



# THE LONG WAY BACK

The first draft of a short story by Jason Rodi

## THE LONG WAY BACK

Light came into the cave. The monks removed the stones that had been placed there years before so no one would know of the strange abode. In his mind and body, James Will had stood still for so long, that he had thought himself dead, or so he'd hoped. Locked deep in a meditative state, undisturbed by nothing but hallow drips and sparse movements of the mountain around him. But now there was light, and though he could not open his eyes it seemed as bright as the light of heaven. Slowly, the monks opened the way in, and peered at the man they once knew. Would he have finally found the peace he had been seeking in the mountains. They sensed a sort of fear only monks can fear. Not the unknown, nor the inexplicable, but rather that which binds them into a purpose beyond faith or reason. Will had come into their monastery long ago, and involved them in a quest not even he knew. He simply could not grow old. So, as they came towards his inanimate body, they feared both for the death of their old friend, and the demise of his plan to find what time would not give him. He sat mummified, the same way they'd left him, thumb and middle fingers together toward bliss. They gently unwrapped him before the one that had been closest to him put his ear to his heart, and listened. Minutes went by perhaps before the monk thought he may have heard something. In his mind he asked: "Are you still with us Will?". He hoped for it, and so believed he heard his old friend's heart beating once more. Unlocking his joints to lay him down on the planks they brought with them, they carried him into the opening, toward the light that enveloped him fully. He could feel this, and thought he was carried by angels toward eternity. The brightness and warmth overwhelmed him with a joy he had never known. At last, this was the end of his long journey, the next step.

He lay still for days before he could find any strength. The monks covered him in oils and balms and carefully massaged his cracked skin while letting droplets of water through his lips. His tongue was hard like wood, and his throat so tense that the water took hours to make it's way into his vessel. He could feel this, and though it pained him, it was good, and he surrendered to the pain. These days were like a long birthing process which he trusted as he felt life unearthen inside his pours, inside and out. He could hear the chants of the monks, careful not to stress his labor. Before he could open his eyes, he knew he had not left this world, and though he had wished for it, for something new, the sensations of every detail of life coming back into his still young body was ecstasy. Life itself was beyond value. It was God, and He was inside him.

He opened his eyes knowing Tensing, his old friend, was sitting by him, meditating. It was dusk, and having known the day had gone by, he could not wait another night. It was surprising how crisp everything was. He expected a hazy light yet everything was shining around him, especially Tensing. Quiet, he stared at him, light emulating from all around him like an aura. He could not speak yet, but he could smile and let his friend know that he was glad to be back. When Tensing opened his eyes, he looked straight at Will as though he expected he would be there, staring back at him. He returned the smile and Will realized it had been a long time. Years certainly, perhaps decades. They waited together as night came. Will looked around him and found strength in this. Even in darkness, he could still see.

The next day, he had turned his body over toward the door to watch the light of day. Monks surrounded the hut in anticipation, so he lifted his arm enough to signal for help, and Tensing pulled him into a seating position. His muscles felt like twigs, unable to bend and painfully tearing at the seams with every forced movement. But baring the strength of an audience, he was taken outside and sat on the edge of the hut, toward the sun taking rise. The hut was on the edge of the mountain. He was brought water and fruits. He could not recognize every face but most of those he was seeking were there. They all sat staring at him as he swallowed a berry; bitter, sweet. He could not speak, and he was glad for he knew what they all wished to hear, but what he might have had to say was something else entirely. Most of them were in the Himalayan heights, far from common Earthly pleasures, seeking silence and wisdom in this. This had been the case for Will too. He had travelled the world over, avoiding wars and lengthy stays that could bring attention to his peculiar condition. He'd come to the mountains seeking solace, peace, and perhaps answers, but after 15 years he was utterly bored, and did not see the beauty in the details that these monks had learned to satisfy themselves with. Older than all of them, and barely looking over thirty, he'd renounce the world and the unique life he'd been given by muting it. Considered a Saint by some of the monks that shared his secret, his story was now legend, and the cave in which he meditated for over a decade was almost forgotten as younglings now populated the monastery, and the modern world was catching up to it too. Tourists were common visitors now, sometimes even carrying satellite phones and portable video devices that brought images and sounds into the minds and hearts of the young monks who might never find the kind of peace some of their elders had experienced. But James Will did. The legend was real, and a testament to the monks' creed. He sat in silence, tasting the berry still, wishing he could remain the legend they'd come to pray by.

He waited weeks before uttering his first words. Will was secretly preparing his exit. He wanted to vanish like a ghost and strike the imagination of the young boys that he would often catch peering at him. Tensing knew this, but kept it to himself. On the first snow of the year, Will came out of the woods to find Tensing sitting by his favorite tree. Once he sat next to him and let the moment settle, he said his first words in almost two decades: "Thank you my friend." To which Tensing replied: "Is that your way of saying goodbye?" There was a long pause between them, like two old men who know when silence means more than words, or two boys savoring their youth. "Why did you wake me?"

- "I was an old man already when we put you in the cave, and I'm even older now. I spent my life seeking eternity in the stillness of a moment. The closest I felt to enlightenment was in meditation, when consciousness would rise like a sun inside me. I wanted to see that sun rise from within you too, and perhaps shine upon us all."

- "They're all waiting for me to show them the way to enlightenment, and after years meditating, all I want to tell them is to live, see the world and everything they've been missing."

- "What are you still missing James?"

They sat in silence for a few more minutes, reflecting on everything that life still had to offer Will, and the moments of enlightenment that were now counted for Tensing, until he added:

- "You should go where your life began."

And so he did. One early morning James cleanly folded his robe, gathered his bag and clothes from some thirty years back, and without any goodbyes he set down the mountain toward the life he had sworn to surrender. He was 133 years old.

With age, James had learned the ways of the nomad. He carried very little with him, and this made him proud. It was the idea that no matter where he might find himself, he could find a way to make a living. He knew multiple trades, and was a fast learner. This too was a skill, to know how to retain information and make the most of it. He was a great mechanic, able to infuse life back into almost any motor. While he was also a talented photographer, having picked up the craft before the turn of the century, when it was still a great wonder to capture a space in time, but it was mechanics that made him an asset for any transport company. Mechanics was his passport. He'd been able to find jobs on ships and make his way all over the globe, managing to leave little trace of his existence along the way, save his photographs, in which he was careful rarely to be featured.

As he walked down the Himalayas along the valleys he had threaded through some thirty years back, he was not surprised to find that much of the landscape had remained the same. It was like walking through the past, revisiting the thoughts that had brought him there. Over a hundred years of memories and some remained so clear, like they were a dream he'd had just the night before, locked inside his brain somewhere behind blank faces and names. Those details were there, somewhere, but he knew better than anyone that one can only retain so much. Certain stories from his childhood along the St-Lawrence river were as clear as the water he'd spend his summers cooling himself in. These were like movies he could play back, frame by frame, adjusting the morals to construct the character he'd come to see himself as. Adventures that carried him out of his village, into the cities of the Americas, Asian ships, and his many flights through Europe and the African country. Africa. Raw and unforgiving with its ancient secrets that ride along the wild, wild days and nights. Africa, the only place he could share his story without receiving disbelief or even doubt. They all carried the memories of their ancestors there, where time blends with myth. It was an easy place to be. In the warm nights, memories lie with imagination, dreams, fabrication. But in these mountains, he left his memories in the past where they belonged. He put his racing mind to rest, at last. An abyss at the bottom of a deep, deep well where he could replenish himself. He drank and when he could drink no more he let himself sink into the abyss. At the bottom of the abyss, beyond the well, the water, and the source of the water, he forgot he ever existed. Once there was absolute nothingness, not even time, there was still something. That's when he surfaced. A bright light exploded in an instant that lasted until now. It was with him as he walked down the mountains, through his memories, toward his new life. It's what carried him up the mountain years before, what made the gear of each motor lock into motion, what pushed his sails to the coast, and what his mother felt the instant he entered her womb. Life. It was ever new, and he was the vessel for one of its most unique mysteries. He did not care to think about it any longer. He was alive, like the ground and the sky and the equation he stood in the middle of. With or without him the mystery remained and he was privileged to be there then, and witness it. He could die before arriving in Kathmandu or before returning to the river he once called home but in this moment he bared the experiences of a century of invention and conquest, and had nothing to show for it but the stride of his step and the exalted glitter of his eyes.

The smell of gasoline and the rumbling sound of every man and woman fighting to survive another day could not be buried under the warm shower falling over him. He was in it now, the world, he could not ignore it and nor could it ignore him. Some smiled at him, others could not

bare the sight of him. He conveyed joy, purity, and wisdom. In the villages along the way he was fed, given shelter, and some even transported him along. He took a Cessna ride back to Kathmandu and was now in the pilot's home. This was an expatriate who had two young boys and a devoted wife, teaching at the local college. He looked at himself in the mirror for a long time before taking his shower. He hadn't seen his own reflection so clearly in three decades and it was shocking to see himself again because it was as though it encompassed the faces of all of the people he met in his life, with that of the pilot and his family most clearly. He was one of those people, no more no less. His eyes were what set him apart from the rest and so he stared at them seeking to retain the intentions that brought him back, and the long long story that came with it, but he could not, and he accepted this as a reminder that he was indeed human. Enlightened? A few times perhaps, but now just a man who needs a shave and a shower, bad. The razor felt good on his skin. He cut the hair around his ears, eyes, and neck with a pair of perfect scissors from behind the mirror. The shower was his greatest reward however, and the only thing that could keep him from a warm meal for a little longer. The noise of the city that came through was filtered and this was comforting to him. His journey home was still only beginning.

He came into the small but quaint kitchen where the two boys sat, one reading a magazine while the other insisting to debate the latest local political affair with his mother. The pilot, named Clark, was standing between them, talking on the phone. James graciously sat down at the table.

"I hope you brought your appetite with you." exclaimed Clark, hanging the phone.

"You better believe it."

"My father tells me you've been living in a monastery the past few years." Simon said while closing his magazine. He seemed the older of the two boys. Probably less than twenty years old but very athletic and smart looking.

"Yes, I have."

"What brought you there?"

"I needed the rest I guess."

Clara set the food in the middle of the table: "We could all use some rest sometimes, that's for sure."

"Yes we could." added Clark.

They all dug into the food, filling their plates in equal shares of the local recipes that Clara had learned for her family. They were a vibrant little clan who had made an uncommon but happy life for themselves in a tumultuous part of the world. They asked few questions and mostly talked amongst themselves, with light arguments and banter. It was the best meal Will had had in ages, not only for the food but also for the company. Family dinners were still a foreign experience to him, and he found it lively, refreshing, and filling.

Later, Clark joined Will on the rooftop terrace from which they could hear Kathmandu rumbling below. Rooftops were visible for miles around revealing the seemingly private lives of everyone around. People felt alone on rooftops, sheltered, yet they were exposed to anyone bothering to gaze across the landscape of clotheslines and antennas. Which kind of life would Will adopt? Which would sustain his attention for decades, perhaps centuries to come? Clark filled a pipe with fresh hashish and observed the same landscape mindlessly.

"Do you know where you're headed from here?"

"I think home."

"Where is home?"

"Canada."

"I used to fly through Canada up to the Arctic circle back in the day. The boys weren't born yet but Clara just hated me going up there in the cold. I loved it though. So calm up there. Where in Canada you from?"

"Small town in Ontario, by the Saint-Lawrence. Do you know it?"

"Sure I know it. You know why they call it the Saint-Lawrence?"

Will nodded though he'd heard this story before.

"What was the name of the explorer? Jacques Cartier, right! Well as he followed the river up stream there was this incredible meteor shower, and he'd just heard of Saint-Lawrence passing days before, so he associated the showers as his crying or something of the kind, so Cartier called the river Saint-Lawrence in his honor."

"I think I heard that before."

"You don't smoke?"

"I don't. I used to."

"You were a monk up there, with the robe and everything?"

"Yeah, for a while I was."

"What brings a young man like you to want to renounce the world like that. I mean don't get me wrong, I have great respect for buddhists, especially the monks, but you don't meet a lot of people from Canada becoming monks. You must have been running from something? A woman, or job, or fight. Something!"

"I guess I was. I was tired, and I couldn't find a way to rest anywhere."

"And now you're rested."

"Now I'm new. I'm a born-again citizen of the world Clark."

"Your parents be happy to see you when you get back I'm sure."

He couldn't remember what his father looked like. He always pictured himself in his place, like another version of his existence. He was a working man, a farm owner who had only known the working life, and hadn't much of an education. His mother, on the other hand, he could see her face in his mind clear as day, but the picture was still, even if the colors were alive. Like an angel, floating, waiting to embrace. He could eternally thrive toward her arms, but he was stuck in his father's image, in the grind of life, the mud. In a hundred years of youth, he never achieved much material wealth. He had a treasure buried somewhere, but he'd had to steal it. He often thought how other men had achieved more in 30 years than he had in 4 times that. He didn't seek recognition or wealth, but was composing an epic journey non-the-less, an adventure across many lives. He had developed an image of himself that came crashing when he entered the fear. Long ago, during the first World War, he feared that the world was coming to an end. He feared for himself, he feared loneliness. He created a need, a hole he couldn't find, flee, or fill. Now he was just a man again, new, but he knew the hole was never filled. No woman, no love, no quiet retirement had helped. What was it that belonged there, what was missing?

He felt strange sitting with Clark as he wanted to share nothing but truthfulness with him, and the only way he could do this was with silence and surrender. Soon he'd go to his place of origin. The last he'd seen of it was the field fire. It was so beautiful, seeing his father beat at it hopelessly and his mother look at it blankly. She had something he would always strive for.

She had an innate trust in life and its course. That look in her face triggered his motion. It was time. He picked up his camera and coat, and set through the fire, to the road.

Clark got him a job on a cargo ship to China. Then, in just two weeks it was Shanghai to Vancouver on another cargo. Within a month off the mountain he was walking onto Canadian soil for the first time in almost half a century. It was unfolding like the pages of a novella found on one of the ships, to be picked up by the next sailor to read quick before arrival. He walked onto Canadian soil, forward, off the road and onto the train tracks. All the trains slowed down there as it was the marshaling yard. He walked along and let the monster of a train slow down next to him, just enough for his pace to match those of the pounding wheels. It was asking him to take the journey, hop on! From here there is only East. Along the life line, the veins of the country, the tracks focusing in front of him: home.

Five days passed, and like a time traveller he jumped off the train on the outskirts of Wakefield and started walking the rest of the way. He wanted to take his time then and remember the details, the smells, the color of the earth. There would be nothing for him there lest the memories of someone he was, someone he could barely remember. But he was willing to let time pass this time and welcome what things may come. He might not even lie about his origins for once, and let people react as they might, think him crazy or an attention seeker. No matter, he was open.

He carried a book of photographs with him, like a travelogue of the past century, the only remnant proof of his long life. He needed it for himself, and not for anybody else, and as he walked through the town he took out his camera and captured his return as well. There was nothing left of what he knew in town. It was an old fashioned little town, and that was its attraction. The university grounds were not far from it, and this had kept it alive for as long as it had. He walked through, imagining years and lifetimes flying by without him. He took out an old map of the area he had kept with him and tried to get a sense of where his family's lot was but as good a topographer as he may have been, even the land was different. Mountains seemed to have appeared where there were none before, and the riverbed was much smaller than he recalled as well. He was might have been disappointed had he not become a patient man. It was at an old style gas station that he sat down next to the owner and took the time needed to figure out where the land was. It was still farmland, albeit not producing a fraction of what they were back in the day. He set off on his way there, walked up a long hill before finding plains where a forest used to be, and across the plains was where his father's farm had once stood.

Ghosts appeared all around James, reliving his past for him, whispering stories he'd forgotten. The fire that engulfed all that he knew still seemed to burn for him, tingling his nostrils mostly, and tainting the sky with an orange hue. He would know to leave again when the fire would be out.

He went to the house on the lot and knocked softly. A kind man answered, probably in early retirement. James, rarely the outspoken type, wanted to tell the man all about his journey since he was last here, a hundred year journey around the globe and back, here, home. He instead asked if he could set up camp on the land, to which the man agreed kindly. So James Will opened up his small tent before the sun set, had a bit of food left from the boat, and didn't even bother to make a fire. He didn't want to disturb anything. He just wanted to lay there among the ghosts and breath the air he once knew. Was this really the place or had he imagined it all, he could not know, but he was there now, and new, and life would be real and

grounded. The stars were bright that night and James thought he might be able to read the story of his life in them, and he fell asleep on that thought.

He became a regular of the local bar where University students tread. The University hired him to do construction, then fix ups, and soon he was the most useful man on campus. Undeclared, but well taken care of by campus “authorities”, for he was the most reliable worker they could remember ever having. The dean even gave him the keys to an old house that needed so much work and investment that it seemed destined to no one but him. He prepared it for the winter, and before long, he had a welcoming home for himself, and some of the students even started using it as a late afternoon hang out. He never locked the door, and the porch had more sitting space than James could use, and besides, he didn’t feel like sitting much these days. He was infused with energy, feeding from the inertia propelling him along with the community he was serving. He was making himself useful, and appreciated. These were becoming the most fulfilling years of his life so far. For once he thought he might be a character worth remembering in a story greater than his own. He loved to chat with the kids, and be of help to them in ways their teachers, parents and friends could not. He would tell stories half made up so they may be realistic for he realized his tales were tall, and that people, and even kids, were more cynical and suspicious than ever. No matter, he would frame these tales with the right opening question, a thrilling denouement, and a meaningful conclusion that would leave his audiences thinking, and returning for more. He told his best stories when working, fixing the tears of time, and finding himself spinning a tale to gain a bit of help and company from the closest victim. He was loved perhaps. No one who knew him on campus or in town could picture anything but a blessed man. Nothing wrong could happen to him. They didn’t know much, but they knew enough to figure he had something figured out, and they felt safe around him because of it.

It was contentment that sprang the heart of James Will’s story.

He saw her coming moments earlier. He recalls thinking that he was so fulfilled, that he did not need anything more, that life was designed in such a way that it is in these moments that it provides the very thing you need to evolve. You’re in the right place, in the right time. She came off a sail boat that afternoon, her first ride since her return. She did not shower before heading out to town because she wanted to keep the smell of the lake water on her. Besides, she too didn’t need to meet anyone. She was the healthiest she’d been since her teens, and it showed. She was untouchable.

James was at the bar to be polite. Laurine, the local café owner and part time fortune teller, had been meaning to set him up with a nice girl to thank him for the old menu board he’d found and installed for her. He didn’t care to meet the type of girl Laurine might introduce him to. He was content. Then he saw Jane walk across the room toward her old high school friends. She walked with reserved stride, giving as little of herself as possible. Her body flowed forward, as if she came with a kind gift. He saw these simple things in her as if he’d pictured her in every other woman, what he’d wanted them to be.

Laurine mentioned something about destiny, or cards, or our given path, the kind of thing Laurine would say as to give the impression that she saw what others could not see. Yet she hadn't seen Jane.

He walked towards her. He approached her girlfriend first, knowing Sarah well enough to be forward with her.

"Who is your friend Sarah?"

"I'm Jane." she was instantly trusting, and this surprised her, so she held herself back as to not take anything for granted.

"I'm Will. You're not new in town."

"No, but you are."

"I am, sort of. My family came from here a long time ago and I just sort of came back to my roots." so much exposition, he thought, but right to the heart of things. The ease he had with her.

"Where were you?"

"Nepal lastly, but here and there really. Too much travel and moving."

"What's wrong with travel?"

"Nothing. We're always traveling, aren't we?"

"I guess so. Do you dance?"

"All the time!"

They screamed all of this, and then became quiet as they danced, and exchanged looks and smiles, like nothing was threatening, or even flirting. It was fun, and good, really good. So, about an hour and a half later she suggested she go to her friends', and waved James goodbye without making a fuss. He stepped out with her anyway, as if there was nothing else he could possibly care about in the bar.

The moment they stepped out it began to rain.

"You really shouldn't walk me to the car."

"I want to, it's alright, you can give me a ride back."

Because walking was obviously a bad idea, their pace sped up with the amount of rain coming down on them, and again Will saw: her feet driving forward through the water and her forward stance, like she was pulled by her heart. This was an old kind of love, the kind equated for that of his own ancestors.

He let her go, knowing he would see her again shortly. There was no reason to be hasty. He had all of time ahead of him, and he needed to do this right.

He'd had his fair share of lovers. He never married but the last woman he'd loved might have as well been his wife. His relationship with Laura lasted over twenty years, long enough for her to know James was not an ordinary man. She was over fifty when he left her with the key to the treasure, and there was little chance that she was still alive some forty years later. The thought woke him up early the next morning. He'd fallen asleep replaying each instant of his evening with Jane, in close-ups, slow-motion, as though the future was written in every detail of her words, her skin, and movements. He looped it in his mind as sleep came over him. James barely slept three hours each night since he was about a hundred years old. He slept lightly, and his dreams were often vivid. He intertwined the first times he met every lover into his last evening. Every woman's stance and dance. Their lips and scent. Jane was there all

along, reliving each moment with him on every side of the world and across time. They danced like this, softly through the ages, and made love as she grew older and older into Laura. It's Laura's face that woke him up, that and her hand closing over the key. He laid in bed for a few minutes, staring up at the sunlight shinning in, faint. He got up and walked into the kitchen, toward the fridge. He drank a long gulp of orange juice and was over taken by a deep chill. It came like an electric shock. All of his cells seemed to shutter, vibrating toward death. He put his robe on and, already feeling better, looked at himself in the long mirror in front of his bed. He was proud of his body, it had served him so well, perfect engineering. He was a wonder even to himself. How he'd survived the last century was either miraculous or sheer luck, and being older now, he felt his luck could only run so long, and that the tunnel of time was getting ever thinner.

That week, he paid Doctor Pickering a visit. He was a quiet man working in the university lab in micro-biology. James had an affinity for him. He was as reserved as James, but his mind seemed to work similarly to his. The turning world was a mechanical wonder to him too, and without trying to explain it, David Pickering had tried to tame it in his own way. Nearing fifty, he was getting tired, and lost in his own research which wasn't nearing any great discoveries. Doctor Pickering was closing up, piling up his knowledge into a cage even he had no chance of finding the key for. James came into his lab one Wednesday afternoon.

"You're a doctor, right?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you're a medical doctor, correct?"

"Not really."

"But micro-biology, it's the study of life in a way, of what makes the body live."

"In a way, yes."

"I have a condition, a health condition that could be of interest to you."

"What kind of condition."

"It's quite unique, I assure you."

James poked his finger with the needle and let a drop onto the glass. David placed it under the microscope and James stood behind him, watching his reaction.

"What am I looking for?"

"How long does a cell survive outside of the body."

"A human cell, not long, a couple of minutes at most, depending on the room temperature and all kinds of other factors."

"How long have you been at the University?"

"Almost 15 years. Been too long really. Boy, you sure are talkative today."

James thanked Doctor Pickering for his time and made his way out of the lab. The good doctor went on to his work and a couple of hours later, when cleaning up the lab he returned to the microscope and took the glass out without thinking about it, then, just before cleaning it, he thought to look at the blood again, as it didn't seem to have coagulated. He rubbed it together and placed it under the lens again. The blood was still fresh.

That evening he went out to the local pub for the first time in years and ordered a big steak and a pint of beer. As he chewed each bite he looked around him at everyone else. He knew something no one else did, and though he wasn't sure of what it was, it was the only bit of victory he would have had to celebrate, the eureka moment he'd been waiting for, possibly the

last celebration of his life, certainly the only one he could think of besides his marriage, which had turned into a bitter affair.

The next day he kept his eyes peeled for James all day, and even asked for him a few times to see if he might be able to fix the air conditioner in the lab. That day, James was also keeping his eyes peeled for someone. He went to the marina. Jane had taken up a job there, and was getting the hang of it. He didn't wait to approach her again.

"Do you rent boats?"

"I'm afraid we don't, but you know enough people around here, you can borrow one or go out with somebody if you ask kindly."

"I prefer sailing by myself."

"Lucy, you know this fellow?"

"Everybody knows James. He's such a gent."

"Well couldn't you and Hank go out on the lake with him. He's looking for a boat."

"Of course dear, we're taking her out this morning if you want to join us."

"I'd love to."

For a few minutes, he stood with Jane. "I will do right by you," he thought. I will be smart, and know how good a woman you are. Because it was true, he didn't know how there could be another woman beyond her. He would want to die with her, share the world with her.

All the while, she knew, and listened carefully to James' stories, taking him seriously but not at face value. She questioned him about his reasons for things, for being happy, or optimistic. He was flippant about the course of things, yet put great importance in the details of the day. He accompanied Lucy and Hank, and later did the same with other boat owners who needed the help of someone like Will, someone who had known how to step out of the race and take care of what is there. This was the key that made him slip through any door, unlocking any mechanism into motion. It's what made him the best sailor the marina ever had.

Jane discovered all of this by watching him, and letting him in each time he'd walk by her, and how he would get involved with her surroundings, her well being. He would not fail her. She was utterly seduced but didn't want to seduce him. She was stable, and knew she should not depend on anyone but herself.

This was the way they watched each other for weeks, savoring the moments before they'd be lovers, letting their desire drag as they knew that the first contact would be ultimate.

The season was falling. Jane and Will had kept the marina in full bloom for almost two months. School was starting up again soon. It was a day when the wind went into the sea, pulling.

"We will build a boat," he told her.

She turned to him. "Our boat." He was already looking at her. There was nothing more to say.

"You know Will, nothing is permanent. It scares me to think that there will never be a point in my story when I'll live happily ever after. I don't know if tomorrow I'll change my mind about you and realize that you were just as flawed as anyone, or even more, like there's another side to the pendulum and that soon enough, it'll swing back."

"Let's build a boat together, and see where it takes us."

There was a young man who had moved to Wakefield a few months before. He was a hopeful lad, full of good intentions, coming to fill a post as history professor. In his early thirties, he had made the switch into teaching after a successful albeit short writing career. He had sincerely enjoyed his first classes, and the students liked him too, a couple of the girls were

even planning their seduction schemes. He was a good young man on his way to the top once again if it weren't for the freak occurrence of which he was the victim. One day Roger Culprite disappeared. His apartment was empty, his books and furniture gone, all but a bicycle leaning on the wall by his house.

The whole town was mystified by it, and the students, especially having liked Roger, suddenly insisted on having a history class or at least be credited. At a loss the dean turned to the students for a suggestion and one of them remembered one of Will's stories and thought he'd love to have him as his teacher. So he proposed it to a couple of people and they picked up on the idea, which made it's way to the dean, upon which the dean walked into James' house one early evening.

"Hello Mr. Will?" he was uncomfortable to be there.

"Dean Harris. How nice to see you. Come on in."

"Why thank you." He kept his jacket with him and walked toward the kitchen.

"Would you like to have a seat?"

"Certainly." and he sat at the counter. James poured him a glass of tea.

"Did you hear about that Roger Culprite fellow?"

"Of course."

"Dreadful affair this. Dreadful. If you ask me the kid must have been an addict that needed to find his fix somewhere."

"I like the alien abduction theory best."

"Yes, well, me too I guess... Suffice it to say that we're missing a teacher for this semester.

There's a slot to be filled and I just don't know where to go at this time of year to get a teacher to finish that class and those kids aren't going to have it any other way. Letters from the parents and next thing you know the board is having a special meeting. Now it's enough I have a missing person incident on my hands that I gotta deal with the board. You can see my predicament."

"Certainly."

The dean looked at James long and hard.

"Do you have a university degree James?"

"Yes I do."

"It wouldn't be a history degree, would it?"

"No sir, I'm afraid it's not. I have an engineering degree from Ohio."

"You don't have that diploma handy, do you?"

"Definitely not."

"Well, maybe it's all the better, unless engineering is considered a social science, it won't stick."

"What will stick, sir?"

"Damn it Will, I thought you were smart. Now how's your history?"

"The last couple of centuries are pretty fresh."

"Then you begin tomorrow."

James walked into the classroom without being over dressed or any different than the way people had known him before in fact. He'd learned to wear clothes that fit any situation and that also meant the classroom. He didn't know exactly where this turn of events might take him, but at least it would give him more visits with Dr. Pickering who had become what you might call a friend, or at least a confidant.

He was one of the last people to enter the classroom. The students were respectful, and a little excited at the idea that what was the caretaker one day was suddenly their teacher. Some had been witness to his stories before, and knew they'd be in for a treat.

"As you may imagine, I'm a bit surprised to find myself here. You'll have to cut me a little slack, and help me lead the way through this semester so we may all get through it. I was given this textbook, along with a list of reading materials you have assigned. Is everyone familiar with this text book?" Everyone was.

"How far have you gotten already?"

"We're just entering the industrial revolution, chapter 3."

"Let's see." he flipped through the book like he had before entering into class just to get a better idea of what he had to cover. He looked up at the kids, most were still below twenty.

"You've seen this past century. You carry it with you. You were there all along, watching. The first photograph was taken in 1826, in France. Centuries of advances in chemistry and optics set the stage for it. Then in 1867, a simple machine put photographs into motion, motion pictures! They called it the "wheel of life". It was at the beginning of the next century that projecting film became common. It happened fast, the way the Internet changed the way we communicate in less than a decade, so did cinema change the way we see the world. The industrial revolution was in full swing then, and we embraced the future like we were walking toward nirvana. Agriculture, manufacturing, transport, all of technology was evolving at unprecedented speed. All of our lives were changed, every aspect of daily life was eventually influenced by this major turning point in human history and for the first time we could also record and playback our history, and across the world no less. So it was a deep rooted awakening we went through, like our collective consciousness connecting for the first time in a common image. What was recorded then would be forever, for the first time."

The wheel of life was turning steady for James. David had taken blood samples, some Xray, brain waves, even psychology questionnaires. It was the DNA test that gave the first abnormal results. He was missing a gene, what could be considered the aging gene. David walked through the University halls ahead of James, who followed him without question. He had news to share that could only be done in the privacy of the lab.

"It's your DNA."

"What about it?"

"There is a missing link in the chain, a missing gene. You have to know what you're looking at to know it's not there and in your case it's not there."

"So that's it, it's genetic?"

"It's genetic."

"But then I would have had a history in my family."

"Not necessarily, it could be a mutation in the genetic code, it happens every few generation, but this is a major mutation. And if it was hereditary, chances are your ancestors died of some disease before they could live beyond fifty, or an accident, who knows. You're not immortal. You can get hurt, and you can get sick, and while you heal very well, you still scar, and can just as easily die than the next guy. It's just that if you stay healthy your cells keep regenerating at a steady rate. You're just not programmed to grow old."

"There must be others like me."

"Sure, there must be, but they're either hiding out or they're in some government research center somewhere. Do you realize your body is probably worth billions of dollars? Think of all

of the medical advances we could make just by studying you, or even the beauty products that could bare your name.”

“Take it easy David. This is between you and me. No one else knows or can ever know.”

“Jane will know eventually.”

“No one can know. I trust you with this.”

“How can you be so selfish? How can you not want to share your gift with the world?”

“Because it’s mine. It’s all I’ve had since I can remember and I’m not about to give my life away for the vanity of those who can afford it.”

“It’s just not fair.”

“To who? To the dying? I will die too, David, and in the grand scheme of things I won’t have been any different than you.”

“How can you say something like that when you’ve seen all that you’ve seen. It’s insulting, and degrading to think I can’t appreciate the life you’ve led.”

“If you outlived everyone you ever knew, you might think differently.”

James instantly remembered being beaten by hoodlums in Eastern Europe. He was left for dead, unconscious by the road side. It was freezing, and when he woke up his fingers and feet were swollen from the cold. The pain of pressure upon the bottom of his bare feet would rise up his spine. He had no where to go and no one knew he even existed. For all intense and purposes, he was dead to the world. But he remained, and he was found buried under a thin coat of snow, thawing out under the sun. Despite the torture, his body survived the cold, and he only sustained a little frost bite. He lost his finger and toe nails but they eventually grew back.

“I’m alive David. That’s all I know. Half my memories are made up, and I can barely keep up with what day of the week it is, but the only thing that’s true is that I am here and I can’t be forever. I can’t turn my life into a freak show nor the world with it. I won’t be a martyr.”

To Jane, he never had to explain anything. There was nothing to explain. He told of his past lives like they were fictions all intricately tied together. James was a storyteller to the listening ear, and his tales were tall, and he would always end each story with some kind of tie in, like: “and that’s how the Corporal came in contact with the map, but that’s a whole other story.”

To Jane, he would only tell the stories he’d told others, to keep her posted with his days, so she may share his life with her. They worked on the boat for two winters, sculpting it slowly, letting the design come out of the wood first, and all the while thinking of the dynamics of the affair. Jane had proposed plans for the design and it’s end purpose and James listened intently. Sculpting that boat and it’s destiny was a perfect equivalent to Jane and James’ relationship. It was patient, and sensual, and honorable. He made love to her, giving all of himself to her in only the doses her body let in. A fluid symbiosis, a haven. They’d spend most nights as James’. They shared an empowering trust and confidence in each other that transpired in their love-making. She wanted his seed, and he gave it mindlessly. Will had learned to ejaculate at will as it were. Tantric sex was second nature to him, and he would often hold it for numerous days before exploding inside of her.

The second winter, he held his ejaculation for the entire winter, until the boat would be done. It focused him on the great task at hand. He had never built a boat before, and couldn’t afford too many mistakes. It was an April morning that people rolled long logs under the boat as it came through the town, across campus, and down the road to Jane’s station at the marina. They set it in the water and James instantly jumped onboard. He felt his footing push the boat

slightly off shore, like a force coming into motion. He grabbed Jane's hand and pulled her next to him. He put up the main sail and the wind kicked in simultaneously. It was magical, everything they could have wanted it to be, but they didn't want anything. They were there all along, and had it not been as such, it would have been good. But the wheel of time had locked into motion all of the gears that made the wind blow that day, and James and Jane effortlessly brought their boat out for the first time. They were proud and alone in the world. They laid by the mast, in the fallen sail, drifting out into the infinite horizon. Will thrust himself selfishly, devouring her and the moment, molding her with his hands like he never had before. She was his to mold. He couldn't know of a greater creature for him to love this way. They quivered in the blazing sun and cried.

Ray was a wonderful child. Affectionate, fragile, and easy to please, she looked in a constant state of wonder, and could play the same game for longer than most kids. Will stayed at home with the girls for the first few months. Around the time she was born, he started working on an old motorcycle he'd inherited from a fellow teacher who had imported it and could not get it to run. It was a 1967 Royal Enfield, the Bulleit classic, the kind he used to drive in India. Both Jane and he knew that they had conceived a child that day on the boat. He never thought he could have children, but when it happened, he knew, like it had been a voluntary act. He went for a swim after and when he got a little far from the boat, too far for comfort, he had a feeling of connection with the universe in a way he hadn't before. He was floating perhaps a mile off the bottom of the water. His head was above the water, and his body under, on the line between Earth and Sky. He was entirely alone, yet eternally connected to Jane. This was a new kind of immortality, the kind that made him forget there was ever anything missing. He let himself sink into the darkness below, looking upward at the light shining through the surface, and he, in that instant, called her Rayana.

Jane was an incredible mother. She only had one uterus from a cancer in her early twenties. She'd learned how to take care of herself since then, but questioned her own abilities to take care of someone else, someone inside her. While James perceived Ray as an extension of himself, Jane recognized that she was a different person all together. She was born at home, in water, and when she came out and looked up at the dazed lights, James' mind burst with love. She was not him, nor Jane. She was Ray, already all made up and feeling and thinking without anybody's influence. She was whole already, and this humbled James. He had nothing to give her but unconditional love, and the rest would take care of itself.

David Pickering came to the house with a couple of cigars. Jane was resting with Ray after already having had a breakfast with her high school friends, so David barely came in, intent on sitting on the couch. James came out to join him, and gave him a heartfelt hug.

"Thank you David."

"I hope you plan on smoking them now. A friend brought them back from Cuba, they're pretty fresh."

They toked and let the flame rise up high in front of their brow before letting the smoke fill their mouths.

"I tell you David, it scares me how fulfilled I am now."

"It scares me too," bursts out laughing.

Without looking at him, David asked James: "Do you think she has it?"

“I don’t know, and it’s not up to me to know.”

He wanted her not to have the gene either. He wanted her to live forever so he might finally die in peace. He wanted her to be taken care of, and have nothing ever happen to her. He wanted her to have all of the spoils of life and grow up as she may. There was time.

And time there was, as Jane nursed her little girl, James found himself more alone in the house than he expected he would be. So he worked on the bike, and would escape the mechanism when Ray would cry him out of his wake. He’d rock her and bring her to Jane if she couldn’t stop crying. She sat on the porch one afternoon and James took out the Enfield. As Jane and Ray watched, James decompressed the motor, six or seven times. Push, push, and pushed on the pedal to let go of the pressure inside, and let the fluids flow. When he knew she was ready, he placed the kick start pedal in the perfect position, feeling the gears line up with it, and without hesitation he kicked. The explosion set the motor thundering into motion. He turned down the rotation from below the gas tank and listened to her roar. Ray was very impressed by the loud noise his father was making and started waving her arms out as if to fly. Jane blocked her little girl’s ears.

“I’m gonna take her for a ride.” and he clicked it in gear and set off down the road. As he found the second and third speeds, he considered the miracle of mechanics working, alive. He still had it, he could still infuse it in things, the way it had been infused in him.

He didn’t drive far that day, for fear he might never return. He felt the inertia of the wheels, and it made him miss the girls. What if something happened to him? What if he crashed and wouldn’t see his daughter grow up. He didn’t want to miss a thing. He turned and headed back home.

He came into the kitchen where Jane was preparing supper. There was a letter on the table addressed to him. It came from Japan. Inside the envelope was the key to his treasure. It had been wrapped in a hand written letter.

“Christopher Pierce. I know you don’t go by that name anymore but I will never call you anything else. I know it took me a long time to write back. Two years isn’t that long for you I’m sure, and it’s not so long for me either. It’s been about 35 years since you and I last saw each other, so I’ll let you calculate how old that makes me. I was surprised to hear from you to tell you the truth. I thought you’d be dead by now, one way or another. You stung me twice already, there had to be a three. I return your key assuming you remember the password. I also told my daughter Meg your address. She is now living in Vancouver.

I hope you have found what you were looking for in those great mountains. Know that there were also mountains here, that might have taken you just as far.

May you live prosper, and in love,  
Yasuko.”

She included a picture of her family. Jane came around the table and asked him what about the letter.

“An old friend sent me something of mine. I wrote her when we met, but I didn’t think she was still alive because she hadn’t written back.”

“What’s the letter say?”

“I don’t think you’d understand it.”

"I've heard about Christopher Pierce. He's one of your characters from your history class."

"Yeah."

"You want to share this one?"

"Maybe another time."

The key would open a safety box in an old Mississippi bank inside which James had locked away a box of souvenirs, pictures and tickets, IDs. It was proof of his life. After he'd locked it away, he had doubts that his life might be imagined. When he left Japan, he gave Yasuko the key, renouncing his past. He wanted Jane to know, he wanted her to know before Ray would know but he couldn't just tell her, and he didn't know how to show her other than through that box.

He left in the spring on the Royal Enfield to drive down to the Mississippi Bank. He carried little more with him save the key around his neck, some tools in the satchel, and a bit of cash in his pocket. He left without a big goodbye, like he'd be back at the end of the day. Ray was one already, and walking. He thought of her for the first 100 miles away, imagining what she might be saying when she's blabbing on mindlessly, wondering how much is imitation, and how much is instinct. He thought of Jane for the next 100 miles. How he hoped for her fulfillment. He didn't know her without Ray anymore, and she didn't know herself otherwise either. Then he thought of himself for the third hundred miles. He thought of his youth, of whether Jane would still see him the same way in 25 years. If he could find a way to share life with someone for once, life ultimate. He couldn't, they would grow separate, and Ray would catch up to him, and it didn't make sense. It wasn't plausible. That's the thought that had him ride for days without end, his engine burning through the modern world, feeding on vegetable oil of fast food joints along the way. It was the future now, and he had been there all along.

He parked in front of the city bank and walked in with his helmet under his arm, and the key in his hand. He asked to see the manager and told him what he was there for.

"The password is Tomorrow."

The safety box was passed the newer safe, down a long corridor, into the old part of the bank.

He turned the key, pulled out the box, opened it, and inside was nothing but a note.

"How long will you remember me?" signed by Yasuko's daughter.

From the bank lobby, he found her phone number and called. There was an answer after many rings. "Hello. This is Christopher Pierce. I am looking for Yasuko Tadakoro's daughter?"

"This is she."

"Do you have the contents of the box?"

"I do."

"Can I have it? Perhaps I could pick it up."

"Who's stopping you?"

"Why are you doing this? That box means the world to me."

"You don't remember me, do you?"

"Yes, of course, you were beautiful and very kind as I recall."

"That was a long time ago, but thank you."

"Can I have my pictures back?"

"You have a secret Mr. Pierce, don't you? Something you wouldn't want anyone to know."

"Doesn't everybody?"

“Not like you.”

“May I find you at your Vancouver address?”

“How much does your secret count for you?”

James thought about the situation he was in. He made a 360 pan of the room, of his place in the world, and he hung up, and walked out quietly, key in hand.

The Enfield took a few more kicks to start. As he rode out of the city onto the highway, he saw a fork before him between home and his future there, and his past lives which sat in a box on the other side of the continent.

At the last moment he took the fork Westward, toward his past. He only had to do a little mechanics along the way as he made the motor heat more than he should have. Enfields weren't built for speed but they were built to last. Along the way he did not call Jane to let her know he'd be longer. Part of him didn't know whether he'd ever go home.

It took him over a week to make it while only driving during the day. He found shelter in camping grounds along the way, and a couple of motels where he sat meditating much of the time. His arms and back were tired but when he arrived in Vancouver, he went straight to the young lady's apartment. He rang the doorbell referring to her name. She buzzed him in without question. He walked up, stretching his legs. They felt more tired than usual. She opened the door and was shocked frozen. Will was shocked too to see Yasuko as she was when he last saw her. Still beautiful, petite, and frail. She lost her balance and fell. Will caught her in time, and walked in. He laid her broken body on her couch. She was in her late forties. When she opened her eyes again, he was sitting at the kitchen table. She quickly sat up and said: “You look just the same. You haven't changed a bit!”

“You haven't either Yasuko.”

“Of course I have. How long has it been? 30, almost 40 years?”

It wasn't the Yasuko he'd known, it was her daughter. She looked so much like her mother but it still made him question himself, and his memory. She couldn't look that much like her.

“You have something that's mine, and I need it back.”

“After all of this time that's all you have to say to me?”

“Where is it?”

“It's not here, let me fix you a tea.”

“Why? Why would you steal something like that? It has no value to you.”

“You don't remember me do you?”

“Of course I do. You're Yasuko's daughter.” he pointed to a picture of the two of them together, mother and child both looking in the later part of their lives.

“You don't remember us?”

“I do, but what is there to remember?”

“We were lovers.”

He thought at first that she might be lying. But as she spoke, the memories came back to him in bits.

“You were my first you know? And I loved you then, more than my mother would ever love you, and you knew it. You left Japan and I was 2 months pregnant.”

“You were pregnant with my child?”

“Not for long. My mother forced me to have an abortion and consequently threw me out of the house.”

She immigrated to Canada soon after, and only went home to Japan once or twice a year since.

"I'm sorry to hear that. I sincerely barely remember."

"How could you forget? And how can you still look so much like you used to, just like I remembered."

"The box you stole from me, it contains pictures and documents tracing my life over the last 130 years or so. I need it back."

"It's impossible. I don't have your box."

"I beg you Yasuko. I need it."

"I destroyed it." She watched for the hurt in his face. She wanted to hurt him.

James sat silently, trying to come to terms with what it meant, what a life forgotten would be like. He shot off his chair.

"Why?"

She fell to her seat and looked up at him, nervous but glad to see his reaction.

"I want my box Yasuko."

"I burned it."

He waited a few seconds and looked at her, sad, beautiful, but old. He turned his eyes off of her before he built a mountain of hatred. He walked out of her apartment with his shoulders down, like the world had fallen on him. He was alone in his memories, and he thought of all the people he'd known that were now gone, and for once he thought that he too might join them some day. He was more vulnerable than he thought.

He wanted to be home with Jane and Ray. They hadn't heard from him in over a week, and it made him feel like he might not exist to the world anymore. Proof of his past had disappeared, and this was a kind of shame, like it hadn't been worth more than a box, and now the box was gone. He wanted to come up with a story to tell Jane when he would return, something about a mission, something important.

He called her from a borrowed cel phone. Told her he couldn't speak long, but that he would be back in a couple of weeks. She wasn't worried about him, she was worried about herself and Ray. She was obviously tired and angry.

He came riding back slowly. He stopped often. He didn't speak to anyone longer than a couple of words. He was retreating into a place he hadn't known since he left for the mountains. It was a calm place with walls of frustration from which he stayed clear. He pictured having an accident many times along the way. He imagined himself slipping on road kill and hitting on coming traffic. He pictured the bike's old mechanics blocking into gear and propelling him out of time.

He rode home after having been gone for a month. Jane was outside with Ray when he arrived. He turned off the motor and walked towards her, who didn't move away from her garden.

"We need to do groceries but there's some left overs in the fridge."

He went up to Ray. She seemed so much older, like he missed a year. She looked at him and smiled. She'd missed him without knowing it. He had missed her more.

Later that night, once Ray was asleep, Jane joined Will out on the porch. She asked him where he'd been. Without looking at her, he began at the beginning.

“I was born in 1877, not far from here. I stopped growing old in my early thirties but didn’t realize it until I hit 40. I don’t have other children, and I’ve never been married. I worked as a mechanic most of my life, and travelled the world 5 times over. I’ve never known love like the love I have with you.”

She listened to him quietly, and when he was done, she simply got up and said:

“I’m glad your home but I’m very tired. I’m going to bed.”

He followed soon, and held her tight. She never mentioned his story again.

The years began to flow like water then. Unstoppable. It all happened through Ray. She changed every day, a little more of a person every day. James saw himself reflected in her and it made him more self-conscious than he ever was, but by God was she pretty. She was explosively charming, and calm, and joyful. She did things at her own rhythm, was independent that way. Everywhere she went, people knew her. She was Ray. They would wave to her and smile, and not believe how much she was becoming a great person. James, he was her taxi. In the summer, they would ride the Enfield with a side car for her. He let her do everything she pleased. She knew best what was good for her, and if she didn’t her mother would point it out to him. He was in awe, and it often paralyzed him. He was her aid more than her guide.

Jane is the one that pointed out his first grey hairs. She found it attractive. She treasured them as her own because it was the first things she saw in him that changed. He liked them too, as they were a refreshing addition to his character. But when his sight started to deteriorate, the fear returned. He denied it until headaches cut into his class. His sight was effectively not what it used to be.

“I’m growing old David. Slowly but surely, it’s happening.”

“You want me to do some tests?”

“I don’t know if I do. You might as well.” Doctor Pickering went for a syringe and began the procedure.

“I like the idea of growing old with Ray. You ever thought about what it might be like for her to reach my age while I stay the same. The never liked the thought.”

“I wouldn’t mind getting one of her blood samples.”

“Maybe. We’ll see.”

James’ DNA didn’t grow an aging gene but it did coagulate like normal blood would. They both looked at the results perplexed. James rubbed his beard, as unable to visualize how his mechanics could now be failing him as he couldn’t tell what made them run so well ‘til then.

He looked at Ray from a distance. She was turning 7 and she’d built a whole world around her. It was impenetrable, not because she wouldn’t share it, but because it was so vivid to her. He was hopelessly proud of her, and Jane was still a perfect, giving and guiding mother. Jane shared Will’s silence for the past couple of years. There was still love, but it was focused on Ray. James spent his days telling stories at the college and was glad to find peace and quiet at home. Ray was the soundtrack to their lives, with her singing and the characters she played. There was laughter, always laughter.

“We should take the boat out tonight.” Jane said.

“That’s a great idea.” James agreed.

Ray went running to her room to get changed.

They rode the Enfield to the Marina. Jane was on the passenger seat, and Ray in the side car. With his family around him, he couldn't be happier. Travels didn't call out to him. He enjoyed Ray's youth more than his own. It was her turn. They took the curve together.

James remembered that day like it was seconds ago. Twenty years had passed and he still took the same curve except now he was riding alone. He was 160 years old, but he looked about a 100 years younger. He got off at the marina where Ray was working for the summer like her mother once had. As he stepped off the bike he took a deep breath in as if to remember what it feels like to breath. He walked up the path like he did 25 years back to meet Jane, and found Ray instead.

"You're busy today?"

"I was, but it's slowed down now until people start coming back in."

"It's so good to have you home for the summer. I met your mother right here."

"I know Dad."

"Do you have time to go out today?"

"Let me see. I think he can handle the rest of the day alone." She goes out the cabin toward another small building screaming: "Jason, my Dad and I are gonna take our boat out for the rest of the afternoon. You ok here by yourself?"

James was pensive, looking at the marina through a glaze, like everything was soft. He started walking to the boat to prepare it.

Jane arrived home from work before everyone. At the doorstep was a package from FedEx. It was addressed to Christopher Pierce. She brought it in and left it on the table. She went upstairs to get changed and stopped in her tracks. The package was calling her. She walked back down the stairs and sat at the table. She opened it swiftly and a few pictures fell to the floor. She bent down to pick them up. There were a few in color, and a few in black and white. The prints were small, but the pictures were magnificent. They were the testament of another time, and she felt a sort of privilege to be holding them. She got up, flipping through them and noticed a man in one of the older pictures from the 40s it seemed, that looked very much like her James. She dug into the package and pulled out a yellow box filled with more pictures, some old documents and letters. She spread it across the table and looked across her husband's life as if across the horizon, an ocean of stories.

James Will turned the boat until the wind caught the sail and pushed it forward, strong. Ray tightened the rope. They sailed well together, barely needed to speak. The wind was steady and the sky was clear. Ray approached him and gave him a big hug from behind before taking the helm. They were getting out far, and neither flinched. They could go on sailing forever. Will sat in front of the mast in a meditative stance. He closed his eyes to feel the wind and water hit his face. The movement of the waves, the rocking wind, the pulling current. He opened his eyes slightly and pictured the curve of the Earth in the endless horizon.

Jason Rodi  
September 1st 2010





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