

waking up on the wrong side of the border
Curt Eriksen

I don't remember flying like a crow, or anything like that, not even standing up and stumbling out of the bar but yes, waking to an eerie stillness which might have resembled that of death, although I'm not likely to ever know, or at least that's what I believe, that there will be one moment in my life into which all the others will pour, converging while simultaneously freeing themselves from their interdependence of meaning, the subtle shading, for example, of all color derived from the one spectrum of light, everything the eye requires and seeks compressed into that final luminous point somewhere just in front of me, something that I will smell, feel, hear, taste and also see, witness and experience, just once, only once, and never again, a vision of pure sense, unadulterated *aisthetikos*, something I cannot even imagine or really believe in and accept as possible that will happen nonetheless and when it does, will surprise me with its sudden and irrefutable violence, or perhaps it will be some slow leaking of strength against which there is no recourse, a dizzy draining of pulse and with it memory, all memory flaring before fading like fireworks dispersing and blinking out, the loss of which, the last trailing spark that leads nowhere can be, might be, considered bliss, a reward, release, from the bondage of the pain associated with the guilt of having lived or, as on that next morning when I opened my eyes to a bright midday light filling a screen door and a window curtained with a pale yellow sheet I had never seen before, pure heart-gripping awareness, the sudden and chilling knowledge that one has been, but has not been aware of being, leading instantly to the whole set of unanswerable questions that included wondering what I had done, *where* I had been, what had happened and with whom, and finally, how it could be so, questions incited that morning by the undeniable nakedness of my body, the floundering attitude of my spent penis and the disarray of my clothes on the floor beside the narrow bed.

I sat up as quickly as I could, which wasn't very quickly at all, and swung my legs over the edge of the iron bedstead, but I had to hold on because sitting upright it was as if the residue of all that drink shifted about with every slightest move I made, like unsecured ballast, or bilge water, complicating such simple maneuvers as I felt myself barely capable of achieving, the bending over, for example, to slowly and deliberately collect my shoes, socks, underwear and finally my jeans which, once gathered in my lap, remained there, useless and mockingly inanimate, until I could manage to fumble one garment after another onto my limbs, resting often in between, trying to catch my breath, calm the upsurge, swallow and recall, while staring at the door, then at the floor, then at the door again, with its torn and patched and torn again screen that seemed to be a clue, if only I could figure it out, an entryway perhaps, or an exit, a signal transmitting a command, maybe nothing more than the desire of the sound of that door slapping shut behind me again, a force that drew me to my feet and a few steps forward where I stood and glanced dully around the room, noticing how small, nondescript and shabby it was, until I saw my shirt lying inside out at the foot of the bed and realized that that was what I had been looking for.

Whether or not the door was anything but a door, stepping through it and into the needling glare of such excessive sunlight changed everything, seemed to wipe out everything, as if nothing but light, only too much light, existed, by which nothing at all could be seen, there being no contrasts, no feature by which anything could be distinguished, so that I stumbled along through a formless world squinting through my fingers like a man whose eyes have been plucked out of his head and, in fact, the throbbing behind the sockets was enough to blind me, make me cry and howl or at least curse myself and regret, if not every drink, at least the last six or seven, those wicked shots of mescal, for example, that I couldn't keep count of and the mere thought of which set in motion a swell of nausea against which I bowed my legs and leaned forward, just like a sailor bracing himself for the anticipated thrust of a gale, which broke at last with a long and complicated belch that succeeded in turning the tide somewhere in my throat and sending back down into the unsettled depths of my gorge that which I hoped would remain there.

I dragged myself along like this, my hands over my eyes, forced to stop abruptly every few paces and bend over and grip my knees, sweating intensely, then burping, spitting and inhaling a mouthful of warm thin saliva while raising my head and jerking forward again in a supreme trial of will, mind struggling against stubborn determinate matter, a feat that demanded of me everything I was capable of, all the strength and reserve and power of concentration I could muster, but which seen from without must have appeared both pitiful and ridiculous, because before long I began to hear the shouts, the catcalls and bold laughter, and although I could see now through the haze of heat sweltering before my eyes the vaguest of forms, the stumps of desiccated trees and the ruins of houses, I could not discover the source of the abuse, until the rocks started landing at my feet and whirring past my head and striking my shoulder, at which new source of pain I turned abruptly and screamed, the impulse coming directly from that most visceral part of my soul, a maddened lion's terrible roar which had I not been a part of the sound might have frightened me as well as flushing the little monsters out of their makeshift blinds behind the stumps and the crumbling walls of the ruins where they stood indecisively, until I bellowed again, forcing them into an uproarious and panicked flight.

Standing there watching the eddies of dust settle behind the urchins as they disappeared further down the road, whooping and hollering insults over their shoulders, the dense obfuscation inside my head started to clear, just a little, and although I still felt at least as dead as I was alive I knew that I had made it, that I had survived in order to suffer again, and I noticed that some of the limbs of the trees were still green and that some of the houses, although apparently wrecked, were inhabited, which might or might not have meant that they were indeed inhabitable, but most assuring of all I saw ahead of me now the glint of sunlight striking water and, walking unsteadily in that direction, I saw as I approached that the water was a wide but shallow and muddy creek coursing sluggishly through a pair of steep concrete embankments splattered with graffiti, a river that I assumed must be the Rio Grande.

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