

Episode 45: Hello Traveler  
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There are strange hills inside our skulls. Slowly, through time and exploration, we become native to these inner landscapes. Yet, even the wild places we seem to know well can surprise us.

Welcome, to The CryptoNaturalist.

[Theme Music]

[Quiet mandolin music and clinking glasses fades in]

Hello traveler.

Good to sit here at the bar with a fellow wanderer sheltering from the rain. And what a shelter this is, eh? A tavern inside a truly huge black tree on a lightless hill without a road for... gotta be fifty miles.

Well. Maybe I ate something that didn't agree with me earlier or maybe I'm just continuing to enjoy my talent for wandering toward felicitous happenstance. It hardly matters. Real or imaginary, I love anyplace with a mandolin player.

[Sounds of drinking. A heavy glass.]

My, my. This mead is singularly delicious. Ya know, honey is a profound and lovely substance that should be reserved for only worthy uses. I'd say this drink earns its ingredients.

Ah.

It is not lost on me that I seem to be the only one here speaking. You seem to be looking on my rambling kindly, so if you don't object, I'll just continue. A place like this. A night like this. The music. The thunder and rain I feel, but no longer hear.

There's just too much life dancing through me to keep silent.

It's just who I am.

I guess we all greet joy in our own ways.

Joy. I wish you joy. I sincerely do, traveler.

But, if you don't mind me saying so, I feel like there's a bit of sadness in your eyes tonight. Nothing to worry overmuch about, of course. Sadness is as natural as telling secrets to the moon or laughing at sudden rain.

And still.

I've seen that sadness in more than just your eyes lately.

You know, it's the strangest thing.

More than one person lately, more than one mind you, has told me that they worry that their life isn't amounting to much.

Specifically, folks have said to me that they worry that their lives aren't a net gain for our world.

Imagine that worry, traveler.

Maybe you can.

Imagine you wear those shoes.

You worry if your existence is worthwhile in terms of bringing forth goodness and balance. If just being a living human in our modern context is immoral. Being a taker. Being a consumer. If the Earth will gain a return on its investment for the air you breathe and the food you eat.

Can you imagine such worries?

But, of course, existence just doesn't work that way.

Life doesn't work that way.

You aren't an investment and can't be evaluated as such.

You weren't a calculated risk aimed at some form of profit.

That's not how life works.

You didn't invent the ancient mechanisms that brought you here nor can you alter them.

You certainly didn't choose what sort of lifeform to be.

Let's be plain about it.

Unless you photosynthesize, you're living off of other organisms. You didn't create this system. No one asked you to sign on to this fact. Life exists in myriad forms and its existence is its own justification.

There is no "best" way to do it or "ideal model" for the planet. We are temporary.

The planet is temporary. What is ideal for one species is less than ideal for another.

Now, this isn't me suggesting we all take our hands off the controls of our lives and shrug. Our choices absolutely have weight. There is balance to be achieved for ourselves and our world and I think it should be our task to seek it.

I imagine these issues all feel different for humans because of our executive function. Our agency. We think about patterns and the big picture. We create systems. We impose order. But weighing the value of our fundamental existence and our life-minutes isn't like finding the most efficient way to load the dishwasher.

I'll say it again. There is no perfect version of ourselves or our world to achieve. Heh. Let that truth linger in your mind until it takes root. It takes some tending, but that tree will bear fruit.

No perfection.

And yet...

I think we should lay our hands lightly on the things we can influence and press gently toward goodness. Toward empathy. Toward balance. We should do this within the vital constraints of honoring our own limitations, happiness, and mental/physical wellbeing.

We should not dash ourselves against our hopes for a better world.

In the scales of my judgement, the quiet, gentle, tender moments deserve as much (or more) attention as our dramatic, strenuous, industrious moments.

Lives are mostly quiet, small, fleeting things and it feels like a mistake to spend them wishing instead that we were huge, enduring, planet-shaping things.

Context.

Acceptance.

Cultivate love for what is and hope for what could be, all while sparing a bit of awe and gratitude for the massive, unknowable, unlikely forces that culminated with your own odd, unique, singular presence on this planet.

Just look at the place we're sitting, hmm? Stranger still, look at the architecture of our own minds and bodies.

Yes, own the small concrete good you can do, but reject the idea that the fate of the world is in your hands. Reject the idea that you need to justify the breaths you inherited from natural systems older than we can realistically imagine.

Not even the fate of this moment is in your hands. Yet, we should endeavor to love this moment and, by doing so, learn to love ourselves.

Ah.

There now.

I've talked and talked. Let's sample someone else's words. You've come with me this far, perhaps you'll join me for today's hidden lore segment.

Today's hidden lore is a poem by Eric Fisher Stone.

### The Snail God

I pray to Mary, Mother of Mollusks  
to redeem the soil with the snail's oily grace.  
Maybe God is a snail  
plumed with eyestalks, tilling  
the slow drum of his pulse  
on the dirt's sprouting rhythm  
small as a clover leaf.

Instead of cross-shapes  
churches built in spirals  
like the chapels of shells.

In a grassy labyrinth  
he trails to a gravestone,  
kissing the crippled log.  
He plows the kingdom of roots  
stirring dead men into flowers.

What a lovely poem. If there is true holiness in the world, certainly it is to be found down in the quiet happenings amongst the leaf litter.

Eric Fisher Stone is a poet and writing tutor from Fort Worth, Texas. He received his MFA in writing and the environment from Iowa State University. His poetry collection, *The Providence of Grass*, was published by "Chatter House Press" in 2018. His second poetry collection, *Animal Joy*, is forthcoming from "WordTech Editions" in October 2021.

I just finished reading Eric's first collection *The Providence of Grass*. I very much enjoyed it and, since you're hearing this, I expect you would enjoy it too.

Well, traveler, I'm glad you're still here with me. What an exceedingly rare fellowship we are apart of, eh? To be awake and alive in this world. So many of our peculiar strengths also leave us vulnerable to peculiar vexations.

For example, I can sympathize with the idea that some folks are suspicious of happiness simply because there is pain and injustice in the world. I can understand that idea.

But we need to approach that sort of thinking armed with a couple unshakable truths.

You are an essential part of nature and it is right and natural that you should be here.

Tied up with that truth is the truth that you deserve to feel safe and happy.

But, you might say, there is evil and injustice in the world.

I agree.

And you didn't cause it and it's beyond your power and understanding to banish it from the planet.

Again, you are an essential part of nature. You arrived through the same natural processes as a dandelion or a Kestrel.

In the context of nature, you should be here because you are.

In the context of life and love, I am certain you deserve to feel safe and happy.

No, you can't banish evil from the world, but you can absolutely break yourself in the attempt to banish it.

You honor yourself and your world by owning a share of the virtuous work. A share that doesn't crowd out your duty to love and care for yourself as the embodiment of nature closest at hand and most in your control.

You turn your back on reality and your own worth by trying to own global outcomes. Zoom that mental camera in.

Worrying about the meaning of your life in the context of forever, in the context of global challenges, in the context of human history, is like being anxious that you aren't directly managing the conversion of hydrogen into helium in the heart of the sun. Just be you. Be here.

Our brains can't see it all. Not the whole story. Not the real context. As such, we are constantly making decisions on what and how we see things.

Perspective.

You can send your thoughts tumbling through the centuries.

You can make a warm drink the prize of a lifetime.

You can imagine the Earth as a firefly speck in an ink black sky.

You can make any simple kindness the essential truth of your story.

See with intention.

The good and evil in this world are happening concurrently.

Our choice to focus on the good is itself a way to defy the evil.

Traveler.

You've been a generous listener.

I think I'll take the wisdom of your lesson to heart and sit in silence for a spell.

Until next time, remember. We're all strange animals. So, act like it.

**Show Notes: Episode 45: Hello Traveler**

Thoughts about loving ourselves in an imperfect world in a strange tavern on a dark hill.

## **Credits**

Thanks to Andrew Collins for the use of his song Farewell my Old Friend. I borrowed it with his permission from a 2020 YouTube performance. I just love Andrew's playing. Find out more about his music and check out his mandolin lessons at [www.andrewcollinstrio.com](http://www.andrewcollinstrio.com).

I recently put out a call for help on social media asking folks to contribute to my work via Patreon or Ko-Fi and I have received a truly awe-inspiring amount of support. I'd like to specifically thank Jennifer Reed for her generosity in joining my Patreon at the CryptoNaturalist level. You are exceedingly kind.

Check out Field Guide to the Haunted Forest by Jarod K. Anderson wherever books are sold. If you'd like a signed bookplate for your copy, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

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## **Post Script:**

You know how to love things. A song. A cloud. A single graceful leaf. Just practice turning that generosity of affection toward yourself.

End.