

The Hike: A Kafkaesque Semi-Biographical Story
By Meg Fannee

A group of reveling travelers approached a trail head full of promise, themselves full of joviality, full of companionship. Led by a man of seemingly endless knowledge, the travelers steadily climbed in search of assured waterfalls and beauty. They further hiked, the terrain becoming evermore steep, though, not bothered by the increasing difficulty with some carrying liquid spirits, most carrying lightened spirits. Once reaching a precipice, many stepped forward to provide the needed direction for the merry travelers as the man with seemingly endless knowledge proved to indeed have ending knowledge questioning if the group should go east or west. Once decided, the travelers carried onward heading west finding the trail becoming increasingly narrower. The grade intensely declining, the group scuttled left to right, right to left, left to right until reaching what was surely the next part of the trail. The man no longer with seemingly endless knowledge now with ending knowledge nervously laughed, "Seems we are now where we once started."

Still with happiness in their hearts and minds, the travelers saw the first gaffe as merely a shared memory for reminiscing in years to come and pressed onward past the goats, past the dogs, past the failed trail to a marked sign in a language foreign to that of the group. Though some turned back, most of the travelers once more followed the man of seemingly endless knowledge regardless of his proof of ending knowledge into the wilderness knowing 8.85 kilometers, a length sure to satisfy the wanderlusts of all, winding its way to cascading water, scenic vistas, and the picturesque ending village lie ahead. With great speed, the man with ending knowledge and legs reaching great heights set a pace bringing with him others with legs of great heights leaving in the distance behind those of shorter statures and varying degrees of physical maladies. This did not bother the travelers. They shared hopes, dreams, many laughs climbing up, deeper into the forest. At last, all was well with the merry band.

To the left, a field of golden flower called some travelers; they remarked the gold caused the hills to come alive, some even hearing the sound of music while twirling merrily among the plants. To the right, the terrain became evermore rocky but beautiful, the wind made the trees dance, and the distant sounds of nature surely held water just ahead. The travelers were truly happy finding solace and more camaraderie amongst their fellow wanderers. The man with ending knowledge had even relaxed knowing he had gained the trust of his followers once again and perhaps some of his lost knowledge. All was well with the group.

To the left again, a small structure appeared. One traveler needing to see beyond the hills alive with the sound of music climbed the ladder. Though it did not break, it buckled and creaked as he climbed. The travelers became anxious but hope remained, for they knew the view would be one not to miss. As the climber approached the top, he reported that the hills contained neither life nor music, rather dead grasses stained the landscape flat and brown. The travelers collectively and nervously laughed but continued on. As the trail below became ever increasingly rocky, it also became ever increasingly steep upward. Many travelers slowed while others stumbled. The once merry travelers sombered in enthusiasm.

"Where is the water?" a traveler quietly said to herself.

"It is darker than before," another traveler said to the travelers around him.

"The trees are thicker, more ominous," mentioned another.

The travelers slowed to a stop to allow an injured member to splint her ankle. With much argument to turn back with the injured, she insisted the travelers move forward. Now with liquid spirits

gone and lightened spirits significantly weighted, the group still continued now looking for any indication of time or length left in the hike. All was not well, yet not all lost either.

To the left, a dried waterfall cliff leading to bone dry rock bed below; to the right, steep, rocky stairs with no consistency in height. The travelers slowly made their way to the top. Wearing, they looked around at the dried terrain, but to their delight--Finally! A sign! Only 2 kilometers left! The travelers found a resurgence of joy and chattily made their way forward.

To the left, a fallen tree bridge over the dry creek bed. A fall. Another injury. Too far in to turn back and with only 2 kilometers to go, the travelers continued. The trees continued to darken, the mountain grade steepened, the travelers' joy began to fade yet again. The 2 kilometers left should have taken no time at all for such a vital group, but hours later, they continued to wander. Just when all hope was gone, though, another sign! 2 kilometers.

"Should we not have gone 2 kilometers already?" one traveler gasped.

"We have been at 2 kilometers for hours," another groaned.

"We can and shall do it!" encouraged the man with seemingly decreasing knowledge.

The travelers, now stopping every few meters for rest, slogged ahead. The hours increased. The length increased. Another sign! A new sign. A sign not seen yet before. A carving that from a short distance away appeared to be a rose colored flower found to be nothing of the sort upon closer examination. *Worms, as thick and long as...a man's bony little finger, themselves rose coloured and also spattered with blood, wriggling their white bodies with many limbs from their stronghold in the inner of a wound...*¹ "There's no helping you," they whispered to the group. 2 kilometers.

The travelers no longer merry, no longer reveling, no longer with spirits liquid nor lightened, no longer with a man of seemingly endless knowledge rather with no knowledge at all, no longer with hills alive or hills with the sound of music, no longer with full health, no longer with the happy memory of the first hiker's gaffe, no longer with water, food, or happiness, saw no way out. Forever with 2 kilometers to go, the travelers roamed the forest for each of their own eternities. *There was no making it good again--not ever.*²

¹ From Kafka's *A Country Doctor*

² Ending line from Kafka's *A Country Doctor*