



*Suspension*

The days grew stifling as the sun teased the horizon for just a moment longer each sunset. People rejoiced about the fruitful offerings of a town drenched in summer and took solace in the idea of having something to look forward to—banal fireworks, blurred nights heavy on the indulgence and light on the consequence, and, largely, the shared idealistic vision of life free from the omnipresent feelings of uncertainty.

Mirroring the weather, the news had become feverish and severe. The monotonous slur of words delivered by men with coiffed hair on the television transformed into something more urgent. News briefs hit hard like the bombs they reported. By the middle of that summer, I stopped watching the news as I could no longer bear to see plastered images of a world removed from the bubble in which we lived. Thousands of miles of sea and land separated my television set, couch and stability from the pain of people we could not see.

That night, the stiff people on the news were scared—the men in ill-fitting suits in Washington were scared. Nevertheless, the moon persisted and stars poked through the tense and enigmatic sky. I slept with the windows open (it never cooled down much this time of summer), only to hear the sound of the unraveling of the human condition. My neighbor's sobs saturated the suffocative silence. The man across the street paced, illuminated orange by the motion detector light. As I lay there, I became aware of the rhythmic and cyclical rattling of the ceiling fan above, of the feeling of my body's weight imprinting into the mattress, and of the vaguely distinguishable shapes of the furniture in the room around me. The darkness was good at hiding trivialities.

I awoke at 5am (or, I should rather say, decided I could no longer bear the suspended state of lucid light sleep I had been falling in and out of) to see that we would throw ourselves into yet another ritualistic day. I wanted nothing to do with the news. Before the sun had fully risen and the land was cast over with heat, I hastily left the confinement of the house. I was directionless—all I knew for certain was the urgency in my leaving. With no cars on the pavement and none in sight, I walked down the center of the road. Was this supposed to feel liberating? I was unsure. I had become unfeeling; this I was sure of. I was unsure of so much so often that the unknown had become a normality. I thrived in the gray areas of life—and here I was, walking down the center divider of the road I had driven countless times, but never too fast. Never too slow. I was always adhering to a

flawed moral compass forged from an unclear vision of who I was, or who I had become.

I stood beneath the redwoods, hidden from the unforgiving and piercing late morning sun. Dust particles in the air revealed rays of light able to seep through the trees' canopy. Needles and leaves crunched underfoot; the open forest floor allowed for my wandering. I soon lost track of both where I had come from or where I was headed. A bird suddenly called out, breaking up the otherwise stagnant atmosphere. I yearned to reach out to it, to understand its soft queries. Instead it flew off with a succinct movement of its wings, alarmed at my presence.

I arrived upon a stream, accentuated by a slight cascade. Here the air was less sweltering and moved more freely. The earth was cold against my legs as I sat down beside the water. I quietly observed the stream, which I discovered after further inspection was brimming with activity. My throat constricted as I swallowed, my thirst demanding attention. The clear water, although within arm's reach, was undrinkable, yet another temptation of what could never be.

Minnnows traversed lackadaisically as skeeters jumped about above them, causing delicate ripples in the glassy surface. I closed my eyes and let my mind be nowhere else but in this moment. The exhaustion which had been building inside of me had become overwhelming as I struggled to open my eyes again. I looked up once more, my neck craning to take in the magnitude of the trees around me, extending upwards like spears puncturing the tranquility of the blue sky. I laid my head on the ground and let my arms fall to my sides. My eyes slipped closed as the fatigue of my body and the world around it pinnacled, almost, into sweet finality.