

## Madness of the desert.

Once upon a time the hero of this story was wandering alone in the desert. He walked purposefully (or so he thought) amongst hallucinogenic cacti and salty rocks, his soles crackling in the dry earth, hissing from the heat.

Suddenly, he stopped short on his feet and saw a ridiculously long, wool thread stretching for miles and miles, connecting West with East. Its color combined grey with orange and a line of fire ants trod along its adventurous trail.

He decided to walk along the thread, matching the ants' direction heading east.

They walked for hours under an unforgiving sun without a word exchanged between ants and man. One ant, however, was stealing fleeting looks of our tiresome hero, puzzled over his general demeanor. Why did this husky man walk alongside them? It wasn't his country, and it definitely wasn't his war.

Under a sweaty brow their glances met, an obligation of courtesy arose, so they introduced themselves.

"Hello there, Mr. Man," said Brosha, the ant. "I'm Brosha... the ant."

"Hey Brosha," responded politely our hero. "I don't have a name I can offer. Not one that I remember, anyway."

"Huh! It's very strange but you do look like a Nameless," said Brosha, fascinated by the realization. "Your face. It's almost blank."

"So I've been told," said our hero, with a smirk.

Both creatures retreated momentarily into their thoughts. Then Brosha said:

"What are you doing in these parts of the world? Where are you from?"

"I have no idea," said our hero, wiping his forehead with his shirtsleeve. "I remember nothing. I might as well be from here."

"No, you can't be from here," reprimanded Brosha. "People here have names. Names matching their faces."

"I suppose you are right... Where are you marching to?" asked Nameless.

"Nobody knows exactly. But we're at war... All I know is the ant in front of me. Arosha. He's my leader, and I always follow his shadow."

Then the whole platoon halted instantly, with a thud. Dust rose from behind them and everybody closed their eyes. It was high noon and nobody casted any shadows. Our hero rubbed his eyes and watched as the sightless ants pivoted 180 degrees, facing west. They opened their eyes, fixed their stare on a 'fresh' shadow and began to march again.

"Brosha! What the hell happened?" Nameless asked bewildered.

"I am Brosha," said 'Arosha'. "The one you're talking to is Arosha. My leader, and I always follow his shadow. But you seem to know me, stranger. Have we met before?"

"Yes! I mean no. I don't know," our hero said, feeling confused and liquid inside.

"Well, anyhow. I'm Brosha... the ant."

“Hey there,” our hero said once again, wondering what was happening. Were all these ants aware of their situation? He thought asking more questions was wise and so he did. “And who’s the one behind you then?”

“Ah, that’s nobody you wish to know. That’s Crosha. My pet. It always follows me around.”

Feeling more perplexed, our hero enquired further: “And the one behind Crosha?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. You must be mistaken,” the new Brosha asserted. Or was it the Old Arosha? And if so, will the new Brosha’s pet, Crosha, be Arosha tomorrow?

They walked some more.

“It will be dark soon,” our hero noted. “What happens then?”

“We sleep. What else is there to do?” Brosha stated matter-of-factly. “And tomorrow we march into battle.”

The sun slid inside the horizon. When the shadows blended seamlessly with the night, the fire ants stopped, sought shelter underground and slept. Our hero sat cross-legged and stared at the wool thread for hours, contemplating the lives of ants.

With the sun gone, the wind crept deep under his skin and froze his bones. It felt strange but the colder it got the stronger his mind grew. It was firing electricity, making wild connections to seemingly disassociated events and ideas, revealing the ways the world worked (or could work).

And then, just before hypothermia got the best of him, it all seemed crystal clear. He knew the meaning of life and couldn’t wait to let the world know.

“But first,” he shouted, mostly out of joy, “I will grab this thread and knit a sweater for warmth.” And so he did, using two wooden sticks for needles.

Sadly, the thread was not a regular grey-orange wool thread. It was the one dividing sanity from madness. So once the borderline was obscured our hero couldn’t decide whether he should wear the garment or eat it. Oscillating between sanity and madness, and remembering vaguely a hint from his meaning-of-life revelation, *for warmth and happiness was to come from inside*, he swallowed the sweater whole.

Curled into a ball, still and cold stiff, our hero breathed slowly, like a fish on a boat. He chanted his idea over and over into his head. ‘At least seven billion times,’ he thought, hoping to reach each and every one of us. But nobody heard from him again.