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Edge of Somewhere



Kris Farmen

*For Joseph Sullivan,
who made me get back in the water.*

1

It was midmorning and already hot when the shark grabbed Charlie Deacon. This happened in Western Australia at a distant surf break called Mallees where he'd been camped out and surfing for nearly a week. The surrounding country was all sandy semi-arid scrubland, but there was a nice place to camp at the base of the headland among a pile of rounded boulders. Charlie spent the whole time wondering if the run of straight offshore wind would ever come to an end, this being the preferred wind for surfing as it pushes against the wave faces and sculpts them into rideable perfection. The offshores blew every morning and past noon until the heat of the day combined with the cool of the ocean to raise the afternoon sea breeze, then just before sundown the wind would die completely and the ocean would glass off to a mirror finish as the waves continued to roll in from faraway lands that Charlie may not have seen.

During this week he was treated to that rare dream of all surfers the world over: Days of endless sunshine and perfect waves with not another soul around. He

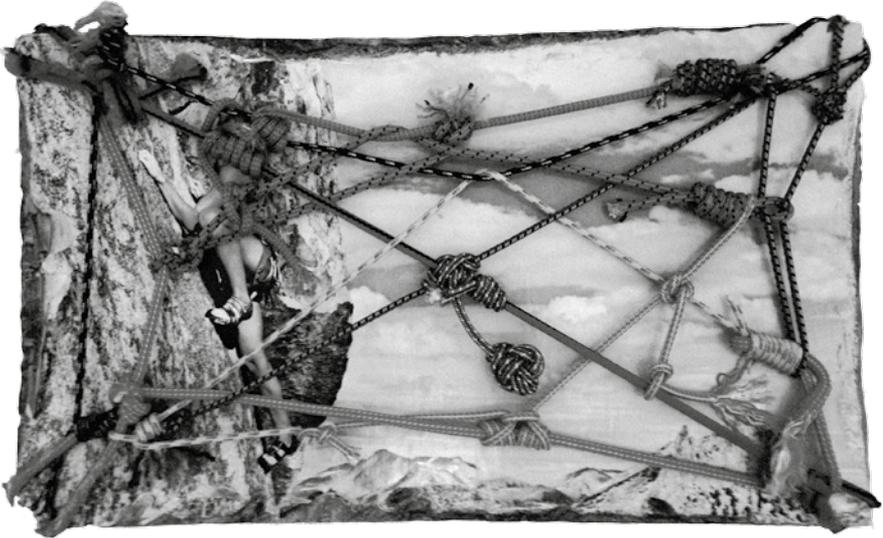
would surf several hours in the morning, then lounge in the shade during the heat of the afternoon. When the evening glass-off came he would head back out for the evening session and surf until the stars appeared at the eastern edge of the sky.

His only company had been the occasional kangaroo and a flock of emus that strutted past his camp a couple times each day. Their tracks measured a good six inches across like those of mutant turkeys, and they looked to Charlie's eye like something straight out of pre-history. He often watched them from out in the lineup as they moved around feeding, wondering where they found water and fantasizing about cooking a couple of their enormous drumsticks in a pit oven filled with fire-hot stones.

When the attack happened he'd been out for only a half-hour or so, having slept late after staying up into the wee hours to smoke a joint and study the canopy of unfamiliar stars. He duckdove under a wave, punched out the other side, and holy shit, there was a fin knifing through the water not twenty feet away.

Surfers tend to have a morbid fascination with sharks; their life's calling is one of the few activities in the modern world that includes the very real possibility of being eaten alive. A surfer is vulnerable to shark attack, and every year a half-dozen of them around the world get hit. There's really nothing to be done about it except push the thought to the back of your mind. But it never really goes away, and when you suddenly see that fin it jumps right up to the front of your cognition. This reaction might be called, in more plain terms, raw terror. Ninety-nine percent of the time the fin turns out to be a dolphin, but on this particular morning Charlie drew the unlucky one percent.

Weathered In



Martha Amore

For John, Kate, Lily, June and all of my family and friends, much love and gratitude.

Breakup

I wanted to have the flu. All of the clues told me otherwise, but I believed what I needed to believe. If I had the flu, I would soon be done with it and be able to join Karl and the rest of our group on the Denali climb. We'd been in Talkeetna for the better part of a week, sleeping in the back of our aging red Toyota, named Yo because most of the letters on the tailgate had weathered away leaving only the friendly salutation between the brake lights. Yo was already an old lady when we bought her in Bozeman, but we managed to keep her running through all the years and mountain states by treating her like our beloved, though quirky, grandmother. Every time we had to get her up to speed or altitude, Karl would open her hood and talk gently right into her engine. I loved listening to him cajole the old truck into good behavior. "You've been with Rachel and me a long time, baby," he would say. "Through thick and thin, ice and rain, and I

don't care about the big number on the odometer, you can still turn headlights."

My father worried about our lifestyle, of course. We had just wrapped up two years in various towns in Colorado, couch surfing or living in our truck while Karl earned a graduate degree in engineering. I supported us on my meager coffee shop wages and a side business of combing thrift stores for good quality gear and clothing, then reselling. Now we were in our tumbleweed phase, which was really not so different from our grad school phase. Karl charmed and begged his way through the program, cutting class so we could spend more time on the road and in the mountains. I had a small inheritance from my mother who had died two years before, but we barely touched the money because we knew how to live cheap: oatmeal for breakfast, peanut butter for lunch, rice and beans for dinner. Our biggest expense was coffee, beer and weed because we only bought the highest quality of each.

My dad thought I should be building a career of my own. He struggled with getting me into college, and he simply couldn't fathom why I wasn't using my degree. "Rachel," he was always saying, "climbing is a leisure time activity. A hobby. You can't center your whole life around it."

That, however, was exactly what Karl and I were doing. We lived simply and in the moment, and though my dad couldn't accept this, I thought my mother would have been happy for me. "Live your entire life while you're young," she used to say.

We drove to Alaska in April, taking our time to do some climbs in Oregon and Washington. I wasn't prepared for spring in the far north. There was still snow

Sundowning



BuFFy McKay

Dedicated to my siblings, Samson, and Smudgie.



One of my favorite things about Anchorage, and Alaska at large, is sunset. When the sky is clear and the light starts to dissipate to color, all the blues fade to green, to plum, to midnight. Raging colors – or subtly slanting blues and greys – it’s all great to me. I love that sunset in-between time, the limbo between day and dark, awake and asleep. Sunset and sunrise, blurring the edges of a wilderness city to a time when I can think.

Sunset is also a time of uncertainty, of potential. Getting ready to go out on a Friday or Saturday night, sun sinking low over Cook Inlet, I used to enjoy taking my time in the shower, doing my makeup, picking out what to wear even if it was jeans and boots – which it was, most of the time. It was Alaska, after all. I loved the anticipation of putting on a fresh outfit, the feel of the material sliding over my arms, the touch of fabric so like another skin. Adding that extra layer of clothing always

made me think about its removal, all the wonderful ways it could happen that night. Sunset for me is a time of possibility and a time of in-between: it's a dream time, a limbo of hope, suspended breath.

When I was a kid growing up in Rhode Island, I'd spend summer days outside playing with my sister Chloe, before she decided she didn't like blowing on dandelions to make wishes anymore. Or going in the woods. Or mosquitos. Or being barefoot, because the pavement and crabgrass hurt her feet. Or the other neighborhood kids – we weren't really friends, like sleepover-friends, but rather the group of kids you went to school with and hung out with afterward. My pals and I went to the pond in the woods behind our block, most of the time. Sometimes Chloe, trying to make us think she had nothing better to do, offered to come along, especially in summer when the older boys would be swimming and catapulting off the rope swing toward the falls.

"You can wear my turquoise bathing suit, if you want." Chloe opened her dresser and showed me the suit that would make me die if I put it on and wore it outside the bedroom door. I was twelve, the first girl in school with glasses, height, and now – suddenly, stomach-churningly – boobs. I wanted comfortable. I wanted incognito, and tough. Boobs don't provide well for incognito.

"It's okay," I said. I lifted the hem of my old white Hanes t-shirt to show her the black one-piece tank suit I'd had for two years already. It was stretchy to the point of comfortable, especially after a couple years of the pond and Narragansett Bay.

"You can't wear that." Chloe handed me the bright spandex suit. "This is new. Yours is about to fall off. And you know," she added in Big-Sister Voice, "you don't want that happening when you jump in."