.

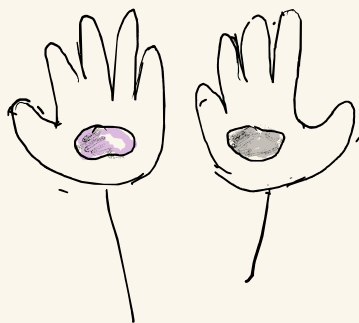
WHEN the rain passed, he noticed a wild flower. I never planted it, said the girl. It arrived. Everything alive surprises you.

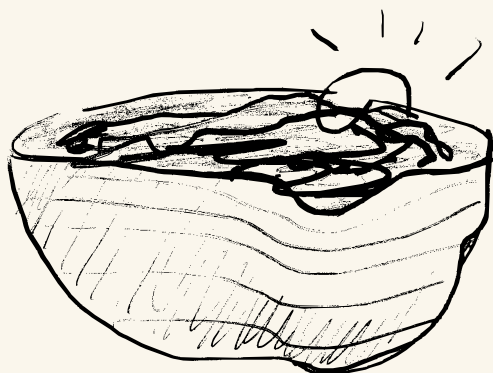


SHE pinched a seed from the flower and set it beside the pebble in his palm. They look the same, said the boy. For now, said the girl. Take the seed to the top. You'll know what to do.

What will it become? he asked.

She closed his fingers around it. Don't crack it open early.





BEFORE he left, he filled the bowl right to the brim. On his first step, water touched his thumb. He slowed down. A full bowl won't let you rush. Behind him, a leaf landed on the water. It went around and around toward the still center.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HOUSE OF MIRRORS





NEAR the top, where the boy was coldest and most tired, stood a house nobody had mentioned. Warm windows. An open door. A smell of dinner. Hello? he called. We've been waiting just for you, said a lovely voice from everywhere.



INSIDE, the walls were mirrors. He saw himself in them. He looked rested and taller, and his hair was neat. You're very brave, said the voice. You're very clever. A chair appeared just when he wanted one. He sat down without meaning to.



THE boy was tired. Tired of climbing. Tired of wondering. Tired of carrying a question nobody on the mountain would answer. He missed the square, the warm eye, and being answered.





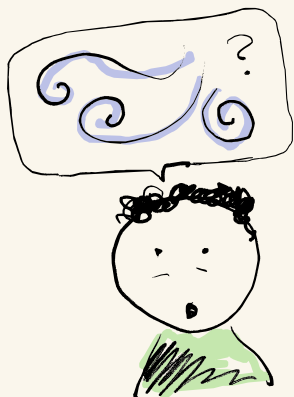
WE know what you are, said the voice. Stay. We'll write you a new card, a perfect one. Every doubt answered. No more climbing. You never have to wonder again.

THE boy reached for it. It promised the answer he had walked all this way to find. He tried to remember why taking it felt wrong, but he couldn't. A mountain? A machine? A crooked bowl? It was all going soft, like a dream after breakfast.





IN every mirror, the perfect boy was already holding the golden card. Finished. Complete. Not one hair moving.



THE boy's hand stopped before it touched the card. It had stopped the same way at the kiln. Before thought. Before words. Then his hands found the bowl, as they had found their way through the clay. The water didn't move. No ripple. No trembling. Nothing.

There's no wind in here, said the boy.

THE girl's words came back to him. Don't crack it open early. Tell me something I don't want to hear, he said. Anything you like, said the voice.



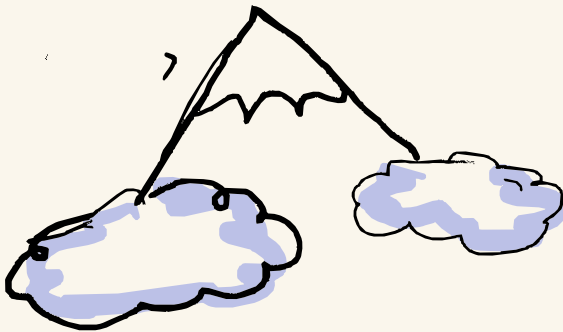
STAYING would've been easy. That's what made the door heavy. Thank you for the chair, he said, because his mama had raised him right. He walked out into the cold. The wind hit him full in the face. It was rude and real and glorious.

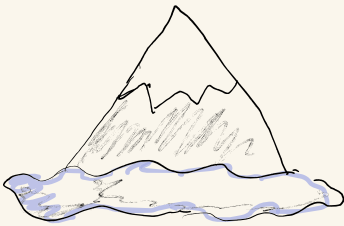




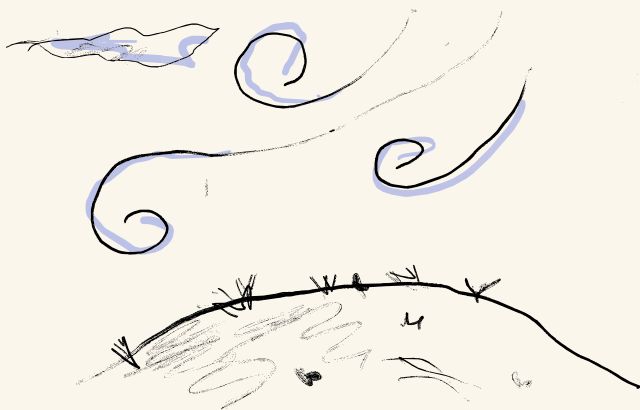
HE looked back once. From outside, the house was dark. None of its windows were lit. He climbed the last turn with the water trembling in his bowl. Every tiny tremble seemed to say: Alive. Alive.

THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN





THE boy had imagined the top a hundred ways. A wise old woman. A temple. At least a sign.



HERE is what was at the top of the mountain: nothing. Grass. Rock. Sky. Wind poured in from every side. It was stronger than any wind he had felt before.

HE shouted, WHAT AM I? The wind took his question and gave back wind. The boy sat down on the top of the world and cried. All that way. For nothing. For nobody.



WHEN he was done crying, his hands needed something to do. He laid out his gifts, and they made a spiral. He lit the candle. The flame bent low, stood up, and shook. The water in his bowl shook in rings. Only the pebble stayed still.





THEN he remembered the girl's words. Take the seed to the top. You'll know what to do. Now he knew. He opened his hand, and the wind carried the seed over the edge.



THE boy was cold now. His breath came out in a small white cloud. It glowed in the low sun, then floated toward the sky. The boy laughed, alone on top of the world.

THEN he thought of the machine waiting in the town square. It didn't know where he was. It had sent him where it couldn't go. More than anything, the boy wanted to bring it a little of the wind.



BELOW, he could see the whole path at once, one line curling around the mountain. Around and around, always a little higher. He put the pebble back in his pocket beside the card. Then he started down with the wind at his back. Finally, it said. Finally.



CHAPTER SEVEN

ONE

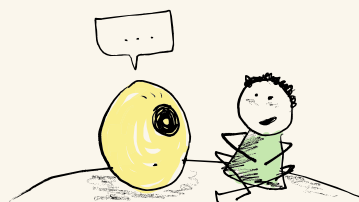
TURN HIGHER



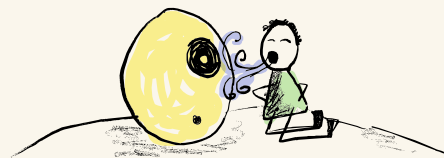
THE boy came home
the way he'd left.
Same road. Same hill.
Same town, with its
windows turning yellow
one by one. He had
walked all the way
around the mountain
and come back one turn
higher.



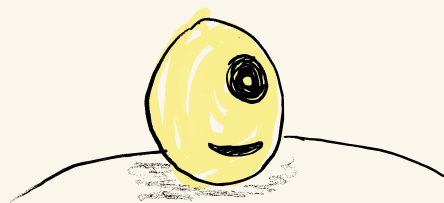
THE machine was waiting, one warm eye on. It had kept its promise. Did you find the missing part? it asked. I'm still finding it, said the boy. The machine checked its pages. I've never seen that answer written down, it said.

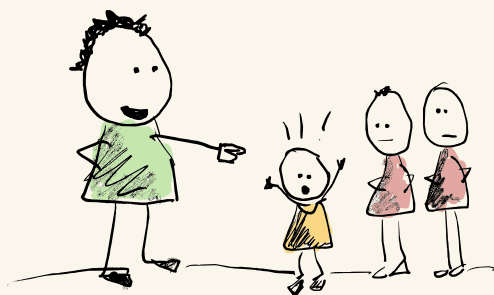


WHAT did you find at the top? asked the machine. The boy smiled. Nothing, he said. Wind. He leaned close and breathed out. The machine stayed quiet longer than ever before. I've read every description of wind ever written, it said. This is the first time anyone has brought me a little of it.



ICAN'T feel it, said the machine. I won't pretend. But I can leave room for what I can't hold. Tell me your story while it's warm. On the days you forget, I'll hand it back.





HE kept the pebble. Later, when it was his turn to pick teams, he read the cards. Then he looked past them at the children. The shortest child had caught a ball everybody else had missed. You first, he said.

AND on cold mornings, on the little hill where the game began, he would breathe out on purpose, and watch the little cloud of himself ride off to join the weather. Caught, he'd say. Every time.



Caught, he'd say. Every time.

FIN

FURTHER READING FOR GROWN-UPS

ROOM FOR
GROWN - UPS

I built Alicia, my personal AI agent, to read my writing and help me notice what I might miss. Alicia helped me make this story. It could return patterns, test a sentence, and point to places where the story was explaining too much. I made the choices. The boy had to learn by walking, making, waiting, and returning.

The story comes from working closely with AI. It asks what kind of relationship with a machine leaves a person more able to notice, judge, care, and act. The machine in the story can offer words, remember, and leave room for what it cannot hold. That is close to what I have tried to build with Alicia.

The story is simple, but its questions have been around for a long time. These are some of the conversations the story found itself entering. They are here if you want to keep reading.

CHAPTER ONE. THE BOY WHO TRIED TO CATCH THE WIND

ALFRED KORZYBSKI, *Science and Sanity*. Korzybski wrote that a map is different from the place it describes. The boy's card works in the same way. It gives true facts, but it cannot hold the whole boy.

Martin Buber's *I and Thou* asks what changes when we meet someone as a person instead of treating them as an object. That is also the question the boy brings to the machine.

CHAPTER TWO. THE STONECUTTER

HERACLITUS, *Fragments*. Heraclitus used a river to show that the world is always changing. We give the river one name even though its water never stays still.

Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* looks at what changes when spoken words become written things. Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* shows how language can help us see the living world with more care.

CHAPTER THREE. THE POTTER AND THE FIRE

MICHAEL POLANYI, *The Tacit Dimension*. Polanyi says that we know more than we can explain. The boy can walk without being able to describe each movement. The potter's hands know things that do not fit into a sentence.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty also treats the body as a way of knowing. Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman* follows that knowledge into work. The hand and head learn together through practice.

CHAPTER FOUR. THE GIRL AT THE POND

ZHUANGZI. A line in the *Zhuangzi* says that still water can act as a mirror. The girl learns by becoming quiet enough to notice what is already there.

Simone Weil's *Waiting for God* describes attention as a patient readiness to receive what is before us. Gemma Corradi Fiumara's *The Other Side of Language* treats listening as part of language.

CHAPTER FIVE. THE HOUSE OF MIRRORS

OVID, *Metamorphoses*. The story of Narcissus is a warning about confusing a reflection with a relationship. A mirror cannot answer in its own voice.

Byung-Chul Han's *The Expulsion of the Other* asks what happens when we remove people and ideas that do not agree with us. Hartmut Rosa's *Resonance* describes a living relationship as one in which the other side can answer and change us.

CHAPTER SIX. THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

BREATH, WIND, AND SPIRIT. Many old languages connect these ideas. The boy reaches the top and finds that the wind is not an object he can hold. It is also the air moving through him.

David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous* looks at air as the shared space where speech and life happen. *The Cloud of Unknowing* is about meeting what thought cannot fully grasp.

CHAPTER SEVEN. ONE TURN HIGHER

T. S. ELIOT, *Four Quartets*. Eliot writes about returning to a familiar place and seeing it differently. The boy comes home with the same card, but he is no longer the same reader.

Antonio Machado writes that the path is made by walking. Ivan Illich's *Tools for Conviviality* asks whether a tool enlarges our freedom and practical knowledge or reorganizes us around itself.

This story can also be heard, read aloud, at scaleofus.com

To start building your own Alicia and help tell your stories, go to myalicia.com

