

Saucers

The saucer hovered with the motion of a corkscrew. To observers directly beneath it and those far aside, the hovering was obvious; the craft was not descending. So it appeared at the extremes of observation. Anywhere else, the grooved turning of the vessel suggested an indisputable downward momentum, threatening to crush the people directly beneath, who stood transfixed, like deer in glaring headlights.

From our position slightly off to one side we shouted our pitiful pleas to these mesmerized earthlings to clear out, get away from the touch-down point. We watched their hair dancing wildly in the unpredictable winds stirred by the saucer, which seemed to teeter as it dropped. We saw their thin forearms shield their eyes and their angular elbows somehow reflect the otherworldly light.

It was no use; they did not move. The saucer continued its false descent while its most proximitous ambassadors awaited their destruction, like willing victims to ancient sacrificial rites. Through the maelstrom of sand and swirling debris, it appeared that one man was lifting a child, a boy, offering him as absolutely the first to make contact, an arm's length higher than all the others. The boy lay still in the man's stalwart grip, his frail body limp and dangling. A woman held the boy's hand, either stroking or tugging, it was impossible to tell. An empty wheelchair lay on its back, the desert fitfully coating it with crystalline skin.

The saucer began emitting a rumbling. So we thought from our hearing position, which again was off to one side. The sound made our skeletons vibrate within us. We were more aware of our flesh-and-bones reality than ever before; questions of soul apart from the body, of spiritual essences, yes, all the old questions we carried and carried and did not know we were carrying anymore—they dissolved from our coursing bloodstreams like too much nitrogen gas.

We who occupied the middle ground were as divers in a deep blue sea. As the saucer slowly sank, it seemed instead that we were rising, slowly rising; that above our heads a glimmering surface approached, expanding and contracting, the liquid equivalent of our hopes and fears. We surged upward; we drifted askew. A current carried us even as we stood perfectly still, reverberating from deep inside.

The saucer had stolen our vocal chords. We grabbed hold of our neighbors by the shoulders with both hands, all of us, like wrestlers do. We looked into wide eyes, as if seeing a mirror, the mouths revealed there in constant exaggerated motion, but nothing coming out, not even air. On the contrary, the air was going in, abundantly in. It was too much to swallow and our resistant throats bulged with the effort to holler against the invisible infusion.

The result was a bellyful of words, sentiments, and vocalizations. One who has never digested one's unreleased noise can never understand, can never feel how the turbulence of it rattles the soft inner organs, how the glands are its slaves, pumping thick tides of fluid that surge with resent and remonstrations. It was everything we could do just to hold each other in place.

Yet there was no alternative either. Farther inward, beneath the craft, the doomed inner circle drowned in a billowing tumult of sand. It seemed the ship intended to build itself a mountain for landing on. Nearby earthlings were its first natural resource for this purpose, pliant cornerstones and foundation. That direction was hopeless. We wanted to back away, but no movement was possible.

Upon the far hills the most remote participants passed through a period of wild winds and fallen power cords; showers of sparks lit the fading sky like new stars, as live cables broke free and lashed the land, spending their rage. But the winds died at that altitude; the power cords became only disheveled hair, wilting sea urchins, a porcupine or two with heavy sunstroke and no will to prickle. The danger passed over the outskirts and the people there ran.

It was infuriating not being able to join them. Our bellies glowed red with the injustice of it. Yet somewhere inside us we were also relieved, yes, relieved. Relieved at the apparent air-tightness of our doom, the significant almost-ness of our escape, which was nevertheless impossible. We were not quite the dead ones beneath us, but not the traumatized either. No above or below.

The craft had a power for erasing those conditions, all conditions. Its gleaming exterior, constantly moving so that movement was always in question, like a speeding tire, reflected so sharply as to show us a perfect image of ourselves whenever the near side dipped our way. Who were those magnified creatures in that looking glass? It was embarrassing to consider them us, to connect us to our visitors as their first experience of another world's life. We

could not help but wonder did the saucer tip away so quickly each time out of mercy over its painful revelations?

Yet the underside of the saucer was no less revealing. There we saw nothing, or rather the absolute Nothing that lay beyond ourselves. We could see through the saucer. Its central point on bottom was a powerful vacuum, raising hills as one function, swirling winds, but also exciting the eyes to come forward in a manner of speaking, to refine their focus through the quivering lens of the saucer itself and penetrate the furthest reaches of Space with a glance.

We saw the backs of our heads, inverted craters. We saw through the saucer and through the unknown and the path of our vision carved a ubiquitous circle, emerging again through the starting point of our eyes, the ending point of our eyes, at which time we convulsed as if jolted from sleep, the saucer no longer pitching away from us, nor toward us, merely hovering, descending, lifting, reaching.

We wanted to hide from the saucer. We collectively blinked and the saucer vanished in that our last iota of darkness.. The earth settled, the winds stopped, the people below us began a sudden clamor of dusting themselves and jubilantly swearing, as happens immediately after the inexplicable and terrifying. On the hilltops above us the others crept back into view timidly, waving at us with slow, hesitant gestures. We were already different in their eyes, already an indelible reminder. For we have never closed our eyes since that one collective blink.