

A Frenzy to the End

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I walked down the street as it spiraled, ever tighter, ever darker, never reaching its center, until I was in complete black and traced my hand on the wall that lined my path. I felt that I was walking into the center of an enormous shell. Experience—biting; earth—taught me that something waited at the center, if the center would come.

Or I to it: but one could continue forever without coming somewhere, my fingers traced the unseen wall so lightly that it might have been air. To feel something, I thought, means it's really there. I wonder if I will see it.

The same step a hundred times, a million: at what point does an action become infinite? How many steps were enough? —Ha! I shouted in experiment, I introduced a newness, I knew it to be hostile. —Ha! I repeated and wondered: who said it that time?

My left fingers traced my path; I felt that if I strayed right I'd fall into an abyss, or worse, wander wall-less. Again I considered infinity: wandering without a finger-point would be infinite long before my current path. Just sitting in a black space could be eternal nothing if the black remained. And an abyss...that might stir something at first, terror at a bottom, then some acceptance of falling as flying, but eventually an abyss is infinite too. Until its end, if I reach it.

I gasped, drew myself up harshly. —What are you doing? I barked somewhere. This black place in which your senses will likely fail you, where is it? Where have you gone? How easy to lose yourself, when you find a dark snail shell abyss to tread, now I want to see you, turn around and let's give you a good look, let's see where you're trying to go.

I turned and began to retrace my steps, a faint light in the distance glowered then glowed, my now-hanging left hand reached to my face to check if all features would return to the light. But, I qualified, but—if the light leaves again I won't turn back this time, surely I'm moving toward the outside of it now, even as the ground slopes and I'd imagine it rising, if the light leaves again I'll continue here toward the source. I've communed with the sputtering streetlights that blink off on approach and I have learned to look down, to grieve in silence, even to walk some paces away before glancing back. I know how to catch the briefest faintest glow by surprise and then to cradle it warm in my chest until it begins to send rays skyward, until the orb follows them up, expands, encompasses. Encompasses and diffuses, containing and leaving itself. I know that having the patience to await the center is the main thing.

I know, but still I feel a tremor expand from my belly in lightning tentacles when I lose the light again. My next step feels forever and my foot lands below the previous path, the path in light that is no more. The path in light had shape, texture, I knew walls to be stone, a path to be surrounded, I miss a musty scent that I snapped at, trying to inhale, consume, hold, pervading; the dark path loses reference. An abyss. A commitment to an infinite abyss. If I jump, where might I land?

And if it's nowhere...I remember staying awake all night, fighting some terror of non-sleep, finally expelling myself from my room. I rode the train for hours, I navigated under and out of the city and

arose to meet the sea at dawn. The cold clean feeling of winter pervaded me especially, snow ground into sand beneath my feet, I considered the sea stretching into the creaky sky, I filled with coldness and brightness refracted off the water and the snow, invading me, but inside me the same dark nothing remained, a knotted despair that would not be expelled; I could shout at the sky or pray toward it, I ran at the ocean and threatened it, my feet weighted by sand and snow and cold. Perhaps if I'd flung myself into the surf, allowed the freezing salty light to overwhelm me, then I'd have risen breathless and empty into a clear empty space...a clear nothing that would exorcise the knot in my belly, the knot that writhes now to meet the darkness around me. Pure dark nothing is real, I can hold it though I can't contain the opposite, a blinding light so huge it negates me. I imagine my negative pinned in the whiteness, held firm by its force, and shrink back to the path. An abyss could be heaven.

The same stark suicide. Abandoning myself the same, no matter where I land. What's worse is seeing...do you remember, I thought, do you remember learning in physics class that cats who are dropped from fourteen stories are more likely to survive than those who fall from four (what is this intimation, "who are dropped," they fall as easily from greater heights) because they forget they're doomed, they untense, forget to fear, land limp and dumb. Without sight, I too may forget, I will fall endlessly into my own abyss, dark or light it will blind me. My abyss because it's inside me, endlessly as I enter myself again and again, suspended in my fall.

I want to tell a joke. You know, the kind of thing that would break up an abyss, I recall a life in which I'd have expected something solid at the end, something not as dark or light as where I'm currently blinded, an infinite sightless fall could do with a joke. Otherwise it's just me, falling into myself, tumbling into and fumbling with the dark knots in my belly, the hard knobs in my elbows, the cuckoo shaking around my skull. Here goes: what did the one-winged crow call? I was thinking of a joke a friend used to perform for me, it ended with my finger in his mouth, it was something dirty that made me screech in a way I criticized later from the empty darkness of my sleepless bed. Sleepless bed and its unsleeping passenger.

But the crow, think of the one-winged crow spiraling groundward as it flaps lopsided, flops furiously aloft, what is its sound? I am a spiraling crow in an abyss, unable even to feel if I turn, air's resistance has lost me, perhaps gravity is a thing of my past. The gravitas of gravity, lending meaning to my falls. My falls, the minute trips of youth, a toe misplaced and damning, a body aloft and crashing. A moment suspended, my body aloft, timelessness experienced first between a fall and a crash. Nothing to be done, nothing for me, nothing tingles as my feet slip, my face turns skyward. Nothing necessitates this moment of panic, then the float; superhuman I parallel pain, I face the heavens, I spiral quicker toward hardness. Gravitas may be an incorrect derivation; it's the inverse, a lightness that we cannot celebrate, cannot hold. A lightness that gravity corrects: the gravity of a mortally wounded bird, cawing at its death as the grass rises greenly to meet it. How could such a bird exist, a bird with one wing? A joke doesn't recognize its ravaged side, its blood-matted feathers, its vital organs coming clear. A joke, some joke, just a short fall.

The answer is nothing. The crow leaves itself before it ever hits the ground. We're not equipped, I engage the crow, we cease in the void, you and I. The space between my mouth open and laughter and the slack jaw of death; where does that movement happen?

Back to the light. Losing myself in thoughts won't get me anywhere, though focus hardly seems better...the patience to await the center. As a woman I can hold that spark, draw it inside me to a

warmer darkness where it can grow more safely, it can expand as it pleases, cradled in wet comfort. A cold black spiral is no place for a young spark, my hand hits my hip as I look up toward the spark I chastise, I feel my mother in my throat, I try to laugh. The black swallows the found noise, an indication that I should have heeded before releasing anything.

I've been hiding from this but I am afraid; first, that I will spiral forever; second, that I will fall off a ledge, into an abyss, every second approaching death conditions; third, that I will fall into the abyss but die naturally, a human prone to death—in a unit of time, a small calculation in such a space—of my natural age, my frequent hunger, my rampant desire. The worst is this third. I am afraid.

But here is the punchline: I pause, I lost it, I thought of something just moments ago. Moments...? How long have I considered the spiraling crow? Something parallel in the joke and the crow, both recede as I try to grasp them, both vanish into the black. I close my eyes to recall them and grey waves appear at a distance. Grey waves are all my mind will give me.

I open my eyes; I feel concern for my disappearing memory, I worry that it has been swallowed into some eternal ca...ca, as the crow flies it's a short distance, nothing at all...my toes tingle and I remember: cavern. My mind supplies "cabin" first. Perhaps that is the joke.

Both the bird and the punchline are lost, the bird and the punchline, both have been dropped live, a fourteen-story cat, an enormous cat that grows to the height from which it was dropped. To become the space we've inhabited, will that help? I, a piece of an infinite spiraling abyss. I, a map of a certain eternity. My fingers no longer touch a wall on either side.

Nobody will believe me if I return, I think...nobody will understand. Nobody has walked this spiral alongside my self, sharing a blackness so empty it cannot fill me. Nobody will know if I fall. A constant source of..

Still I walk toward the light; when I was young and driving with my parents I'd turn backwards in tunnels, trying to remain in the kaleidoscope mosaic for a little longer. The light at the end of the tunnel meant an unwelcome return, a necessary breath, a full round belly. A light now...just a state change. Like the tourist attraction in the American west where people can stand in four states, experience a state change and then eat a peanut butter and jelly or go drink a beer with friends. The light is a step to accomplish so I can forget it.

I must fall. I begin to run. I will reach the edge, I will fall and know that I am falling. I will keep the light on my left side, I will run perpendicular to the light until I am stopped or let loose. Perhaps a trip will help, I try to stumble, I run on my toes. No, it's unnatural; I run faster, I feel myself unencumbered by gravity, by atmosphere, by ground; I gather myself and accelerate. Even an abyss couldn't contain me at this speed, as I gather all that I pass into myself, the darkness becomes me as I'm flung through it, and when I close my eyes I can see its me, I can see a swirling cloud of dark with glittering eyes, steaming nostrils, a thing alive. I will gather my self until I've expanded beyond the abyss. I will break my fall, I am faster than knowing so I do not, I am a frenzy. A whirling dervish, a maxi-god, a...I trip. It is done. I can no longer be darkness or light.

I have not been alone. As color rushes back to my cheeks and my eyes, my surroundings, I see movement on my side. But movement of another cannot stop my spiral. I remember being quite young, in a field, rock formations surrounded it and led to a dense birch copse, or a wood, I was

quite young; little friends were near me, playing, perhaps we attended a celebration, a birthday party. I ran across the field, I climbed the rocks in my light party dress, and I spun, I became a maelstrom, a frenzy, a spectacle. My mother shouted that I'd fall, that I'd exposed myself, she ran toward me from a house across the field, and I twirled and lost her and felt the air on my legs, felt the breeze spin around my middle, the darklight shadows played on me as I spun, I took them into me, I whirled until I tripped, a frenzy to the end. I felt the air in me then the mossy rock, I smelled it on me as I fell, I was not afraid because it stirred inside me, it became me as I approached it. Now it stirs heavy in me again as something moves beside me, a forming feeling glows deep in me, I open my eyes wide.

