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Splashes Unheard

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ANDREW NOSTI

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Why don’t you come on down from there?

He has never felt this high before. Looking straight out, he can see over the dangling sun on the horizon. It would be high, he has known, but this high? Everything below him has transformed into a distant mass, like a painting seen from afar: one rolling, gray-blue surface. From this height, he can barely discern the tips of the tallest rocks.

He hears his heart’s squelchy thumping.

Cars behind him sit empty, some with doors left open and engines running. People have crowded in huddled groups behind the barricades. They watch him. Some faces look pained, pinched. Others have phones shielding their expressions. One woman sobs loudly into a man’s coat shoulder; she is the only not watching. Most look impatiently blank.

From here he can’t hear the waves crash against the cliffs. Foam sprays and splashes around the jagged edges, the white standing out against the gray, but neither the crashing whoosh nor the subtle ebb and flow echo up this high. He can still smell the water, though: briny, ancient, mucky. It smells like distant memories—some his but most not—and a promise. Maybe he can’t hear the waves because the wind is so loud. It howls monstrously in his ears, along with the thumping. Stronger gusts sway the bridge, and he squeezes harder to maintain his grip on the oxidized rail, which is damp from dew or bird shit, or maybe his own sweat. He doesn’t know why he grips tighter when the gusts roll in. Doing so seems counterintuitive. Something instinctual, imbedded deep inside him, reacts before he can stop it, he guesses.

Why don’t you come down so we can talk?

His arches ache. He left his shoes at home, not seeing the point in bringing them, and now his bare feet curl around a black pole about as wide as an average man’s arm, rust patches like scabs. With every gust the railing groans.

He’s walked along the bridge countless times before, coming home, leaving home, going nowhere in particular. He always walked along its side-set path, fenced in from the road and the edge. It never looked this high from the path. He could see out from there, but never down. This is real height, out here on the rail, past the fence. This is a cosmic height. Maybe even a divine height, if one believes in that, he ventures, and he feels the yearning to believe now. Aching arches and sweaty palms are worth such a feeling.

You don’t want to do this, son. Come down so we can talk.

It took a while for anyone to notice him out here on the rail, and then a while longer before they cleared a perimeter around him and phones came out and the woman started sobbing. His arches ached by then.

He stands stock still, as motionless as the cliffs below, meditatively focused, his senses hyperaware. Dr. Lorsan tried to teach him mindfulness. They spent a few sessions on it, breathing a lot, thinking about breathing even more. He never managed it, that acceptance and progression through the world, that wholly, bodily there. Out on the rail, now, he has finally achieved it. He is wholly and bodily here, now, progressing on the rail. But there’s so much—more too—so
much Dr. Lorsan didn’t explain, maybe didn’t know about being here or there, that it really meant also not being here or there. Next Tuesday will mark a year since Dr. Lorsan and the Tuesday after that two years since the house.

Whatever it is, I’m sure we can fix it.

Can they? He has asked this question dozens of times with dozens of variations, but he hasn’t found the answer. Below knows, though. It must.

Long before he ever stood on this rail, long before this rail existed, that space below him was there. That space below him stretched and wound and slithered back through time, a time so distant he can’t imagine it. Once, long ago, it was all water, before land rose from the depths, a beast emerging from below, and brought with it a whole new world, whole new life. Cliffs now towered and lorded over the water. But one day, after all the eons of splashes and crashes that he can now see but cannot hear way down below in the froth, the cliffs will erode, swallowed back again by the parent who birthed them, who gave life to the new life. Long gone would be the rail, even longer gone him, when the cliffs disappear, submerged beneath the pools. Going down into that water is not a fall but a return. Water is in him now. He can feel it squelching. Water is him. He is water, and one day all will be water again. What lives beyond water, after all?

Please, son. Children are watching.

The sun hangs on the edge of the horizon, partially concealed by the cliffs, casting forth a polychromatic screen of darkly warm hues, reds and purples and pinks. Orange is the sun itself, enlarged by its proximity to the cliffs. How large it would loom once all was water, once the horizon curves and falls away, unbroken by anything but fluffs of cloud, which are really just water waiting to return, like him. He can’t imagine an orange not exactly the orange of the sun right now. He knows there are other oranges--he has seen other oranges--but here and now is only this orange. Orange of fire once flickered in his irises; he stood outside and watched as it licked away his world. But that orange has evaporated out on this rail, and this orange alone remains. Only that purple and red and pink, too, once he thinks about it, remain. Only that gray-blue swashing below. Sunlight iridescently bounces off the water. Movements along the surface make the reflections quiver and dance. He is aware of his body like never before, aware of all of it, the whole thing, here. Not just the aching arches or the sweaty hands or the knees growing a little shaky. He feels the breeze on his skin, on every inch of it exposed, in his hair. He feels the smallest flutter of the air around him. He feels his lungs expand and contract, every increment of their ballooning. He feels the trace of his thoughts, the way they surface, grow, and then disappear, and he feels the ripples they send forth. He feels his blood in his body, moving like those waves, red like the red halo around the cold orange disc. He feels all this as if for the first time. Every pore is individual, distinct, atomized, and he can feel them, each one. And he can extend this awareness out, beyond him, past him, but still with him. What he can’t see or smell or hear or taste he can still feel. Crashes and splashes down below, not even seen now because he can’t focus on both the sun and the water, resonate up to him in lulling undulations. Not on his fingers or his palm or anywhere on his skin: inside is where he feels it, because it is him, and he is it, connected by his water to the water. They are bound by their long history, both experienced and
awaited. They will reunite soon, he knows, because he feels that inside of him too. He feels the lowering of the sun. Not just its last vestiges of warmth or the only-orange glare in his eyes, but the movement of it. He can feel the sinking, the sliding, and he knows it is neither sinking nor sliding, not really, not for him. Like the return to the water, it is not a descent. Sometimes, language fails a sensation. Language, after all, is not water, perhaps the only thing that is not water, and language is all he’d known before that rail.

Are you listening, son? Can you hear me?

The sun now barely peaks out from over the edge, all orange disappearing. It has dipped below the horizon, a horizon now inside him. All of it rumbles together inside, mixing, swishing like the water, his water, the water. There is no he, no rail, and, now, no sun, no orange, not the shade of the sun nor the shade of his banished memory. They are not so discrete as that, so divided. They are one now, and he feels them, deep in here, resting like a weight that pulls him downward and will burst out of him and birth it all anew. He feels only now.

Son…