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passage two

By Josh Smith

Hundreds of hazy angles flood your mind in a flash, overcoming your balance. The ground finally releases its grip on your feet, and though only a second passes in the fall, you feel as if you were dropped from the most distant corner of the sky. Your newly dissipated form lifts you against your will and begins to move you towards the city. Your multiple diffused viewpoints attach themselves to grains of sand in increments and eventually become a barely decipherable map that leads your rough shape through the bustle of natives.

Your faceless half has full control over the rest of your body. You are unable to read its thoughts, unable to predict where on this unstable chart it leads you. All that remain are five senses, useless due to the flood of information being pumped through you from the citizens of this nation. You feel your mind being tugged in one thousand directions at once, but your inhabited body pulls harder toward its own undisclosed destination. As it drags your feet slowly through rough sand, your stomach shudders with motion sickness. It is finally revealed by hundreds of eyes, from multiple positions, multiple heights. This is where you are being taken. You are sure of it. A building that towers above the rest, but is by no means in better condition. They surround it; these faceless. Vultures circling the one carcass large enough to sustain them all in the middle of this desolate wasteland. You notice that their pacing slows relative to your proximity, and by the time you arrive, they have completely frozen, leaving a small space through which you are to pass.

Upon entering the building, the stench of this rotting kingdom intensifies. You try to recoil, you try to return to open air, but your instincts fail to pass beyond the border of what was once your brain. The inside is dark – despite the high sun alone in the sky – lit only through thin, broken panels of driftwood walls. You move along these dirt floors, led down these winding, narrow halls which seem to run in a jagged spiral around the building, from the outer walls to the center.

A group of six faceless sit in a circle in the center of what appears to be the only room in the building. Their thoughts creep into your mind, tuning out the rest of the populous with their amplified signal. These incoming ideas feel strange, as if spoken in some visual code that you can not quite crack. You are carried closer to the six, who stand as you pass into their ring. When you reach dead center, you are stopped. The six that surround you slowly approach, each lifting an arm towards the head that has replaced your own. One after another, their hands rest atop this head, atop one another. The sensation that ensues is one of an intense pull from above, from six sides, tearing pieces of you from yourself, and from your faceless parasite. Breathless. Unable to respond. Removed. Divided among seven faceless strangers.

Your life.

Your insides. Your outsides.

Your physical. Your mental.

Your past. Your future.

Your regrets. Your expectations.

Your failures. Your successes.

Your death.

You face forward seven times and are carried in seven directions toward a single task. Your fourteen hidden eyes witness the bodies gathering along the shoreline, around the deteriorating tower, near the crumbled shacks that these people called homes, and on a stretch of level soil between the spire and the water. The rest seem to scatter among stones and shrubbery. This motion is too severe; your remaining awareness slips away into the grasp of captors.

The seven of you move through the city, working without delay – or your consent. Your hands lift thirsty plants from plates of earth, they pry splintering wood from the walls of the central tower, from rooftops of huts as your body bends to lift sun bleached logs from the sand while you wade out into blue to greet another as it drifts ashore where your back burns from the weight of stone slabs carried in from forgotten foundations and piled where you stoop to clear the square located in the shade of the tower that you dismantle with little effort as you fuse soil with vegetation and stack each recovered fragment of wood near the substructure you and you construct, and assemble a procession of bricks stretching from the sea to the central square where timber and mortar become rooftops soon to extend across walls of new brick that you, you, you, you, you, you, you and your entire city of faceless workers manufacture until just after dusk and in this twilight exhaustion sets in, but your seven bodies spare you no rest as they all stack these bricks into new walls and then attach the wide rooftop panels that mark completion of this cathedral.

While the faceless masses mill about its walls, the many who are you proceed inside for a long and well deserved night of rest.

In the morning, you arise with a dry mouth, but wholly refreshed and invigorated to find yourself alone in your own body. Exiting the shelter built of your sweat, your bare feet leave a trail in warm sand, marking strides toward the comforting sea. A wall of cloaked residents lines the beach at your back as waves slide along your legs. There is no need to look. You feel their presence as if you stand with them staring out at this voyager who came into their home – somewhat familiar, certainly foreign – to unknowingly return it to them.

The ocean breeze becomes a gust becomes a gale that brings clouds from the horizon. The water begins to splash before you. Drawing closer, the raindrops find your face. Looking down, through a spattered distortion, the current halts, then ebbs against its flow in the contour of a human body stretched out from your feet to mock your shadow. His arm moves from his side, then waves goodbye. Tilt your head to the clouds, squint through their mist as it tingles too softly on your skin – so softly you question its existence. With both eyes and mouth agape, you witness a million drops come slowly down, then halt. Reach out to touch a defiant bead, but it evades grasp with a quick upward shift. You lift your arms to the suspended rain and are in turn lifted from the liquid.

Lightning strikes applaud cyclone symphonies; the hairs on your neck rise in ovation – or fear. Quickly realize it is both as your galvanized body speeds upward, then freezes before two colossal eyes.