

the road ends.

by Chandler Crawford

Proverbs 25

- 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;
if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.
- 22 In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head,
and the Lord will reward you.

(A fork in a dirt road in the middle of an arid desert. An old man sits on the ground in the center of the fork. Behind him, a rusty sign has been blown over by the wind and lies in the grit.)

A long silence. The sound of buzzards in the distance.

The man turns and looks behind him in the direction of the noise. He turns back around and continues staring into the dirt. He reaches into his pocket and produces a bright green apple. He examines the fruit, contemplating. He opens his mouth to bite, but before he can sink in his teeth, the sound of another drifter is heard. He looks up. Frantically he deposits the apple back into his pocket.

The drifter approaches slowly. He is frail and weak.)

MAN 1

Stop. Don't take a step further.

(The drifter halts.)

Who are you.

MAN 2

I don't mean no trouble, mister.

MAN 1

I didn't ask you if you was here to mean trouble. I asked who you was. Now who are you.

MAN 2
I'm just passin' through.

MAN 1
Just passin' through, huh.

MAN 2
That's right.

MAN 1
You got any water?

MAN 2
I might. . .

MAN 1
May I have some? Feels like I haven't had any in ages. I'm parched.

(MAN 2 reaches into his back pocket and takes out a small flask. Hands it to MAN 1.)

MAN 2
It ain't much.

MAN 1
I just need a tiny sip.
(Takes a long sip.)
Just enough.

(He tosses the flask back to MAN 2.)

MAN 2
You must be thirsty.

MAN 1
How long you been travelin'.

MAN 2
Can't say exactly. Years? A long time.

MAN 1
Long time, huh. Whatchu got in that bag.

MAN 2
In here?

MAN 1

Yeah. Whatchu got in there.

MAN 2

Oh nothing. Just my belongings.

(Pause.)

MAN 1

Your belongings, huh.

MAN 2

S'right. Ain't much. But at least what I got I can call my own.

MAN 1

A man would like that.

MAN 2

Why. . .I suppose so.

MAN 1

Uh-huh. Where'd you come from.

MAN 2

Why. . .just that way. Someplace I used to call home. Don't matter now I s'pose.

MAN 1

Uh-huh. And you're just passin' on through, huh.

(Pause.)

MAN 2

I. . .I don't mean no trouble. I'll just turn around. I- -

MAN 1

"Didn't mean no trouble." I don't matter what you *mean*. What you intend, don't intend. Trouble just. . .happens to people.

MAN 2

I better be going.

MAN 1

What's your name, mister.

MAN 2

No, I'll uh. . .I'll just go back to- -

MAN 1

I said what's your name, mister.

MAN 2

Jules.

MAN 1

You just passin' through, Jules?

MAN 2

Well, I'd like to. Are the toll taker?

MAN 1

Something like that.

MAN 2

Are you the highwayman?

MAN 1

No. I'm no highwayman. I'm just a man.

MAN 2

Don't got no name?

MAN 1

I got a name. Not that you'd be interested to hear.

MAN 2

I see. Well. . .I'll just be on my way then. Very nice to have met you.

(He extends his hand for a shake. MAN 1 doesn't even acknowledge the gesture. A long pause.)

MAN 1

You look hungry

MAN 2

To be honest, I ain't eat in a while.

MAN 1

I can see that.

MAN 2
You. . .don't got no food do you?

MAN 1
Depends

MAN 2
On what.

MAN 1
On everything .

MAN 2
You got food?

MAN 1
I don't got much of nothing.

MAN 2
But you got food.

MAN 1
I got something you want.

MAN 2
Ain't much that I want.

MAN 1
Of course there is.

MAN 2
Ever since I left home ain't much I wanted. Just what I
needed.

MAN 1
You need food.

MAN 2
Not where I'm going.

MAN 1
You're not going anywhere yet.

MAN 2
What about you.

MAN 1

What about me.

MAN 2

What is it that *you* want. I'd like to know.

MAN 1

That ain't somethin' you want to know.

MAN 2

I'd like to help.

MAN 1

Help?

MAN 2

Every man deserves happiness. I seen too many men die alone. Hollowed out like a shell. No man deserves to die unhappy.

MAN 1

A man would like that.

MAN 2

Yes he would.

MAN 1

You're still hungry.

MAN 2

I am.

(MAN 1 reaches into his bag and takes out his apple. Presents it to MAN 2.)

MAN 1

Take it.

MAN 2

What's that.

MAN 1

It's for you.

MAN 2

For me?

MAN 1
Take it. It's the only one.

MAN 2
I can't.

MAN 1
You can't?

MAN 2
It doesn't feel right.

MAN 1
It's yours. For your. . .journey.

MAN 2
What do you want for it?

MAN 1
Everything.

MAN 2
Well I ain't got much.

MAN 1
You got that bag.

MAN 2
Ain't nothing in this bag that's of value to you.

MAN 1
Everything is valuable to me.

MAN 2
I have water.

MAN 1
Give me the bag.

MAN 2
I know you're thirsty, mister. You can have the water.

MAN 1

I've had enough water. I want your bag. Give me your bag, and the apple is yours. Give me the bag, and I'll let you pass and continue on your journey.

MAN 2

Why. . .it's just stuff. Just stuff I call my own. Nothing more.

MAN 1

Give it over.

MAN 2

Whatchu want my bag so much for?

MAN 1

I want to know what a man cherishes. What he carries around for years upon years. I want to know what weighs a man down. What burdens his journey. I never had nothing like that of my own. I been sittin' here for as long as I can remember. All I ever had was this little apple. Never ate it. Always tempted though. If I ate it, I would have nothing at all. Now I can have so much more. I know you're hungry. Now you can give me that bag, take the apple and be on your way. Or you can turn around and drift forever, full of regrets, until you're nothing but a forgotten memory. So are you going to hand that bag over or what.

(Pause.

MAN 2 takes off his bag and tosses it to MAN 1. MAN 1 tosses the apple to MAN 2. MAN 1 picks the bag up, opens it, overturns it and shakes out its contents. What falls out are personal effects such as: a picture frame, a pocket watch, a ring, some folded letters, a flower, a doll, a little black book, etc. The two men just stare at the contents strewn about the road. MAN 1 kneels down and picks up the pocket watch. He examines it closely. He looks up at MAN 2.)

MAN 2

Like I said. Just. . .stuff.

MAN 1
Memories.

MAN 2
A man would like to die with such things to hold on to.

MAN 1
Yes. A man would like that.

MAN 2
I'm sorry.

MAN 1
For what.

MAN 2
For not having more to give you.
(MAN 1 can only look at the watch. He picks up the flower.)
I know you're thirsty
(MAN 2 reaches into his back pocket and pulls out the small flask, hands it to MAN 1.)
Please. Keep it. You'll need it more than me.
(MAN 1 cannot look up.)
I'm sorry I don't have more to give you.

MAN 1
That's. . .alright.

MAN 2
May I pass through?

MAN 1
Go 'head.

MAN 2
Thank you.

MAN 1
Yeah.

(MAN 2 passes MAN 1 and walks up to the fork in the road. He thinks. He turns back and sets the apple on the ground next to MAN 1.)

MAN 2

This could never be mine. Please take it.

(MAN 1 is silent.)

Thank you again.

MAN 1

For what.

MAN 2

For lightening my load.

(He turns around and looks down both roads. He thinks about his choice. He lowers his head as if to pray. After a moment he makes he lifts his head, chooses his path and exits. MAN 1 is left staring at the stuff scattered on the road. The sound of buzzards are heard in the distance. He looks behind towards the sound. He gets up and walks to the fork and looks both ways. He crosses to where the rusty sign has fallen. He picks it up and shoves it back in it's hole. The sign reads DEAD END with an arrow pointing in the direction MAN 2 went.

He crosses back and picks up his apple. He goes to take a bite, and it crumbles in his hand.

The sounds of buzzards in distance sound.

Lights fade out while he is left staring at the scattered objects on the ground.