

The Pasture

The pasture's fence seemed impenetrable. Sturdy, elaborate, and entirely too much for a simple horse pasture, yet it still wobbled in the wind. Gaps were found, yet none had ever been seen to leave. The gate never once opened and seemed like it was put there more as a statement, possibly a formality, rather than in the name of actual utility. This equestrian estate was one of all types of confusion. Certain times were hopeful, others less so. Awards were occasionally given to some, while others struggled and still found themselves lost, despite being given the same tools to survival.

That was the thing, the catch, the "but." Those that followed the rules that had been set forth either by those outside of the pasture, or those within the pasture found themselves highly rewarded, yet they still attributed these rewards to the whimsy of the universe and their own undeserved luck. As far as those outside of the pasture go, nothing was known. Certain theories had come and gone with some more radical than others. Some claimed to know, some even claimed to be able to communicate with them, but it continued to be hearsay. Was this some kind of experiment? Was it a study? Maybe we were there for slaughter. Maybe we belonged to the calvary, and they happened to be enjoying a rare moment of peace. Maybe this pasture was built and abandoned, but we were never told.

As far the pasture goes and those held within it, there was no detectible pattern. The pasture's size was large enough to raise question, but large seems better than small. Some areas were lush, rich with tall, healthy grass and plenty of water. Other corners were more barren, dusty and decrepit. Within this enclosure there were all types and sizes. Paints, Clydesdales, Arabians, Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, Andalusians, and many others were the make of up

this place's residency. Assimilation naturally occurred as superficial familiarity somehow fostered the feeling of safety, while violence and sadness was still found in every corner of the pasture. Two things remained the same amongst all inhabitants of the pasture, and that was the bridle pulled tight through everyone's cheeks, and the brand we all shared. The bridle never came off and it never loosened no matter how many days in the sun or the rain. Some had been seen beyond the pasture with no bridle, but to us they seemed wild, untamed, almost rabid or possibly non-sentient.

The consensus was a nebulous thing. Some claimed to be joyful and satisfied beyond all measure, incapable of quite articulating how to replicate their state. Others were restless and afraid, never quite comfortable within the space and always searching for a way out, while some wavered. Some moved about the perimeter looking beyond the fence and the gate only to consistently return to the herd, back to the lush parts of this place. Not many went it alone. Most needed that security blanket, a bed warmer by their feet, hot food at home and a water heater that works. It's rare you ever find the ones that go into the cold, the ones that leave the nest without knowing the path they are on. Some vanished without anyone seeing where they went, and others reappeared the same mysterious way complete with a new, tight bridle.

One day, along the perimeter of the fence in a distant corner, I found myself squared up to a gap in the enclosure staring out at the grass that lay just beyond me, folding in the wind. My muscles twitched and I had been restless for quite some time now without knowing or being told of any impactful method to cure my restlessness. I did not wish to harbor any ill will or negativity towards the pasture or those found within it, because I understood them. At least I think I understood them. If that negativity was ever found within me, it must've been due to an outlet deficit. There simply wasn't enough to channel myself towards, so all that was left was the

pasture for my angst and my discontent. I had grown bored of the bridle, the patterns within and those that ran through it while at the same time loving it for all the same reasons. My ambivalence knew no end.

Just beyond the fence, someone appeared. An older lad I had come to know quite well; my father. He spoke to me on the silliness of the pasture, the inconsistencies and the childishness of it all. He spoke of land outside of the pasture where many resided, even more than those enclosed. He didn't speak with much personal experience, but what he lacked in understanding he made up for with enthusiasm. He had no path, he had no plan, he didn't ever claim to have any kind of answer, but it was enough for me. I needed something new even if it was unknown. I decided to do what I had never done, something I'd never seen anyone do, and something I never anticipated. I left the pasture.

I left the consistency of the pasture for something new, without having told anyone, and in a rather spontaneous matter I declared myself a new journey. Without any real direction, I knew not what to do. I looked to my father, but he was already gone in the distance. Suddenly his enthusiasm seemed to have run out of supply as he stood alone, gazing into the unknown. Without any agenda, I decided to run around the pasture, only on the opposite side of the fence now. I was careful and I kept my distance, but I searched for those that I knew.

Eventually I was able to meet with some familiar faces up against the fence and tell them of my new endeavor. They were confused, as was I. They asked for my plan, and I told them I had none. They asked if I was happier, and I told them I didn't know. The most surprising thing was immediately noticed, and that was the bridle. It had begun to loosen and was even hanging loose in my mouth. After a bit, it fell off completely.

It was after a while that I began to acclimate to this new idea of being out of the pasture. I had made my way around its entirety quite a few times, checking in with those that knew me before I realized that I needed to leave. If this act was to have any significance whatsoever, I needed to point one way and go. So that is what I did, although I must admit I wasn't as determined and focused as one might assume. I wandered.

I wandered out and found the world. I found more souls and more pastures than I could have ever known existed. I did not enter any of the new pastures, as they appeared just as mine had, although some of them were much larger, with a few of them being rather small. What surprised me was how many more resided outside of the pastures compared to those inside of them. Some were even born outside, never having known what it means to be bridled and inside. The excitement was addictive, yet was often times difficult to distinguish from anxiety, and I found myself comforted by those in my same position who appeared to be in control, mature and aware.

Adventures were had, fun became known, and a new life presented itself. Not the same fun and life that's found back in the pasture. This kind was new. It was volatile and unpredictable. It could bring you up and drop you down with no warning, and that was part of its allure. Dangerous and exciting it was, while inversely, those that lived it often had no path. Is that kind of electricity wilder and more interesting when harnessed? Could a life be had in this hurricane? Many of the questions that were had at home still remained. I had assumed there were answers, but instead there was only a new way of wondering about them. Like this, I wondered for years.

Eventually, this life took its toll. Others, wilder than I went up, and they came down. I made frequent trips back to the pasture and kept in touch with those that cared. They marveled at

how free I was. Without the bridle, I was completely naked. These trips always served as a good reminder of where I am from, who and what I love, and why I had left. Differences were obvious between them and I, but there weren't many of substance. I had remained essentially the same outside of the pasture as I had inside of it, but despite my character's reliability within the context of such inconsistency, I found myself lost.

I found myself wandering just the same as before, but rather than an exploratory wander, it was a truly lost, dawdling kind of wander. I might have been able to fool others that I was content and satisfied with my current position and with my current route but that was not the case. It was beginning to grow stale. The ability to do whatever you want, decided who and what you are with every passing day, and the endless array of options for where you might take yourself in life morphed me into an apathetic and confused individual. Freedom was no fear. Freedom was the ability to choose. But now freedom seldom felt free. Now it felt hollow and cheap. Maybe freedom is having a choice. Maybe freedom is having a path, or possibly a fence. It's possible we've never quite understood that paradoxical term.

Feelings, thoughts, and words of making a return to the pasture began to swim through my mind and the conversations I had with a very select few. Maybe a new pasture? Maybe my old one? No one could know, although I alone knew of the tilt I had felt within myself. I no longer yearned for the folding grass, the unreachable horizon, and that relentless question of what the day would hold for me. I began to wish for everything I had once raised my chin at. The pasture was now my key, my one idea for a compass, so I decided to return to my humble beginnings and see if they would have me.

Upon returning, I was welcomed with immense warmth and met with praise and high regard. I did have the ability to woo others which, as all things are, was gift as well as a curse.

Many others would not be as lucky as I. Some had returned to the pasture to a simple 'hello' from a few and a 'glad you're back' if they were lucky. One thing is for certain, they regained a bridle, and it was like they had never left. That there, is the crux my story.

After one night with no bridle, I had said that it would simply take time. After one week with no bridle, I said there must be some kind of confusion. I ran to the nearest opening in the fence, leapt through it, and ran around so that the powers that be would understand what was happening. I ran back into the pasture excited to have fixed the issue, assuming that not before long I would feel that familiar tight pull on the inside of my cheek. Excitement quickly slid into anxiety as to why it never showed up. I ran back and through various openings in the fence, I slept nights outside of the pasture as well as some within. I met with those who might understand, but their words were useless. I consulted anyone and everyone that could know, inside or outside, bridled or unbridled. No one had a definitive answer.

It wasn't a simple matching game. I did not desire to simply appear like I belonged in the pasture. If faking it were an option, I would have. I needed to have the real deal, a real bridle, a real connection to the pasture if I was to fully belong. Some would not speak to me. Others would not spend extended periods of time with me. Meeting anyone or anything new within the pasture was instantly confusing and clunky. Was I able to permanently reside in the pasture even without a bridle? Was I obligated to spend the rest of my days with that bastardized version of freedom floating up wherever I went? In theory, I could stay, but it would be closer to a long-term visit than having any kind of permanence. Some encouraged me to have patience while others told me to really work for it. After having tried everything, I decided that there was no bridle in my cards.

Eventually, I decided that I must leave once again. I must leave, not in the name of gaining something new, not out of rejection for the pasture, but in the name of a true search. I must leave because there is no other option and because to stay would be to plant my feet in limbo. Loved ones encouraged me to continue my efforts, while others raised their shoulders with no answers. I could stay and delay the inevitable or go out and try for something new. Once again, I opted for new.

I left to the far corner of the pasture, and once again found myself square with the same opening I had once bounded through years prior. The old lad was there once again with his same script of emotionally based pseudointellectual sentiments, but this time he did not have my ear. I knew I had to leave, although I wanted to stay. I knew not where I would be taken, although I had realized it would take great intentionality. Companionship was greatly desired, although I understood that my brand from the pasture was recognized by all outside of it as a curse, and that it was overall unlikely. The old lad stomped and whined, but it could not bring me to halt. Others had tried to stop me, but to no avail. I knew not what to do but I hoped this was the right choice, and with that hope I stepped out of the pasture once again and walked away ready for wherever the wind might take me.