

The haze thickened around him, cold and welcoming. He longed to touch it, but as soon as he extended two fingers towards the frail wetness, it past through them; no longer existing, just a feeling. As he walked, the fog thickened further still, infiltrated his mind, caressing it into a soft, dripping nothingness. Every sound around him echoed and amplified to reflect his mind; the pipes creaking below his feet whispered and called to him; puddles on the side of the road gazed back at him, vacant and friendly.

Tiring of the hard concrete, he turned off into the damp grass towards the river. Droplets clung to the bottom of his pant leg and soaked his shoes. But, he didn't mind. *Warm socks can come later*, he mused.

Walking faster now, he could hear the distant rabble of the river, coaxing him onward. It seemed as if the world was completely empty of people; of any sound aside from the rustling water.

Then he saw it: A smallish someone, some 30 feet away. Judging by the slight figure, he took it to be a young woman. He then heard the unmistakable sound of stone on stone, and another, fainter sound; wet like the mist in his brain, but not as affable. It disturbed him slightly. A few paces forward, he finally recognized the sound of sobbing, and decided it was prudent not to go any further.

The haze began to clear ever so slightly, and he could make out more of her outline. She continued to cast pebbles into the rapids; some of them skipped, while other merely cracked wetly against a larger adversary. Each crack was met by a louder squeak from her lips. *Could this be why she was so upset?* The hazed receded. She seemed to

have given up her rocky game, her hands at her side, looking tensed; he then noticed odd lumps about her body, some protruding slightly from her hips, and a larger, more serious one above her waist. *Pregnant*, he reasoned. She took a few steps closer toward the water's edge, and ceased crying. He could not for the life of him understand what she was doing. *Why?*

He realized then that the mist was completely gone from him; from his surroundings, from his mind. The rushing of the water seemed too loud in his ears now, and it was no longer welcoming as he watched her edging closer and closer to the lip of the river. A vague alarm sounded in the back of his mind and he took another few steps towards her. She didn't notice.

He could now see her completely. Despite the inclement weather, she wore a summery red dress, her long brown hair cascaded down her back, like the slick rapids inches from her toes. He indistinctly knew he should say something, anything; call out to her, ask her a question, make some sort of indication that he was there. His thoughts weren't enough to be heard over the now roaring water. She continued her slow procession into the river, he realized now that there was a long rock she was making her way across. She was crying again, louder than before. Suddenly, she fell to her knees on the soaking slab of stone and halted, clutching at her head, sounding hysterical. She began to babble incoherently into the sounds, her voice slipping and sliding along with the river. He couldn't make out a word, and remained rooted to the spot, transfixed by this absurd display; his vocal cords refused to agree with his now screaming brain.

He watched her, gasping and muttering on all fours for what seemed like hours, until finally she rose shakily to her feet again. She was still whimpering pathetically and looked like she was going to take one last step...

Then she lost her footing. He saw it happen as if in slow motion, foot sliding on the wet rock, out from under her; her body arching weirdly in mid air before she landed with a sickening, muffled crunch to the earth.

The soft sound of her descent acted as a trigger, his voice finally escaping the prison of his throat in a strangled yell of shock and concern. Wordlessly, he ran toward where she lay on the sharp, black stone; reaching her, he half carried, half dragged her to the shelter of a gnarled tree that grew near the water's edge. He recognized now the sounds of his own ragged breath, coming in short gasps as he tried to put her down as gently as possible on the sodden grass. *She hit her head*, he thought; her eyes were closed, and she lay motionless on the grass. She could have been asleep. He supposed she was beautiful as he studied her face; even beneath the ghostly pallor, which looked even stranger as it bore the swollen wetness of recent tears.

He shook her gently, not wanting to hurt her further. She stirred feebly in his trembling arms; he noticed a dark something spreading where she lay, staining her dress. He realized with a nauseous jolt what the unknown fluid must be. Her eyes opened; surveying the heavens curiously, as if something was written there. Finally, she looked into his face. The question he burned to ask her stuck in his throat, but she seemed to hear it.

“...Wet...gravity,” she managed to murmur up at him. Her eyes shut again. He then remembered the misshapen lumps by her waist. He pulled several heavy rocks from the pockets of her dress.

The rain began to fall over their heads.