



SILVER POINT

Oz

started out relatively easy. Steven carefully but quickly chose his footing. Then the going began to get rough. We encountered some loose materials: pebbles, gravel, sand, etc. . . . which began slipping. My heart jammed into my throat for a fraction of a time before we regained, both of us being somewhat disconcerted, our footing and composure. Steven muttered something about it being close that time; to which I fervently, though silently, concurred. My life did not flash before my eyes, but my imagination worked overtime; my mind perceived my skull smashed and gushing great rivulets of crimson over the boulders down below. Just to add to this life and death thrill, Steven showed me a rare and slight bit of machismo by attempting to tackle the steep side of the rock, but, bless his heart, common sense came to his rescue. He backed down and we walked along a sloping ledge about the width of a hair instead.

My friend then told me to hang on tight and dropped to his hands. With all of my weight on his back, he scrambled on all fours to a more level spot before standing erect and striding along the thin top: we could have fallen off either side, east or west. I was reminded of a tightrope. First we gazed at the ocean clear to the horizon. Then, turning toward the south, we scanned the coastline as far as the cloudy day would permit. Actually, I guess (though I am not sure) that we were looking in a southeasterly direction.

Without turning we were suddenly looking at houses above the beach. A flash of green caught my eye peripherally. I focused in on a couple of shutterbugs aiming their lenses at us. Stricken by the moment, I waved at a green shirted figure from Steven's shoulders. Shortly, Steven sat down on a wide spot and dislodged me.

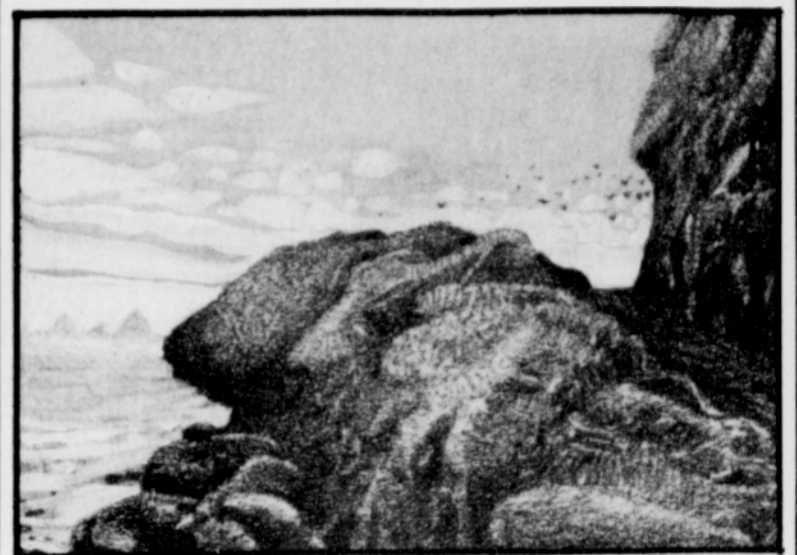
As we sat on the rock reaping in the sights, my mind meandered like lightning. I had a problem grasping a single thought and following it through in any kind of logical or symbolic sequence or thread with which to weave a matrix of profundity. Observing my unoccupied wheelchair (unoccupied except for the groceries, thin linguine noodles protruding from the top of the sack) from above and afar, I wished that I had remembered to bring my camera, for that scene would have presented a magnificent still life (color or black and white). My thoughts shifted, almost with a panoramic sweep of spontaneity, to my wife JoAnn, who is a budding photographer.

I felt that she would have been aghast had she witnessed this risky climbing adventure, but I felt also that she would understand the unspoken impulse which leads me to follow paths of danger. Remembering that, shortly after we met in 1974, her back had packed me over a rocky terrain in the eastern foothills of

the Rocky Mountains, I realized that, perhaps, JoAnn would not be so aghast after all. I knew that my deceased father would applaud it, without understanding why anyone would be crazy enough to carry me just for the joy of having a friend along on an adventure. He had raised me to be strong enough to accept the fact that many people would not include me in their exploits; he was right. But he did not take into account the rare individual, of Steven's calibre, who loves comradeship with people who trust him and his capabilities and who share his desire for adventure.

Adventurous I may be, but in good shape I am not. My buttocks were not responding favorably to the rough surface of Spastic Rock. Besides, your/my favorite spastic was slipping, albeit slowly, dangerously close to the very edge of the chasm to the great void beyond. One very interesting, revealing, and insightful reflection occurred when I found myself being drawn into the void. Ready to leap to the existence beyond life, ready to have the tides wash my battered bones and decayed flesh to the recesses of the ocean bottom, the mysteries of the deep where (I suspected at that moment) the secrets of birth and death merge into one. Despair it was not; It was simply a primordial desire to join my ancestors. Perhaps it was a magnet beckoning to the core of the planet, maybe an intangible relationship between the saline content in my bloodstream and the salt in the ocean, an evolutionary call back to the genesis of life on earth. At any rate, the urge to commingle with the watery depths was just as real at that moment as it always is whenever I perch on a precipice far above the ocean. The very thought of such a deathwish made my spine quiver. I hastily informed Steven about my slipping. He twisted his torso without standing or moving the lower half of his body, placed one hand beneath my legs and the other behind my back and lifted me, as one would lift a baby, and gently placed me on a more secure part of the rock.

When involved in a life and death situation, the subject of death is not morbid or macabre. It is fascinating. Objects and artifacts are well appreciated. My senses continued to be extraordinarily in tune with the natural processes of life and death. Colors were brightened, delineation of physical characteristics, paradoxically, took on more than usual clarity while at the same time they blended into the natural jumble. The overall picture was both clear and difficult to discern between that which was background and that which was foreground. Interestingly, the life and death issue can be viewed in similar light. Is life part of the death cycle? What is apparent is that neither life or death can exist without the other. Immortality as a goal is not only futile (because it is beyond the realm of existence), it is also undesirable; (because eternal life would be pointless and one might say that life without death would not be life in the same manner as light could not be light without dark). Whether or not this discussion of death might at least be considered as academic, or, worse, as morbid and disgusting, nonetheless I relished such thoughts. Only a year had passed since I lay in a hospital bed facing death apathetically (and I might add, pathetically). At least falling off a rock would probably kill me instantly, a death infinitely more stylish to my romantic nature than slowly decaying, a prolonged sickly dying. Mind you, I would fight death all the way, for as an old adage sharply reminds: "When you're dead, it's for keeps!" Since I perceive death as absolute nothingness, I intend to experience life to its fullest, to explore existence while I can. As I grow older and closer to death my fear of it



HUG POINT

Oz

is not quite so overwhelming as it once was. More frightening is the fear of fear. As for death itself, I am convinced that it is the biological catalyst which spurs life into action, especially human life. Conception is the initial creative force; death is the sustaining creative force.

Although I do not recommend it to everyone, living on the edge of the chasm of death tends to sharpen senses as well as wits, I do not speak of the senseless slaughter in war. Every nerve in my quivering being spurs that type of death. I am speaking about braving or enduring the elements of nature which are unpredictable. My vagueness here might be wondered about; however, these were some thoughts that coursed through my cerebral system while I balanced on the edge of that particular precipice.

Then Steven and I telepathically agreed that it was time to descend from our perch. He from restlessness, I from physical discomfort. My friend stood up, then stood me up and grasped me around the upper part of my back and twisted his body in front of mine, whereupon I wrapped my left arm around his lower torso enabling him to hoist me up far enough so that I could pull myself up his body by using my right arm and my knees to grapple and scoot as if climbing a tree. His arms now free he boosted and bounced me into position. All this happened in seconds and without a word between us. Descending was somewhat faster than the ascent. At one point we missed our footing for a split instant and almost plunged past a couple of ascending climbers onto the slimy mossgreen boulders at the bottom of the abyss. I came close to urinating on Steven's back. Then we were leaping from slimy boulder to slimy boulder and before reaching my wheelchair, my imagination went crazy. Before me in vivid color and vicious detail lay my mangled corpse at the foot of my awaiting chariot. I recall shaking my mind away from such thoughts in order to reflect on the magnificence of the climb up Spastic Rock.

Arthur Honeyman was born forty-two years ago with cerebral palsy. He received a bachelor's of science degree in history from Portland State University in 1965, and a master's degree in literature in 1974. He and his wife JoAnn founded Wheel Press in 1977 and published books he had written, including "Sam and His Cart", which was made into an award winning movie. Up Spastic Rock has been reprinted from his latest book, "Journey." The drawings by Donald Osborne were commissioned by the E. J. Reading Greeting Cards company of Cannon Beach.

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