

Although not actually tethered to the rail, he walked as if he were. I gazed up at him. I laughed into air. I laughed in his face--his face so serious with the effort of balancing. It was grey and hot. We'd just come from the beach, our bathing suits still wet with salt water. He leaped and landed. He was suddenly above. He didn't say, but I knew he wanted me to look and admire, to look and look, to gaze up at him with awe, to see him as remarkable, to see him as extraordinary, significant, notable, the daring young man on the flying trapeze.

When I think of him now, this is what I think about: the graceful movement of limbs, the bare chest, the serious face, and how he was always performing, always balancing precariously on a thin rail, one arm suspended above his head perpetually, one leg outstretched behind perpetually, he is high above the ocean, high above the ground, he reaches forward, always moving along, always steady and serious, and higher than I could ever reach.

I admit that I was lonely. So I set the house on fire. It was the best thing I've ever done. It was the most satisfying thing I have ever experienced. I want to set every single thing on fire. Every house. Every thing. Watching that house burn was like nothing I had ever seen before.

I sat on the fence watching. I was watching from afar. I was not interested in watching the fire stop. I wanted the fire to go on forever.

It was like falling myself when the roof caved in. There was a wave of heat that came toward me when it happened. It was like being under water. It was a lot like water, this fire, this burning, this thing that I did, this fire I set on purpose, I made it happen, and it was glorious, beautiful, perhaps the most beautiful thing I have ever seen, I never wanted it to end, I wanted to continue on, down the road, taking this fire with me.

Listen: I have something to tell you about leaping off the edge. About standing at the gate and breaking the lock. About moving away from the space that was created within a hot and heavy breath. About the way in which I could now only stand to look at him when he was facing the other way.

Like a preacher he was, in those moments of pronouncements, those moments of let-me-tell-you-how-it-is, I am the knower, I am the one who understands, you haven't got it figured out the way I do, and so I'll just go ahead and tell you about it.

I will tell you that in those moments I wanted to push him down. I wanted to take out his tongue. I would have set him on fire if it meant I wouldn't burn too.

Instead I turned everything off. His voice became a slow rumbling then. Static. Gravel. Then I filled his drink and then I smiled in his general direction and then I vaguely brushed crumbs on the table into a pile and then I looked at the stain on the ceiling and then I examined my fingernails and then I thought about pushing him off a cliff and then I thought about setting him on fire and then I would hear the finality in his voice and I came to with a jerk of my entire body, as if I were poked with a stick, and I got up to refill the glasses.

“Show off.”

“Practice makes perfect.”

He made it look easy, diving into the vortex. He stayed up all night practicing. He stayed up all night diving into the water. All day, he was waterlogged and vicious, barking orders at me like wolf. This larger-than-life-ness he was cultivating was overwhelming. He was becoming the motion, becoming the water, becoming a copy of himself. Larger than life. It's true, he was doing the impossible. There's something to that. But it was brutal, living this way. I wasn't sure how much longer I could witness this performance. I wasn't sure how much longer I could participate in this battle of wills.

X marks the spot. One moon in the sky and one moon in the water. A third moon hovering between. The great wave made a mountain. The great wave made steam. The difference between water and fire is not so great. I can't tell you how much I wanted to propel myself inside it. This water avalanche, this steam volcano. It became an architecture, an echo that makes a staircase on which one can climb to the pinnacle of an idea. This is how to understand the mysterious.

I threw everything into this space—every word, plate, stone, tree. Every match. Every new thing I had. I was looking for a place to dwell or I was looking to disappear. There doesn't seem to be much difference.

If I got through it, to the other side, perhaps I could make sense of things. But when you're tossed asunder, when you're diving out, it is difficult to understand dry land.

I was laid out. I had a funny feeling. I could give no response.

Tonight. Tomorrow. Yesterday.

What was. All the old-timers. The tower across the street.

If I could tell you I would tell you how every time I saw him I wanted to reach down my throat and pull out my lungs.

There was a time when I was upright. The music I made was an approachable hum. I was way beyond a white picket fence. There was nothing I had done so I decided to make something up. A crime. A disaster. All around me.

There were days I couldn't speak. Days of utter silence. Abandonment to the other senses. What I wouldn't give to go back and do it all over. It was happening to all of us—every day, another one, flat on her back, out by the pool or on the beach. Stuck in a bathing suit for the rest of her days—no matter what the weather.

But we had our own weather, our own houses, our own messes to clean.

I pass through this arc of knowledge. I pass up all kinds of opportunities. The only thing now is to rest, and all of this rest is exhausting. I fall down in the most inopportune places. I fall down and just stay there.

And the expense. I could have never imagined the expense. If I had all day to do what I wanted, I often thought. If I had it all, was never something that crossed my mind. I would never, I often said. I would never do that, I said once. I'm not interested then, was a response I often heard and often thought to make. If you could believe in just one thing, that would help, I was told. I was always told something. What I did understand was obvious. I won't bother to repeat it—or maybe it's important to do so. What I understood was that whatever you think, or believe, or desire is wrong or, if it's not wrong, it will be taken from you. I know this because it happens over and over. And in the time I have left, I expect this won't change. This is the way of the word. The way of the world in a grain of sand, an approach from land. I gave up my ideas long ago. And every time I think about it, I want to tear out his heart and roast it slowly over an open flame.

I saw the explosion before I heard it. A long finger of light lingering. Then the crash of the waves and then a different crash that traveled toward me and made a strong breeze that moved my hair onto my face. I was briefly blinded. When I saw again I saw the column of water still on the horizon, glowing a sick green. As if a mountain were made and it was growing while I watched it. As if it were a place you could get to. I stood on the cold sand with a towel around my shoulders and looked. Each moment I expected it to disappear and each moment there it still was. Ice-like. Majestic. Pathetic.

I wasn't sure which I desired more—its presence or its disappearance. I stood there until the sun gave way. And at the moment of near dark, it seemed it finally gave up its elevation. Another moment longer, and then it was gone.

I left. I walked slowly back to the house. I thought of how I could be like it was. There, then still there, then gone. I wanted to slide over to this other plane. This mountain of light could be my home. This mountain that no longer exists. There I would build a room of water. The webs of light streaming through. A single prism hanging from the window. A table, a chair. This place would never have speaking. Never noise. Only the low hum of waves outside it, serious and cold. I would sit there, still. No thoughts of sticking a knife in his eye. No thoughts of anything. I will kill him if I'm not careful.

When I came to, I was fully clothed and flat on my face. The blast I followed across the water, the pillar of light I saw on the horizon, seemed so harmless. I thought it could not reach me. I thought it was too far away. It seemed it would dissipate over the expanse. What I remember is watching the light, a finger in my eye, the sound only a memory of sound. Everything was muffled, like I had water in my ears. I felt off-balance.

But it wasn't the explosion across the water. I was no longer at the beach. I lay there, my face pushed into the carpet, my favorite dress pushed up my thighs. Then the footsteps in the kitchen. Then the door slamming. The smell of coffee, newly brewed. It was another morning and he was leaving for work.

How long I had been here was anyone's guess. How I was supposed to get up and get on with the day seemed impossible. The waiting until he got home, then his arrival. It seemed clearer to me than ever before that this time was going to be different. I hauled myself up and started to prepare.

I plunged and stayed there under the water, beneath the blue swirl. A new perspective was needed. Music was playing in the house. I could barely hear it—*I'm gonna make you mine, make you mine, make you mine*. The evening was coming down hard and the scent of rain was already in the air. A shift, distinct and dark. I thought to wait there until the storm came. I wanted to stay as I was. I was indexing my thoughts, building a kind of religion, a kind of new prosperity. Here, I had the occasion to think, and this was a new way of thinking. Muffled sounds of below the water. In terms of history, I had these facts: there was a time before me, there is my time, and there is a time I will not know. Let me try to be more clear: here, it was as if I knew the past and the future, but the present was erased. *Sha la la la la live for today*. It was clear to me that the present had no relevance other than here, beneath the water. My inverse-ness had changed my way of thinking—I used to think the present was the only thing that mattered. But here it was different. Was this a joke? The thoughts that came to me were unfamiliar. They were hard to hear. I felt I had a daughter and that daughter was myself. What is the price of loyalty, she asked. And I saw her there, a mirror image, hair swirling around her face which was my own. The sky had no relevance. The earth was only a faint idea. What is the price of loyalty? It was something I hadn't considered before. It was a language I did not speak. What was the answer? To whom had I ever been loyal? As soon as she arrived, she vanished. I could feel the water move around me, could feel the storm's arrival. I was nearly out of breath. I couldn't remember much about the old ways. I thought of the idea of walking on solid ground. I was this close to giving myself over. Then a crash, and without thought I emerged—no longer beneath—no longer the wrong way. I thought the crash was thunder but soon realized it was a deck chair thrown against the house by the heavy wind. It kept happening, hurling itself against the wall.