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The North Sea in February

Lars Horn

The North Sea in February: not cold enough to kill you, or at least not straight off, not where you were. But still, it was cold and grey. It was as if someone had opened a tap somewhere and was syphoning out the blues and creams, the purple flashes. Everything was toning down, like on Photoshop when you click the saturation level and the picture flattens, chucks its innards out. It had been a good two and a half hours now. You felt you were going the same way as the blues and the pinks. Despite all the wetsuit gear, the hood and the gloves and the boots, your body was blurring—the details bruising into crude strokes.

Fingers and toes, then hands and feet, arms, legs: all the finer points of yourself were fading into larger, clumsier limb; your lips felt like a part of your cheeks; your fingers had become hands, and now you weren't sure where they ended and your arms began, same went for your feet and legs. You were probably about six blocks of flesh now: body, arms, legs and head. And you were heavier than before, not just colder, but heavier.

You thought about the distance it had taken to get here: the past couple of hours, and then generally: yesterday, the day before yesterday. And from being six you felt the body finally solidify, rigidify into single form. The absoluteness of it was so sure. And the elation of realising this was how it went: understanding that colour-bleed was meeting body-recede, one movement sinking into the other, this paradoxically sent you rising; you remember you felt you were flying.

And you rolled; your eyes rolled into the wet, into the grey-green depth; and you remember thinking how odd that it should seem green from underneath when it was grey from above. And it was odd how hot it was in your chest; you had been so cold. And the burning in your ears, you had forgotten you had ears.

It was as you were thinking this, thinking it all very matter-of-factly, that you felt

Hangover

your solid lump of a body wrench-crooked: as though someone, seeing you had lost your limbs and that the joints had stopped, someone had decided to make a new one—not a very good one mind, this new joint—it was right on the hip and it wrenched again. You felt like saying to them that this was a bad choice. Your legs wouldn't fold sideways, no-one's would; they'd have to fold you front ways—torso forwards to the legs—that's how the pelvis works, Christ, anyone knows that. They'd have more luck trying to bend you backwards, shoulder blades to calves; I mean that might work at a push, but folding the pelvis sideways? Why try and make a body fold the one way it can't? And you shouted this at them, shouted so hard the burning got hotter; and then they seemed to understand because they turned you round; and you were going to say, you were going to say that was good because then they could fold you forwards into a pike, but they missed the point again: they let your head roll back, flop like that, like they'd forgotten about folding you up, which wouldn't do. You don't leave a bed sheet midway there and then drop it to the floor do you? And then you felt them at your back then cold

dry icy cold

then bright

then shouting, quiet then loud, like someone was messing with the volume; it was them again, the one who couldn't fold a body, or a bed sheet probably; it was them making all the noise. And still grabbing at you, and fastening and shouting and pressing at your face. Or was it your mouth? Yes, mouth. You shouted to get off—but you couldn't have because you could feel your teeth. And you could feel your teeth because something was pressing your lips over them tight, really tight. In fact, what you could feel was less your teeth and more the sharp points where they dug into your cheeks. And then you could taste the salt, and yes, the thumb on your lips, and now the fingers, the hand; you could feel the whole hand grappling round your jaw. And the salt again, but this time in your eyes.

Eyes, teeth, lips, jaw. And ears. You knew you could feel your ears because the hand round your face was still shouting, really shouting. And, to be honest, it was irritating because you were trying to think, to work this out, because it didn't look right: everything kept sliding. And now you could really hear: a slopping-sloshing sound kept slapping into your ear. That was unpleasant. But then again, at least

it muffled the shouting. Is that them still tugging at you? What are they doing? Can't even fold a body. Can't even shut up and see how green the sea is. In fact, Christ, that grey had gone bluey-green and the sun was out—fable-like that, the timing. And you wanted to tell this hand and this voice that they should just shut up and stop trying to fold you in by the mouth because you wouldn't roll up that way either, because you weren't one of those stow-away anoraks that stuff in on themselves. But more to the point, you wanted them to shut up and to realise, realise they were living a miracle moment, a light-shifting end: the sun sitting there, splitting sea from sky. And it had brought all the colours with it, was tossing them back into earth and air, adding dark and light everywhere. The sun had caught up with three-dimensionality and was shaking it back into the landscape.

If they stopped shouting, they might see what a moment you were in. But the hand didn't stop grappling, and the voice didn't stop shouting. And now there was a jaw that kept gristling against your face, jolting the eye sockets and, dirty sod—kept blowing into your nose. But you couldn't seem to shout, so you just let your shoulders slump. At least you saw the sun better that way. At least one of you would be making the most of it. And that was when you decided that this would be your sun. Like all those famous suns, like the one that bred maggots in dead dogs, the tall tinging one, or the one whose cymbals burst tar and blinded, well, this sun was yours: the colour one. This sun brought clouds into heaviness, deepened the sea and vaulted the sky, scattered birds through it, and changed the burning in your ears for one in your eyes.