

Crying

It was difficult for James to let go of it. He had carried his love for her through so many hard times, never triumphing by it, but never forgetting it, either. Now she was gone. It was the end of their relationship, which she had chosen to conclude. James put his hands in his pockets and meandered by the shoreline. He watched seagulls descend and gulp foam like it was food; he sympathized with them.

For six months James had been living an inactive cycle of his life, not going out, not making friends, not keeping friends, not pretending to care. The demands of his job were overwhelming on even the easiest days and his heart physically hurt in his chest, as though it were crying in James' place.

It was true: he had not cried. Not the real tears that wait at the bottom of the pain, only the slight drizzles that threaten a storm of such proportion one will generally run for cover. Now it was too much to bear. James hunched his shoulders against the mounting winds over the surf and closed his eyes for a moment to better inhabit his mind, which was empty and slow. He drew a deep breath through his nostrils and a great ball of inner pain welled up in his sinuses at the peak of his nose.

"I don't want to miss her," he thought, contracting his forehead. "I don't want to feel the loss; it's too big." He was right: the loss was big. Its size was exactly its staying power, and somewhere inside James knew he had to face it to move on. But facing it was hard, and letting go harder.

James kicked some sand aimlessly, uncooperatively. Then he dropped into a sitting position, hanging his head between his knees. All at once the tears came, streaming uncontrollably, as if James were suddenly leaking. He looked down through the watery pools brimming in his eyes and saw a larger pool forming in the sand between his legs. It was the size of a quarter, then a cookie, then a grapefruit in diameter. In its center was a reflection of James crying, first his eyes, then his forehead, then his whole suffering face.

It was a long time before James looked away from that reflection, which right before that moment half-smiled at him. When he stood up, he was thirsty and his body felt more solid than for months; he was amazed he had carried it around all his life without noticing how heavy it was. The act of moving it was a chore, but contrary to habit and expectation, he did not want to take it home and put it down. He was strong enough to carry it and to carry it often would increase his worldly strength.

James took a parting glance at the puddle of his tears. It was smaller from this vantage point, only the size of a dime. The sand was already absorbing it, returning all water to the sea. James caught the last drop of it forever disappearing. He squatted and scooped the last drop with fingertip, guarding it from the wind and blowing on it gently to clear away grains of sand. When his finger was clean, James put the tiny tear to his tongue and tasted the salt of it. Rising to his full height, he looked out at the sea, a sad smile on his face for the sunset.