

Eros, Poseidon and Me

“Darkness, darkness, be my pillow...”

Jesse Colin Young, singer, song writer

There was no one to call to file the edge off, or sharpen it, that it might open a bottle or book. My dog knew, animals are smarter than men. Buddy shuffled unhurried across the room, looked at me with “been-there-it-hurts-like-a-motherfucker-don’t-it?” eyes. He didn’t lick me or curl up at my feet knowing that I had to fall through the hole by myself. Dogs don’t waste your time with empty sympathy. The little guy just stared, like he was trying to soak some of the pain right out of me, absorb it into his own hardened dog-heart. The pain left only two options. I knew she would be pissed if the blood stained the new beige carpet.

How hard can it be to snatch something real from the ever-fleeting, to do a thing for the thing’s sake, to see the rottenness in life but ignore the smell and reach for the broom? How fortunate was I now, as I had been in the past, to have my own Betty Ford Center two blocks away?

I put an old 3/2 mm wetsuit in my backpack, tossed some wax, the rest of some half-hearted bottle and a mushy apple in the front basket. I grabbed the first board out of the rack and tucked it under my arm.

I don’t remember coasting down the hill on my bike or scrambling down the bluff as the sun left its mark on the hellish day. I couldn’t tell you if it was a beautiful sunset or a cloudy dusk. I knew that it was getting dark all the way around; the sea and the sky welding at the horizon.

Buddy stood on the shore and pointed like a bird dog. Strange for a mutt. “Go home . Go home. Forget it, suit yourself.” I took a bite of the apple and tossed the core into the sand watching grains stick to it like memory to the soft part of the brain.

I thought I knew her. I was sure. In the end, it was like the others, shadows of potential, possibility smothered by daily silence.

Paddling out I began to notice things I hadn’t before: the way the cold water seeps in around your knees before your waist, the way the little wake comes off the tip of your board in angular vees, going somewhere, no where. I noticed how the shallow spots on the reef created circular boils on the fast-dropping tide, pulling water, energy and life from its center back into some black hole beneath the surface, a place from which that life and water were born.

There was only one other guy out, one other surfer in the lightest part of the dark hoping maybe, for one last toothy wave of a two hour session. He only needed a ride in, didn’t have to worry about being caught from behind.

I paddled right by him, avoiding his stare. Nothing he could say would’ve made a difference. He was nothing. Maybe he was just got out of the joint and hadn’t surfed for three years. Maybe he was a “trustafarian” who surfed every

day to avoid the boredom of excess. I turned my head just enough to lift my chin.

"Word," I said.

"Word up," he replied.

He paddled away. I didn't see him leave the water or walk up the path, only heard a dog bark.

Out of the corner a big set started to well up on the outside reef. How far had this wave traveled only to finally release its energy here in six feet of black, kelpy salt water?

I paddled hard, spun at the last minute and dropped in, one with the falling lip, Rosetta Stone in sync. At the bottom, I laid it over hard and felt the board bite deep into the wave's face. Anger and regret driving me along.

I could've done better with her.

The wave in front now, feeling the rocky bottom, standing up, begging to be held like a child bringing home a picture made at school.

"Look, Dad. Look at this picture I made for you!"

Look, son, look at this wave I made for you.

Inside now, an absence of feeling in my heart, there's darkness at the wave's circular core. It's a place of hope and I strain towards a faint pulsing glow, the glimmer of some left over refracted light off the bluff as I squirt out onto a broad, nurturing shoulder. Understanding in some small way what Frankl realized after surviving Auschwitz, "What is to give light must endure burning."

Paddling back out, I glanced over at a sea lion. He returned my stare with a queer look, as if to say, "I can do that." The ocean could swallow him up and get nothing. He made an obscenely joyous sound that I'd remember and be empowered by.

The sky above me reflected only blackness. I surfed by feel, wondering what it would be like to feel the shark's first strike. Pondering what it would be like to die in such novel way, eviscerated by what tomorrow's paper would call, "A killing machine that came out from beneath the ocean's surface to rip the man's leg off." The autopsy would say that, "he had an enlarged heart."

It would be a fitting death.

The moon was now the only witness to what would be my catharsis or destruction. Sometime after midnight that great block of ice that had settled in my chest began to melt. I wanted to believe that shit about truth at first light but I felt that it was the night, the absence of external fire, the melding of one day into the next, that opens the gates. The rain started; loud but soft on the back of my neck.

In the beginning she was real. Now she changes her eye color with tinted glass. Other times her eyes looked dead, regardless of augmentation.

I paddle out again, creating my truth, rehearsing my death.

Almost imperceptible at first, I begin to notice it first in the waves I choose and the way I surf them. Then in my relationship with the ocean surface,

the way my board sits gently upon this sheet of smooth black ice, the way my hands softly make quiet little circles on its skin.

I cannot see the advancing swell but I sense something gathering up, waiting for me, if I have the courage. I paddle hard for the horizon, the lower stars blocked by this advancing swell. Harder now, pulling at still water, onward to meet Her.

This is *Her* home. I am a guest. But I am open to invitation and experience.

When it finally comes, it is like no wave I have ever ridden: big but not unwieldy, imperfect in shape and texture, uneven and raw. She carries me gently but I cannot stand, content to lie prostrate, my face close to Hers.

Following the shelf, I ride until my fins hit the sandy shore and I stay there, motionless, breathing. A moon bends under a passing cloud. A phosphorescent edge of foam is switched on.

I let the match burn before grabbing my board and walked toward the cliff. My footsteps kick sand into the air.

She is gone. They are gone. Buddy is there.

I see her older moving in the dark, digging in bent trash cans outside the theater looking for someone new to play her part. We are making choices in the moment; choices that matter, that hurt. She still carries that edible mayhem in her, dying and living not in the sunrise but in every south wind. I thank her for the madness and the adventure before saying goodbye to her gentle violence and half-dead eyes.

I've met someone else, I say to myself, tasting the words. She comes and goes. We are...old friends.

Walking back up the wet clay trail, Buddy waits for me at the top, laughing, I imagine, at how humans confuse absolution and the absolute. I know that surfing and what is left of my life are there now glaring back in the headlights of a passing train.

I am not haunted by Her.