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JEREMIAH BLUE

Judged by Author Tim Seibles

My best friend Chris and I often took day trips to the canyon lakes forty-five minutes east of the suburbs where we lived. We'd pack a cooler full of sodas and sandwiches, and set out to find the perfect cliffs to jump off. We now had our driver's licenses. We were burgeoning adults, capable of packing lunches to sustain us for a day.

Winding our way through the canyon roads, we knew where we wanted to go. The spot was a simple drive-and-park scenario. The cliffs sat about a hundred yards off the shore. We would swim the short distance, scale the face of the rock, hoist ourselves onto a small perch, and then descend into the water. Officials of the lake built small motes of sand and rock on the lake's floor to make the water shallower and hopefully diminish any desire to fling one's self off the cliff face. We were not deterred. The danger was half the fun, and the ingenuity necessary to protect bones from breaking on the shallow river's bottom made us feel like intellectual giants. As soon as our feet hit the water, we would fling them back up, arching our bodies like feathers bending in the wind, redirecting the momentum of our bodies back upward toward the surface, averting the impact of the sandy, mounded threats. Those days, facing physical harm and coming up with a way to conquer it was tantamount to discovering a new land. We were world travelers, discovering uncharted worlds with every leap off the face of the cliff—a hundred yards from where we parked our car.

Standing on the bridge, staring out over this city lake, I long for the exhilaration of my heart bumping hard in my chest just before I made the final choice to throw my body into the canyon lake waters. I wonder how deep the waters are in this lake. It wouldn't be so hard to check, but that would take all the mystery out of it. If the waters are deep enough, I will survive and have a great time doing it. And the stories. I can tell my friends how I randomly decided to "cliff jump" off the Tempe Town Lake bridge, with the sun setting behind me, bouncing rich purples off the surface of the water, a symphony of colors welcoming my dare devil, liberated spirit into its wet.

I picture myself balancing atop the railing, turning to face the sun as it descends kaleidoscope colors into the burning horizon, feel its heat on my face one last time. Then turn, look out panoramic over my final sight as a living human being, feel my heart thrust as though it wants to rush far from any part of this finality, and make the choice—a conscious, adult decision for myself—to fling my body off of one last cliff. This time I will not tuck my feet upward. I will not bend like a floating feather. I will not attempt to avert the danger. I will seek it out. I will allow it. I will hope for it.

There will be no more need for long, heat-wrenched, drunken walks to escape empty days. There will be no more worry of where I will work, or eat, or sleep. There will only be the end. Silence. A sweet, burden-less nothing—at least for me.

But I am scared shitless. I turn facing south down the road, now covered by the evening's darkness, and continue walking back to my apartment.

“Nothing attested, everything sung”
– H. L. Hix