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Fable

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Fable

By: Lukas Leonard

In the recent past, one fact had become intensely, increasingly obvious to Tango the Parrot: he was *not* going to fall asleep. He would really love to, as that was when he got his best rest, but it just wasn't happening. He laid there, on his bed, staring into the stars. The stars fascinated him. There were thousands of them, each particularly unique. He wished he could fly into the night sky and personally inspect each and every one of them. Curiosity filled his chest and his mind, making it impossible for him to turn away. It was as if a parasite had crawled into his mind, keeping his drifting thoughts solely on the wonders of the outside world. Maybe that's why he couldn't fall asleep.

He had lots of interests like this. He wanted to become a pirate sailing the high seas, exploring the deepest depth of the ocean. He wanted to explore the great forests he heard of in stories; he wanted to climb the tallest mountain, delve into the deepest valley.

Aspirations like this were not, of course, common on the island.

The island was not full of adventurers and dreamers, but of many people who were quite satisfied with where they were. His whole life, he had hid his curious mind from other islanders: they simply didn't understand him. He wanted to see new things, have new experiences. He heard the tales of the gruesome humans, people who were as jagged and unapproachable as a sharpened dagger. He was warned of the unpredictability of the outside world, how civilizations fell as easily as trees due to earthquakes and tsunamis.

But quite simply, he didn't care. One day, he was going to fly away into human lands and become an airline pilot (a strange profession for someone of his avian nature).

Finally, admitting defeat, he got out of bed and started walking down the circular stairs in the corner of his room. Looking outside, he predicted the sun to be rising into the sky soon. He decided that he would fly onto the mountain and see if his friend, Toothbrush the Panda was up. (He doubted this; she normally dozed off into the late afternoon.)

Tango set off for the great mesa, his wings singing through the air. He'd been flying since he was four-months-old and had gotten quite good. He went over the forests and the beaches, the streams and the rivers. He had seen these places a

thousand times, and after a while, they started to become less beautiful. Once you have experienced something for long enough, you start to become cynical. You start noticing and pointing out flaws in what was once exciting or new. Tango was bored of the island. It was not exciting or new anymore. It was boring. Unnamed and unrenowned. And when Tango got bored, he looked for something else. Something else was across the sea.

Finally, he reached the top of the mountain, where Toothbrush peacefully slept. Tango had been friends with Toothbrush for a while, ever since they were kids. To him, they seemed like opposites. Toothbrush was anxious and apprehensive, while Tango was loudmouthed and outgoing. They trusted each other, though. Toothbrush was the only person Tango had ever told about his decision to leave, even though she didn't seem to understand his reasoning.

Tango landed on a leafless tree near his friend, deciding not to awaken him. He knew that if he did, there would be a whole ordeal of complaining and explaining, and so he thought it best to simply wait for him to rouse. He decided to wait longer.... Longer.... Finally, as daytime creeped ominously close, he got impatient.

He snuck over to where the bear peacefully hibernated and lightly poked her. Still, the low, rhythmic huffs of breath continued. Restless now, the small parrot walked to its far bigger counterpart and squawked loudly into her ear. At last, her eyes fluttered open and she began to rise to her paws. Satisfied, he floated back to his perch.

“What was that for?” Toothbrush yawned.

“You were asleep for way too long. The day is for living. Let's go pick berries.” Tango quickly replied.

“We might as well.”

Collecting berries was quite a profitable venture. Everybody on the island needed food, and berries were a very popular choice (they were rare, high in protein, and quite tasty). Tango and Toothbrush had been picking berries for a very long time, ever since they first started being friends. They knew all of the best spots, each of them farther than the one before. This was going to take all day.

As they walked through the morning air, Tango and Toothbrush talked about what they always talked about: pretty much nothing. This wasn't a sign of a burgeoning friendship, but a sign of the fact that, quite simply, there never was something that needed to be talked about. Nothing new ever happened, to anybody, anywhere.

As the sun moved higher (and then lower) through the sky they moved from spot to spot, their wicker baskets gradually filling up more and more with the cherry-red berries. Eventually, in the late afternoon when the sun aggravated their eyes and baked their fur, they reached the final destination.

“We should probably head back. These are gonna last us weeks.”

Toothbrush sighed. “Besides, it’s getting dark.”

“Sure,” Tango muttered, obviously distracted.

“Don’t tell me you’re thinking about it again. You can’t just up and leave.”

“I can, and I’m going to.” And Tango left before he could hear Toothbrush’s objections.

Toothbrush awoke to a cacophonous squawk in her ear. One out of four times, this is how she woke up. Tango often complained about how long she slept for, and how unenthusiastic she often was about their antics. Of course, Toothbrush used to resent Tango. She thought of him as too excitable, too eager. As time passed, however, Toothbrush felt a different emotion about Tango: envy. Toothbrush envied Tango’s sense of self importance, his fearlessness, and his confidence. As time passed, Toothbrush learned to enjoy the company of this pompous idiot they became quick friends.

Now, as always, Tango was waking Toothbrush for some other random reason: they needed to pick berries. Toothbrush was okay with this. She was satisfied by the simple things in life. She would love to sleep and pick berries for the rest of her life, but others had different ideas.

Tango used to casually mention his dreams and aspirations, but in recent days it had become far more prevalent. He seemed to be always daydreaming, talking about everything he was going to do in the human lands, about his unending boredom with the repetitiveness of his chores on the island.

She thought a lot about this. She knew that without Tango, life would be a thousand times less enjoyable, but she also knew that there was no point in arguing with Tango, no possible way to change his mind. Tango knew how to argue, and Toothbrush stood no chance. She might as well enjoy the rest of the time with him she had, quietly objecting to his grand ideas of exploration.

After Tango abandoned her for departure, Toothbrush took her time. She knew that he wouldn’t be leaving until night, so that the sun didn’t burn his skin. She also hoped that, deep down, Tango would find it hard to up and abandon his life here. And so she walked slowly, past the deep jungles and the rocky slopes, past the slow swamps and the running waters.

On the way, Toothbrush had psyched herself up, ready to face down and argue with Tango, to give him a piece of her mind. Nonetheless when she arrived, and found him simply watching the crashing waves, she realized that she would never be able to. Words were pointless, and the only thing to do was to let him go. Tango was going to leave regardless, and there was nothing she could do about it. This was strangely reassuring for her, a final, unchangeable outcome.

She was right. Tango left, gently flapping his wings into the night sky, steadily gaining altitude. The moon came from its cover behind the clouds, reflecting perfectly on the calm ocean water. Toothbrush didn't leave the shore for a long time.

