

Davenport

The sunset was almost unrecognisable through the thick, iron grey clouds. It instead invoked the image of a desert cliff face, the streaks of pink, orange and yellow that peaked through looking like layers in a sedimentary rock, exposed to the world by the cutting power of the river below. Unlike a river, the cold waters of the north pacific showed no signs of a powerful current. They moved slowly and rhythmically, and would have seemed peaceful had it not been for the sound of the tide pounding on the rocky shore below the cliffs. Their lusterless silver grey surface showed no hint of the beautiful sight above. The skyline on each side of the setting sun was equally unexpressive. The greys of the clouds and sea blended so perfectly it was impossible to tell where the sky ended and the waves began, save for the twinkling lights of the fishing vessels beginning their night's work. The few cypress that managed to grow on the ocean's edge were stunted and bent, their gnarled branches clutching towards the fading light, curled back inland by the powerful winds that had long since torn all other plant life from the region. In the largest of these trees sat a bright blue hammock, hung precariously between the trunk and a long branch that had grown too heavy, and collapsed back into the dirt. The man inside looked unconcerned with the perilous nature of his situation, or really anything at all. He lay quite still, the only movement an orange flicker in his eyes reflected from far across the water, as the sea breeze rocked him back and forth. A few feet away lay an old wool blanket, its once bright colors now blending into the surrounding dirt. On it sat a woman, singing softly as she played the guitar. Though the words were lost to the sounds of the sea, the notes of the instrument filled the warm night air, bringing a smile to the face of everyone who had come to watch the day's end. As the last of the sun's warmth crept below the horizon, the watcher's eyes were drawn to another

light source, a strange orange glow that flickered like a candle, larger, brighter, and farther than any of those on the ships. The people chatted idly about the light, as they packed up their towels and blankets, not realising the dark clouds were the perfect shade to hide the noxious smoke billowing up into night. They wandered down the narrow path on the cliffside, carrying sleeping children and rolled up blankets. They would not know for some time that the light was an oil rig, caught in the throes of a terrible fire that would continue to burn throughout the coming weeks. They didn't know that the next sunset they came to see would be invisible behind the foul black smoke that would make the air unbreathable for months. They didn't know that the fishman would labor through the night to pull up oil soaked catches, inedible to both the townspeople, and the other lives that depended on the sea. They didn't know that by the time the cleanup efforts were finished the town would be abandoned, its markets clear of seafood, its docks clear of ships, and its streets clear of people. They didn't know that everything they had ever known would be gone by the end of the month. As the last of the watchers faded away into the night, the man in the hammock moved for the first time. He sat up, looking at the flickering light with an expressionless face. He alone of those who had come for the sunset knew what the light was, and what it meant. After a minute or so he averted his eyes and lay back down. As the sea breeze, not yet tainted with the smell of the tragedies to come, continued to rock him back and forth, he closed his eyes, determined to enjoy one last night under the stars in Davenport.