

The Lantern of Bliss

Lon a distant valley cradled by snow-draped peaks, there lived a young woman named Eryth, who was known for her skill in mending things. Her hands could coax life back into broken tools and torn garments, and people came from far and wide to ask for her help.

Eryth had always felt content with her simple life. The rhythm of her work, the gratitude of those she helped, and the quiet beauty of the valley filled her days with a steady satisfaction. One afternoon, though, she overheard a passing merchant speak of the importance of “following your bliss.” The words haunted her. She began to wonder: Was her life truly worthy if it wasn’t filled with the radiant joy the merchant described? Had she been settling for contentment when she could have bliss?

One day, a traveler passed through the valley, bearing a curious object: a lantern made of smooth, golden metal, inscribed with words in some unknown language that glimmered faintly when the light struck them. The traveler spoke of its enchantment. “This lantern reveals your bliss,” he said, offering it to Eryth. “Follow where its light shines, and you will find unending joy.”

Eryth hesitated, but the promise of bliss was too alluring to ignore. She sold her possessions and set out with the lantern in hand.

The first night, the lantern’s beam pointed toward the rolling hills to the west, where flowers bloomed in endless colors. Eryth frolicked among the blossoms and drank sweet water from crystal streams. For a while, it felt as though bliss had found her.

But as the weeks passed, the novelty wore thin. She missed her home, her community, her work, and the sense of purpose she’d once had. She began to wonder: Was bliss this fleeting?

Still, the lantern’s light called her onward. It led her through dense forests, shimmering cities, and golden deserts. Each new place promised joy but delivered only moments of it. Bliss, Eryth realized, was like the wind — always moving, never settling, always fleeting.

One evening, as the lantern guided her down a thorny path overgrown with brambles, she stumbled and fell. The lantern rolled from her grasp, its light extinguished. Eryth sat amid the thorns, weary and scratched, and cried out in frustration.

“What is the point of this journey?” she cried aloud.

From the shadows, an old woman emerged. Her face was weathered but kind, her eyes glinting like stars. “What troubles you, child?”

Eryth explained the lantern’s promise and her disappointment. The woman listened silently, then asked, “And what did you hope to find?”

Eryth hesitated, her voice faltering as she spoke. “I thought I was seeking bliss... something bright and wonderful that would make everything feel perfect. But... it hasn’t turned out the way I thought it would. I’m not sure what I’m looking for anymore.”

The old woman smiled. “Bliss is a fickle guide, for it promises an escape from struggle. But meaning — ah, that is a lantern you carry within. Its light reveals what truly matters to you, even in the dark times. What did you leave behind to chase this fleeting bliss?”

Eryth thought of her valley, the people who had trusted her to mend what was broken, and the quiet satisfaction she’d felt in her work. Her heart yearned for the life she had abandoned, not for its ease but for its quiet fulfillment.

With the old woman’s help, Eryth found her footing and turned back the way she had come, brambles tugging at her sleeves. The path was no easier on the return, but each step felt lighter as she thought of the life she would build — not perfect, not blissful, but hers.

When she reached her valley, her hands found new purpose in mending what had been left undone during her absence. People welcomed her back with stories of how they had struggled without her skill and kindness.

The golden lantern sat on her shelf, unlit and no longer needed. Its promise of bliss had led her astray — in one sense. But in another it had fulfilled its promise by revealing her ‘true bliss’ — a life of meaning for her. It had led her to realizing the worthiness of a life spent in service to what matters to her, even when the road is hard and overcast with rain.

From that day on, when others sought her wisdom, Eryth would tell them, “Don’t ‘follow your bliss’ — that can too easily lead you astray. Seek instead what gives your life meaning, and the brambles will hardly trouble you.

— *William Zeitler*
2024 December 11

© 2024 William Zeitler. Originally published at GrailHeart.com

