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The Dive

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Once again he passed that same spot on the cliff. It was not a special location but it was a tempting one since he started to cross paths with it. The cliffs were close to his favorite beach. It was a beautiful place, mainly due to its location and the view one could obtain from there. He first came across it accidentally, in one of his many runs to the beach, when he decided to take a different route from the usual one. Tricks from destiny!

Since he discovered that particular place, he took that course every time he went to the beach and each time he stopped contemplating the ocean below. The top of the cliff was an almost perfect carved diving board, shaped in the rock that stood out of the main formation. Around 35 feet below was a perfect notch between two large boulders, which, for the most part of the time, were uncovered. Yet at high tide the ocean waters covered the boulders nearly to the top.

It was perfect for an accurate dive.

"How great it would be to dive in between those boulders!" he thought while sat there, inert, just looking down.

At 24, he had had a very enjoyable life. Single, still living with his parents, had the right amount of money to enjoy his social affairs, his few basic needs, and help his mother with some of the bills. Running was one of his passions, one that he enjoyed from an early age. The other passion was to fly. No, it was not any particular way of flight; it was more the flying sensation of breaking the air and falling.

To feel the air through his body and fall...

He knew it was an impossible dream and the closest he ever came to the dreamt sensation was when he dove.

He felt the sensation for the first time when he was only seven. His uncle had taken him to a beach near his home and had taught him the way on how to dive. Without having ever done it, his first try was a success. His uncle clapped as his head emerged from the cold ocean waters. The only correction his uncle had shown him was on how to position his arms during the entrance; the angle of the water entry needed a slight adjustment to be a perfect dive. The following try, perfection.

The next few years he pushed himself a bit further every time he dove. He increased the distance progressively from the point which he dove, any point in any

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place. His uncle had taught him well, nevertheless. He always inspected the landing area before attempting any dive. Being cautious became part of his life; it earned him a reputation amongst his local friends and the summer friends who returned each year. People often would come to him and ask about the reliability of various locations on the beachfront. He always had the tides in consideration and always rechecked all the locations where he dove before, as a security measure. "One never knows what the tides may have dragged, since the last time I dove," he would say when questioned if he had not already checked that area before. His reputation and opinion was well known and respected amongst the beach goers.

Fifteen feet was the highest he ever dove, in the local University indoor swimming pool. Everything happened on a wild bet with his closest friends. He did not do it frequently: diving on the spur of the moment. He always considered the risks involved before any "crazy" attempt at any frivolous provocation by any of his friends. Yet, when the bet occurred, he was ready to try that height. It was not the same kind of dive as if it was an outside one: the wind sensation was not as pleasant, but it could give him an idea on how it could be if and when he was ready to try it outside. That was like practicing for the real deal. As if he had thought the dive was a piece of cake.

In any case, he was now contemplating approximately 35 feet. It required extra attention, care, preparation and reflection.

Thinking was exactly what he was doing lying face down on top of the cliff. He felt the gentle breeze move his hair and he turned on his back. The sun was high. "It must be around noon," he thought. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the heat of the sun on his face.

It felt good.

He almost drifted off into dreamland. The breeze on his hair and the heat of the sun were such a perfect combination that a smile invaded his face. He almost could feel the flying sensation that occupied his mind for such a long time.

At this thought he turned again on his belly and started again to observe the movement of the waves below. He always had felt a special connection between the gentle movement of the ocean and the comfortable waters' temperature. He would float on his back for endless amounts of time. He could lay on his back, close his eyes and let the waves rock him gently, giving him such a good feeling that he often found the thought of his mother occupying his mind. Who knew why that subconscious sensation triggered such feeling and associated it with his mother? Perhaps it reverted to the times he had spent inside his mothers' womb.

No telling.

That radiant July day it was different than usual. He had been debating his dive for many days now and, deep inside, he thought he was ready. Many times he dreamt about the dive; he perfected the take off, the alignment of his body in the air and the entrance in the waters. It had to be a perfect entrance, with a quick bounce on the sands of the ocean floor with his hands, which would permit him to spring up rapidly. The timing had to be perfect; from the moment he left the top of the cliffs, with the tide coming in, so that enough water was in place to receive his body and give him enough room to turn at the sandy bottom.

He had come to the cliffs that day almost unconsciously, as if attracted there by some strange and powerful forces. Now, while looking down at the waters, he felt as if he was facing his many fears. Not that he was afraid of diving. He had proven himself more than once that he was not afraid. Diving was almost a natural instinct, as if it was a part of his body, a complement of it.

His fears were more related with certain aspects of life.

Many his age had already initiated the next step in life by starting their own families, by marrying and having children.

Commitment.

Perhaps that was the fear that was messing with his mind presently. He had been dating this wonderful girl, his own age, for some time now. The mention of the next step of the affair was brought up several times in conversation. Even his mother had mentioned something about if there were any dates set up and if he had already proposed.

For some reason he had not been able to give a straight answer, either to his mother or to his girlfriend. Nevertheless, now his girlfriend was pressuring him and had given him an ultimatum and he did not know how to deal with it.

One is born innocent, trained by one's parents to distinguish between right and wrong, the many rights and wrongs in life, to learn how to make choices, choices that will affect one's lives, but which determined one's personality. It is a kind like birds; the parents spend all the necessary time preparing the appropriate environment for the babies to be born into. After birth, the parents will continue care by feeding them and teaching them on how to give the first steps. Once the little birds learn how to fly, they are on their own.

That is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of being human: the separation from the safe home environment into the "real" world, where one is required to take and accept responsibilities which, usually, were taken usually by parents, without any or very little repercussions on the children.

And that was the dilemma with which he was being faced now.

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He smiled when he thought of a recent conversation that he had had with his mother; "But mom, I'll get married when the time is right. Both of us are finishing our studies and then we'll think about marriage. Don't worry! You'll get your grandchildren."

At this thought, he felt a cold spell run up and down his spine, causing the hair on the back of his neck to stand up. Children! That has to be a long time from now, perhaps in a near future, when he would become more responsible...

Again his thoughts reverted to the present. There he was thinking about some of his fears, in such an awkward moment, all related with one word: commitment! If he only had the nerve to face it like he could the diving. It should be such an easy step that he could not understand why the idea, or even the simple thought of it, could cause him to have pains in his stomach, butterflies, and cold sweat.

"Enough of those thoughts," he said out loud, as if someone were present, listening. After he realized that he had spoken the words out loud, he looked around to see if anyone was close by and might have accidentally overheard him.

The time had come.

With a sudden move he stood up.

On top of the cliff, he looked at the synchronized movement of the waves, coming and going, indifferently. A scene from Henri Charriere's *Papillon* crossed his mind; in the specific scene, Papillon was studying one more way on how to escape, this time from the Devil Islands, where he was incarcerated. By studying the movement of the waves and counting the right number in which the biggest of them would appear, the one he would jump into from a great distance, he intended to throw a man-made raft which would be his life support.

In part he felt connect with this scene, since he looked at the dive as his own escape—not only from his worries but also from the world. Apart from the desire to make that dive, his other ambition was to build a stable life, with a wife and children in the picture—"two or three," he always said, in a not so near future.

Slowly he lowered himself to the ground and sat. Mechanically, he removed his shoes; one at a time, without ever taking his eyes away from the movement of the waves.

A faint smile was everpresent on his face while his look was set on the constant and serene movement of the waters below.

It seemed so peaceful.

With a brusque movement he got to his feet and removed his shirt. With an automatic movement he stretched his body toward the sky above and noticed that the sun was straight above him. "It must be around twelve," he thought, unconsciously. "What a great time to dive."

He sat his eyes further into the ocean. There, he noticed the slow rolling of the waves, in a constant and symmetric movement, that made him wonder how it was produced, even though he knew it was caused, or affected, by the terrestrial gravitational forces toward the moon.

He felt his heart rhythm accelerate. Was it nervousness? It could not be. He would not be doing the dive if he were not ready and prepared. And he was. It had to be from excitement, then. Yeah, that was exactly it.

He looked down always focusing on the coming and going of the waves.

He had chosen the perfect time. The tide was high and the waters were covering both boulders when the waves moved in.

He zoomed in on the small space where he was supposed to enter the water.

His body tensed up in preparation.

His legs took a slight bend at the knees and all of his body's energy switched and concentrated in its lower half.

When he thought it was the right moment, he leaped up and forward.

"What a great feeling," he noted while in the air, sensing the slight breeze, caused by his descent, passing through his naked body and his hair.

The waters were approaching rapidly and, instinctively, he positioned his hands to help him spring back quickly from the bottom up.

Somehow, the images of his mother appeared, out of nowhere, in his mind. He could see her face clearly, telling him that he should not be doing that.

Mothers!

He smiled and hit the water.

A tunnel of darkness appeared in front of his eyes.

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Looking back at that moment, he tried to produce a smile, but the irony was that he could not make one, and he did not know why. He looked at the reflection of his face through the corner of his eye and liked what he saw; the grays predominated and that was a symptom of accomplishment. Gray meant he successfully passed through life, that things went well and that he made it far and was now enjoying his retirement and his peace. He thought about the place where he lived, a place that he always dreamt of, idealized, surrounded by water, one which could not be reached easily by others, giving him the opportunity to pleasurefully enjoy his quiet moments.

He always loved the water and the place seemed perfect.

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From where he was he could hear the gentle sway of the waves and the strong ocean scent penetrated deeply inside him. He could have sworn that he could feel the pleasant and constant monotonous movement of the ocean surrounding him. It made him feel so good that a distant memory of his mother got back in the back of his mind and now a placid smile invaded the corners of his mouth.

He tried to look up and felt wetness on the back of his head. The humidity was high, eventually, and the sweat (was it perspiration that he felt?) seemed to take over the base of the back of his head. Yet, he could feel the heat on top of his skull and he knew the sun was still out...

From the corner of his eye he saw the shape of the moon rising. For an instant he saw the reflection of it bouncing off the swaying waves and the silvery dance gave him a feeling of calmness. "I must have gone to sleep," he thought. "Nightfall is near and apparently I let a beautiful day go to waste," he continues to think. "Yet, I vaguely remember a dream, or I think it was a dream, that really made feel well." And, staring at the silvery waters, quickly turning dark he went on thinking about the dream that he thought he had.

Dark was now solid. It was so intense that he could no longer spot the reflection of the moon on the waves. "Funny thing, darkness," he thought. "I cannot see the moon and it seems that I can no longer hear the waves. It is as if I don't see them, then I cannot hear them; how stupid is it that I still have the sensation that I'm being rocked by them." He thought about getting up to go to bed. "It must be late," he said out loud startling himself by the funny way it sounded. He repeated it louder and wondered why it sounded the way it did, as if he was in a soundproof room, which did not allow the sound to travel anywhere, dying right there where he was.

At the attempt to get up, so he could walk himself into the house, so he could lay in bed and rest, he had a strange sensation that he could not feel his legs. He thought that perhaps he stayed too long seated and, somehow, cut the circulation just like when he sits for a long period of time in the commode reading a magazine or the newspaper while doing what one has to do in that particular spot.

He waited a little longer and, suddenly, he felt really tired. He shivered and thought that it really had gotten really cold. He had not noticed it before, but now in the dark, and with the stars and the moon above him, he felt a breeze in his face and had the sensation that his face was wet. He was really tired, felt his eyes trying to close on him and said, "I think I'm going to sleep here, outside." He attempted to adjust his coat but somehow, just like with his legs, he seemed not to have control of his arms...

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Dawn revealed the lifeless body facing up, gently being carried by the waves.