

# The Illuminated Dream

*by* Tantra Bensko

"The dark violin case murmurs.

For voices are only good  
when silences accompany them.

When behind the speech of the strings  
a sound remains as if from blood."

Rilke

As Kundra looked up from the drenched sidewalk on the North Shore, through her long red hair, through the fog, she wondered "Does the world hold still for other people?."

It always went all wonky for her when she looked away and back again, adjusting itself only minimally, as she imagined it may do maximally for others. "Their brains must pretend for them that nothing had really happened," As they had been walking forward, head turned sideways to look at the scenery, their bodies must have known without doubt where they were going, believing it still looked the same as the last glance forward, and filling it in with their imaginations so seamlessly they never wondered if they were about to step into

nothing. Or something surprising.

It seemed like other people navigated all the angles encountered in looking down, up, left, or right, without considering it. She never got used to the ways the world moved slightly with her head movements, one imagejangledupagainstthenext, with the movements of the body freeing them from being a direct, unvarying horizon. It never looked to her the way it looked in the movies. "Does it really look that way to other people?" The camera always pans straight ahead, carried on a steady-cam to compensate for anything that may throw off the sense that the world is continuous.

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Not that Kundra believed for a minute the world was really continuous.

The montages in movies never follow the movement of the eyes as they look down at the sidewalk and back, making sure they aren't going to step on something wrong. People who walked in movies always were confident that the ground was stable and predictable at all times.

And what about when they walked along, and were approaching someone coming their way? Did other people ever look down at the ground PRETENDING, in this case, to check it for stability, a couple of times, before getting close enough to the approaching person to smile and acknowledge his existence? It was awkward looking at some person the whole time, and smiling too early didn't do any good. There was no way to decide just what kind of smile to give before seeing the person more clearly.

The best way seemed to be to give the people a slight smile as they approached within a certain distance, then look down as they got closer, then look at them straight in the eyes and give them a big smile, maybe say "Hello". Sometimes they would smile back. Sometimes, after all her careful consideration of timing, they would totally ignore her, sometimes with great force. The worst was when she waited too long, and their timing was different, and by the time she got close enough to see them and smile, she had already missed her chance of connection, had seemed uninterested or rude, and it was all over.

Kundra passed a sign that said "Clean Up After Your Dog. Fine, 2000 dollars." She passed a man vacuuming his yard of brilliant, wet, red leaves. She loved the way the water saturated the colors. She looked down, seeing her shoes, which had been wet for weeks straight, in the British Columbia winter, with a hole she was ignoring, and a blister she was favoring, and a smell that made other people near her sometimes smell their armpits discretely, with a

worried look. Her socks didn't match, never did, which made people on Commercial Drive, her hangout in Vancouver, wink at her.

She was wearing shorts because her legs didn't require the services of a dryer after a walk in the rain like pants would. She never shaved her legs, which were holding droplets of water that glinted when she passed the lights, and maybe that's one reason people on The North Shore, in the more conservative North Vancouver, never talked to her. She had just the opposite reaction on The Drive. They seemed to be drawn to her red hair and large breasts and big smile there. "People on The North Shore must be immune to red" she decided.

When she looked up, she saw the most strangely beautiful walk she had ever seen. It was beyond the Ministry of Silly Walks. It broke through the surface of the suburban world and shattered it into pieces, fragments of dreams and amazement. She was not the same as she had been a moment before. It was an epiphany she couldn't put her finger on.

There she was, walking in the North Shore along the sidewalk during the fog and everyone's walk looked better than usual in that pseudo romantic setting, the sounds different, the cars obscured, the shopping center in the distance fuzzy around the edges, almost not really be there. There was the hopeless suggestion that SOMETHING could almost happen here that was not prosaic. That she could have some sort of interaction with someone which was not mundane and formulaic. She had little desire or hope of getting to know anyone there, and she had "lived" there for over three months already.

She had had no place to live, really, and after months of wandering with her backpack through The Drive, sleeping behind bushes a couple times, in people's dirty vans a couple times, on people's floors more times, in hostels, in a church, in rented rooms in houses for two weeks at a time when she was lucky, or sleeping on couches with cats pouncing on her in the night, in lover's beds

for a night or two at a time here and there, in the part of the city where any number of people had no place to live, she had been "adopted" by an older man named Morrison and allowed to live in his apartment for nothing but careful remuneration of all expenses made into lists with tiny handwriting and very straight alignment. He had been a skinhead in London when he was much younger, and carefully shined his Doc Martins, kept his hair cut at level two, pressed his pants with perfect creases, as did his mates. He had the perfect personality for the exacting rules of that game. She loved hearing his stories of going bowling and dancing to Reggae music with the other skinheads, loved his accent, loved him. As friends.

Strangely, the apartment was a startlingly surreal masterpiece inside the normal exterior, and they had made it more so while their friendship expanded.

They had been constructing an art "labyrinth", out of me'al and glahss. She thought in his British accent after living with him all this time, hearing his voice as her own in her head. She hardly talked to anyone else these days, spending all her time on The Illumination, and though Morrison had a similar kind of routine lifestyle and politics and diet as the rest of the folk on The North Shore, he had a way of putting together metals from the scrap yard, and glass in ways that were surprising, surreal, arose from magic and nothingness. "Me'al rules!" they had shouted together, raising their wine glahses.

They went to the scrap yards in the rain, wading in dirty water up to the tops of their boots, and constructed The Illumination bit by bit, in the living room, a thick labyrinth of "screens," glass panels in which her Dadaesque photo transparencies were backed with various degrees of opacity and irony. It was a strange monstrosity, big enough to hide behind, and filled with images of a young dark street violinist she knew, and of Morrison himself dressed as a Bacchus bound in horror.

There were pictures of transgendered nudes, people wearing humongous and hairy aboriginal masks while making love, people with penis tails or donkey heads or chicken legs, in cages with knives in their teeth, dead animals that glowed in beauty and maggots, steps that went into infinity and were made of water. On the other side of the glass, she had handwritten staccato anti stories that corresponded, or did not correspond, with the images. She was breaking up the linearity of the sterotypical "suburbanism" and its idea that the world had a plot arc like a mainstream movie.

She knew none of Morrison's neighbors would get down with their Illumination. Especially the tails made of penises. Still, she smiled at everyone she passed there deeply from her heart, from the habit of true exchange of love and excitement. People there were alright, nothing wrong with them, and no one was really mean to her. She was sure they were nice enough people, just not her type any more than she was theirs. She had received very few real smiles from hearts illuminated with the light of love. The rare ones had been from young teenagers, which surprised her, as that was the age group on the North Shore that completely ignored her the most, though they were the only ones out walking, the others being in their shiny cars. When one smiled profoundly, looking into her soul, she could tell he or she was not very popular. Those young people would probably move to The Drive as soon as possible, become artists, and eat curried rice for three dollars every day if they were lucky. She would think about them for a long time. But the chances of getting to know even them there seemed impossible. There was no means of connection.

She was a fragment that didn't fit into the overall plot of North Vancouver, something that needed to be ground into glass sculptures and thrown into the wind. She wanted to scream the days apart, break into people's hearts, tear apart the skin of the illusions. She wanted to illuminate the pretense of the commercial movie worldview that had been overlaid on the non experimental population. She wanted to make it into a labyrinth and shine her

light on what was behind it. "How many people in the world must feel this same pain?" Time stretched out forever.

The Most Beautiful Walk was perfect for the fog, the ONLY surreal thing she had seen since being there, other than a dwarf she passed along the trail. She regularly threw herself into desperate escapes into The Drive, where she became homeless for days at a time each time, throwing herself into possibilities. As she approached the walking man, visually enhanced by the moisture in the air, her heart sped up. "Finally, SOMETHING might happen!", especially if she could exchange looks with that man. There might be at least an anti-story plot arc.

He was probably only out because the fog obscured his walk, hid him to a degree, because probably no one else there would think of his walk as beautiful. She could glint her eyes at him. Let him know she was different. He had an ally. She was ready for the only non linearity in the straight line of existence in that whole region.

All this thinking happened while the world was whooshing through many perspectives of raising her head and looking at him, realizing she was staring, and looking down, up and down, the world wobbling as her head moved, not to mention her feet. "Sensory Integration Dysfunction," she had heard it called recently. Something some people are born with. Someone else had suggested it came from implants put in her ear, and under her eye, the most common places. She preferred the Sensory Integration Dysfunction idea. And she saw it poetically, somehow appropriate in an artistic way, as for her view of reality.

The strange man approaching her on the sidewalk ahead was very narrow and slender, dapper in a richly brown jacket, and matching trousers, and a hat with a rather soft brim turned down, another shade of brown going into beige. She couldn't see his face, below the hat, and he, like her, did spend a considerable time looking down. She could almost but not quite glimpse that his face was a bit

non human looking, foreign in its tinyness, eyes without lashes, mouth a straight line, neck far too small, all of which could be frightening to look at deeply. She hoped it wasn't true, that he was more permeable than that to her gaze, and to others' as he could have little chance of having many friends if he really looked like that. He could have had a face like anything under that hat. She wanted him to have friends, people he didn't have to pay, to look after him.

She wondered what she would say as he passed, something spirited and memorable, her eyes soft with empathy for him, yet acting as if she were nonplussed by his appearance, breezy as ever. She would open up her heart waves to him as they passed, unguard her smile, making sure he knew she would never reject his friendship, would never make fun of him. Her brain kept trying to put together all the angles of his face barely glimpsed, a little bit of chin, a little bit of neck, a jaw here, a nose there, through the fog and her polite glances away.

She imagined what life must be like for him, how hopeless he might feel in always meeting every single person on the sidewalk as -- the man who walked like that.

*The thing is, as he walked, he lifted an arm straight out with no bends anywhere, like raising a sail on a ship, very precise. His arm continued to lift in jerky shifts, further and further into the air in discrete increments, until it pointed nearly straight up in the air!*

**Then it swung around forcefully, rounding out sideways and down.** Somehow that fit in with the movements of his legs mysteriously, which shuffled briskly and exactly, yet she couldn't imagine how. Her eyes were always on his arm. It was too complex to comprehend altogether, too impossible to seem to go together anatomically. She passionately wanted to memorize him, figure out the mechanics of how his arm

was related to his legs.

But she knew his hat was partly there to keep him from being seen, or having to return people's stares. He just wanted to go somewhere and not amaze.

But he WAS amazing, as he pushed along a brown wooden cane in mathematical movements with the other arm. She realized she had seen him before, once, on The Drive of all outcasts, of all poets and beggars.

The young Chinese friend of hers who busked with his violin on The Drive, a boyish young man with long hair and a beautiful face, and a black hat that was nearly cowboy, had played her a song one day that he had just composed. She had wanted to see what went with that music, but it had to be visual, with staccato, whimsical movement, something she couldn't make up. The music was surreal, dreamlike, almost like an insane little mechanical dancer on top of a child's music box, a child with pale skin and big eyes and not many friends. The music sounded as if ANYTHING unexpected and freakish could happen, yet was playfully quiet, happy, but ponderous. It made her want to see the foreign experimental film that it should be the soundtrack for. And when she'd seen that man walking, on The Drive, the music immediately became his soundtrack in her mind. But he had been far away, going away from her quickly around a corner, and that was that.

She assumed the man lived on The Drive, along with the rest of the motley crew, like herself, and the violinist. His violin music was getting more and more astonishing, his genius more apparent, and when he played, forcefully, in the louder limits, it swung him around back and forth, excitingly, and his head pushed back into his neck. His eyes got very focused, his wrist remaining poetically raised the way Yehudi Menuhin said it should be to create the most vivid sound, the most trembling beauty, the most winsome emotions. His music, since that song, had blossomed into symphonies made up on



the spot, improvised for his listeners, sometimes just for her, creating the sense that life was indeed a powerful, exalted place to live within. A place where something magical could happen.

Then he would say something. He'd suddenly stop playing without ever coming to an end, but interrupt himself, and curl up his beautiful lips into a snarl, showing his missing teeth. Until he snarled, his lips looked like a painting of a black clad Asian hermaphroditic angel in the Renaissance would have looked. When he curled it, saying something deprecating about his playing or about someone, maybe smirking when a woman looked at him and smiled, she knew it was his self consciousness. The effect of the music was dashed in a way that couldn't help but make her and others laugh, looking at each other, together dealing with the dislocation, the discontinuity of expectations. Others had brought it up to her, remarking on the striking differences in his beautiful image as a musician, and what happened as soon as he spoke. But she only smiled at him, forgivingly.

She had tamed him. It had been almost impossible to get photos of him. He didn't allow it. People would ask him, because he was so striking, and he would curl his lips and say he didn't like it. It took her months of their quiet friendship, halting conversations, gaining his trust, before she was able to obtain some images of his beauty.

The poetic affect of the music would waver in the air uncertainly as he brusquely complained and put the German violin in its case. Or the gypsy violin. He was always making more money busking as astonished passersby on the sidewalks would give him twenty dollar bills sometimes. The other buskers were lucky to get a few bucks for a sandwich. But he would upgrade to a better violin, always carrying two with him. The new ones would have less horsehair missing, be less cracked, have a sweeter sound. "I want to be great. I want to make great music," he had told her. She loved him for that. She understood. She felt the same way about greatness, and that made

them very strange, and different in the world. And there he was, playing notes without frets, and having just picked up the violin a few months ago.

What an odd thing the body was, what incredible things it was capable of. He had said, "We're just brainstems, pouncing at what grabs our attention. We could live if we were pared down to just that. We don't have souls, Kundra. There's nothing left when we die." The Pouncing Brainstems had struck her as a great name for a band.

"But you know," she said, "scientists did experiments where they weighed people's bodies after they died and they always lost seven ounces. Do you think that could be the soul?" That just made him sneer and look away. "Or, what about those people, like the kids from India that Ian Stevenson interviewed, who could remember their past lives, and then they tracked down their families and everything they had remembered was true? All the details checked out? There seems to be a kind of continuity."

"I'd have to see it to believe it", he said.

Sometimes, when they had lingered as long as they could together in the night on the sidewalk, at three in the morning, it seemed like something even more could happen—a kiss, perhaps, but not quite. Well, maybe. Once, on such an occasion, they had done Exquisite Corpse drawings on the sidewalk together. When she asked him if he wanted to do it, he curled his lips like she was very weird. "It's the Dada art form where one person draws the head of something strange, some surreal creature, and leaves the neck lines showing, so you can't tell what the face looks like. You can kind of guess at what size it is. Then, the other person does the body. It will be something totally different from the head. Then, you unfold it, and hold it up. You go for the marvelous. A lot of the time, there is some kind of continuity between the two parts, some sort of theme

or something. ...It doesn't matter if you can't draw." But, boy could he draw. He was a genius at that as well, it seemed.

Kundra's and the violinist's pictures didn't find any common themes. The didn't go together in some subconscious, delightful way like they usually did when she drew Exquisite Corpses together. Somehow, it didn't quite jive. But at least they must have given people something to think about when they found them stuck to their car windshields, under the wipers, facing them, as they got into their cars at three in the morning.

Sometimes she had thought of getting closer to him, kissing him, say when he sat with her where she was renting for two weeks, the longest she was ever able to rent a cheap room on The Drive at a time. They talked downstairs until dawn, when her housemate/landlady came downstairs and said "Hey, it's five in the morning. I haven't been able to go to sleep all night." He quickly gathered up his violins and left.

But what was the point, really, in kissing him, considering what he said about sex? "We don't have souls, so sex is just two bodies. People like to imagine it's a merging of souls but it isn't. It's just physical and that's it." And Kundra herself was all about Tantric sex, Tantric love even without sex, but a kind of soulflame that could join and become a bigger fire than either one could be alone, and could approximate the larger, divine flame of existence. And besides, who knows what criticism he would have of her afterwards that would cut her to the quick? Would he find her breasts too low with age, her skin too wrinkled, her face too freckled? No souls, no love, no divine yearnings, no magic.

But his music told her otherwise. There is a Worldsoul. And as he played it, the distance between his eyes, and the length of his nose a little too foreign to her, he became that magical something that some sort of mystical touching beyond just skin could happen. He was a vision, however impossible to ever really know or touch as she

would like to touch, tenderly, impossible to flow together with, impossible to ever lay her head on and float in the darkness of being with.

He surprised her when said he was interested in things that were magical. "Magic is something we can't understand," he said. There was hope.

They had created some magic together on The Drive, at that performance space called The Dream during their performance for those of uncertain gender, fluid sense of self, floating anomalies of consciousness, peyote worshippers, shamanic drummers, and pathological liars. The earliest version of The Illumination was onstage, the lights low, and she and the violinist were behind its screens, walking its simple labyrinth, as he played, following her. She carried a candle, and held it behind one picture after another to read aloud the handwritten text that was behind it, with great fervor and whimsy. The audience could see the images lit up, flickering, glowing redly, as they flowed from one to the next, joining but not at normal junctures, heads with thumbs, and lobsters with wings.

And now, Kundra had discovered secretly the area where The Man with The Walk probably lived, the man whose soundtrack was written for her personally by the Chinese violinist. She wondered if The Man with The Walk lived alone. Surely, someone had to do most things for him, though he probably managed to keep some sort of dignity in spite of that. He couldn't even carry anything home from the shopping center or it would slip out of his hand and fly into the face of a passerby. On the North Shore, all the stores and restaurants were chains, all the clothes people wore were brand names, all the haircuts were from the same barbers, all the books in the library were mainstream. They had television. They were Caucasian or Asian, male or female and nothing in between. They had jobs and clean cars and wives. There were no beards or long

hair. There were no genius buskers breaking the night with joy of beauty that made a portal of the ears into the soul of the world.

The Man with the Strangest Walk in the world was getting closer. She had been missing her holy mission of love in the eyes for all the street people on The Drive, which always made her feel useful, even if she was just walking. This man would recognize that she was different from the others around there, that she was a Drive woman, by the depth of her smile. Her mouth was preparing itself, and she stretched out her jaw, loosening her lips, so they didn't draw back as they did sometimes when she became self conscious. She hated that. She wanted this smile to be EVERYTHING.

He turned the corner.

Damn. She couldn't help but smirk. But her spirit sank. She was no longer useful. No chance for her eyes to beam approval and gratitude. Unless she followed him. At least now she could follow him with her eyes without being rude. She forgot to look down and stumbled on a crack in the sidewalk. His walk really was incredibly beautiful to her, no doubt about it. Her heart was pattering, her breath enhanced. Her step had more bounce, though it would have had more if he had kept walking and passed her. The violin song came back to her, and she could hear it perfectly... in a vague sort of way. She played it in her mind in step with the man, who never wavered off his beat. He must have practiced to keep his walk under such excellent control, to never show any flagging, tiredness, despondency. She KNEW the world didn't look like it did when filmed with a steady cam to him.

Down the street, she saw a man and his two children playing at monsters. They were imitating the man with The Walk. They were having fun. . . .

She couldn't figure out the relationship of The Man With the Walk's arms and legs, and would always wish she could, somehow, or maybe she would be glad she couldn't. How did the structure actually connect? And why?

