

VIEW
FROM THE
EDGE

MICHAEL KASENOW

ONE

“Christ—Christ, oh Christ.” He stared at the winged shadows on the dark ceiling. His arms and legs flat on the damp bed. The air was thick and oppressive. Crickets and frogs stuttered and droned from unseen choirs. Fireflies beamed on the large screens; their tiny beacons pulsating with slow, yellow flashes. Blood that had pulsed and surged through his heart—began to flow smoothly; his breathing consistent and easy. Then came that deep breath, the breath that allowed his senses to gain equilibrium. *This is how Lazarus must have felt*, he smiled to himself. A smile soft and cynical. Joshua looked over to where Ashley was supposed to be sleeping, but again that part of the bed was chilly and empty. He rolled his naked body into the chill; laid his head on her cool pillow. A lazy breeze moved through the screens. Moonlight filtered and permeated. Outside an animal ran through the woods, cracking fallen timber, breaking the silence, commanding the eyes to look and seek out the unseen. His dreams were still vivid and frequent and horrid. They had begun in May, it was early September, two months after his psychotic breakdown—two months after the glass shattered, the ghosts invaded, the howls of fear and desperation wisped from graves he had buried long ago. Today he would return to the University, from the sanctuary of his bed, freed from the hospital; the nurses and doctors; sedated and healing. Minutes crawled by...the air dense. The round, red, face drifted through his

mind, through his thoughts; round, red and rugged. He closed his eyes and saw the scruffy features, hard whiskers, the mean anger. And then another deep breath; then another. He was relieved to be a fifty-year-old man and not a nine-year-old boy. An owl hooted in the distance. He pushed himself up, slowly, sitting on the edge of his bed, wiggling his toes, looking down at his feet, his neck and face moist. *Lazarus in his shroud, cursing the living*, and he smirked. The country air smelled humid and flickered with life. Up from the bed he walked, his legs tired and sore...to the bathroom he willed himself, in a slow drag, leaving behind the smoldering ashes of his childhood. The leaves of hundred-year-old trees danced in moonlight as a breeze cooled the heat. Cold water rushed from the faucet. He took another deep breath. The summer was typical for the Midwest—hot and humid. The water cooled his face. The mirror showed a thin man in need of a few pounds—and a receding hairline. *Lazarus rise, come out—unbind him and let him go*. Joshua almost laughed. His face a gaunt reflection with sad eyes. He was often told he had sad eyes. “Christ,” he thought, “I’ve had better years.”

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The drive to Hadrian University was too long, way too long. The interstate cuts through hills of rolling country, but it takes two hours to arrive. He did this because Ashley refused to move. The lake house was her pride, a trophy that friends and family admired. They owned three thousand square feet in an old brick home built in the 1950s. This included five-hundred feet of sandy lake front with twenty acres of hardwood trees. An open field held the joy of wild flowers. *A beautiful place to raise a child*, Joshua admitted, but still a hell-u-va drive.

“I’ll never sell this,” Ashley once told him. “This is a great place to raise Blake. My friends love it. This is what we’ve worked for! This is what everyone works for!”

Joshua enjoyed his waking habit of three cups of coffee and a shower. This was his favorite time of day; the very early morning. He sat in the big, brown chair in the large living room. Through the wall of windows his sleepy eyes watched moon light pour over the glassy lake. A loon murmured with complaint. A bull frog mourned for a mate while green frogs plucked and harmonized. He was thinking about the day ahead, the wasteful challenges, the monotony. The silence was comfortable, the quiet; his solitude; this jewel of loneliness. He might hear an owl or see deer rush through moonlight, or watch a mouse scurry across rugs on the old wood floor.

Joshua Feenics was the Department Head of Anthropology and Archaeology (AA) at Hadrian U. In this good hour no one would complain, not Ashley, not faculty. There were no grievances to contemplate; no schedules to revise; no whining about chalk boards not being erased; or the copier not working; or the cooling system not being cool enough. This was an hour of peace for Joshua, a block of time to meditate about the day's business, to reconstruct his marriage, and balance the crazy thoughts flying like shrapnel in his head.

He checked in on his son and wife before he left. Ashley slept with their eight-year-old boy, even though their marriage counselor had scolded her against doing so.

"To remove yourself from your husband's bed is hurtful and humiliating. How often have you two talked about this?" the counselor asked Ashley.

Joshua answered before Ashley could mutter an alibi. "I've yelled, I've pleaded, I've cried! I've done everything but burn down the house. This has been going on for eight years! For eight years she's slept with Blake!"

Geraldine kept her focus on Ashley. "He's angry, what do you expect? You've done everything possible to push this

man away. This is humiliation and humiliation is abuse. And your son—Blake? Ashley, a mother does not sleep with a boy his age; three is the limit—tops, the very limit. You are doing damage to both your son and your marriage. You need to stop this. The emotional needs of a woman do not come from the arms of an eight-year-old boy.”

Ashley nodded yes.

Blake was beautiful. His light brown hair straight and shiny like summer wheat, unlike the curls that once blessed his father. He was a tall boy, a string bean of energy, always dusty and dirty from playing in dirt and water. A dark tan glazed his skin. Joshua remembers the twenty-two turtles they caught in that July afternoon—painted, mud, and small snappers. He smiled. Blake yelped each time their net snared one. Proudly he showed the neighbors. Joshua smiled, muddier and dirtier than his son. Then came the turtle races. Blake always picked the biggest out of the bucket and always let his go first, so he'd win. Joshua would push him in the water and they would wrestle and splash and laugh. They played tenacious volley ball on the sandy court that Joshua built near the shore. Blake was spotted 12 points. Here and there, Joshua would take a match and Blake would yell out in high pitched pretend anger. Joshua would chase and wrestle him down, picking his son up in his firm arms, legs and arms wiggling in his grip. He'd throw Blake into the lake and they'd splash until they ran out of laughter.

Joshua loved Blake more than anything he had ever loved, but he knew Ashley's problem, whatever it was, needed to be dealt with. Yet— he could no longer talk to his wife about her obsessive needs, or about any demons haunting their marriage. Conversations raised clouds and these clouds converged into storms. Ashley had her list of complaints. The list married people accumulate like boxes of old, useless stuff. *There's always a list. Lucky me,* he

thought. Her voice well tuned. Her image a fine painting. *Everyone sees what I don't see.* His mind frowned thinking about the charge cards he had paid off in the past three years—and before that. *I work too much, no kidding.*

Joshua gave Blake a kiss on the cheek and tucked the cool sheet around his son's lanky brown glaze. Ashley muttered something in her sleep that Joshua could not understand. He was good at ignoring her now, picking and choosing the fights worth fighting.

He went down the stairs and out the door, moving into the dark of the dawn. This is how his trek to Hadrian began in each day in each year—his Jeep disappearing into the night's last breath. For years he had noticed nothing. Headlights leading the way, cutting through the inky mist. The habit concealing his sight.

That was before his crash.

On this morning, the orange glow of the moon caught his eye and so did stars flashing and falling through September's shower. The dark secret was filled with nocturnal sounds and mysterious shadows. Crickets and the buzz of wings unseen. Hoots and howls and the rut of a buck. The dark lake shining like a mystical mirror. Frogs groaning. Tall trees stood guard and a distant splash shook the water. The luminous eyes of raccoons stared from these trees, and possums skulked across country roads.