

Brocken Spectre

Richard Warren was a perfect specimen of the sandwich generation. He currently spent more time on the phone to his mother's doctor than he did for either his own dodgy knee or his children's anxiety. If you added in all the days off, he'd had to take for Mumsie's numerous MRI scans, blood tests, rheumatoid arthritis consultant meets and the four visits to A&E when atrial fibrillation had sent her heartbeat to the moon, he was shagged. Richard needed a spell of rest and recuperation preferably in the mountains, not a supporting sojourn in WGH's Acute Admissions Unit.

Work was no relief either, when all and sundry were talking about their latest binge watch, he had nothing to give. He couldn't remember the last time he'd relaxed in front of the gogglebox.

Richard held back his laughter at the weekly board meeting. Blue-sky thinking, cloud storage, the cloud community, elastic and hybrid cloud solutions, total corporate claptrap. He daydreamed about his own private cloud. A place where he could float, laze in front of the pool, simply kick back with a margarita and think of the times he'd spent traipsing the hills. His pre-marriage passion.

Back in his corner office on the fifteenth floor, he shut the door, pulled the internal blinds shut and sank into his Eames chair. Eyes closed, he let past adventures drift across the inside of his lids, a cinematic bank of cloud memories rather than the usual motes of blood infused eyeworms.

A halo of marshmallow circled low around Kilimanjaro with Kibo's summit popping through and peaking out over the Serengeti. The lenticular Unidentified Flying saucer over Aconcagua, where katabatic winds left Dodge in the morning and their anabatic twins soared right back up the glacier to blast town in the early evening. All the portent of severe conditions higher up and two wasted weeks at base camp waiting for a weather window.

Then there was his fantasy. To witness a Brocken spectre. He'd spent so much time in high places but had never seen his own personal haloed ghost staring back at him. The spectre appeared when when you were at the summit or on a knife edge ridge and the sun shone from behind to project your shadow onto the cloud layer opposite. Your elongated shadow would emerge from the mist, with your head enveloped in a glory of backscattered sunlight. The Broken was Richard's lifegoal, to witness one - his world's ambition.

Thoughts of mackerel skies and horsetails sponsored Richard's desperate wish to be high in the lakes on Sharp Edge – Blencathra, with one companion, his private, intimate, personal Brocken Spectre.

The phone rang confiscating his reverie. He picked up and his secretary informed him, 'your mother's on the phone again, she's worried about next-week's appointment.'