

"Don't you think it's possible?" He said, not turning back to face her.

"What do you mean— *don't I think it's possible?* What does that mean? What's possible?" She said, staring into the back of his head as if trying to see within the workings of his mind.

"You don't, do you?" He said. "No one does. They used to say it wasn't possible, or that's what my grandfather told me, but now they don't even mention it—not at all. That's just how it is, though. They hardly look up anymore. So much looking down, it's a wonder anyone believes in anything more than the ground in front of them."

He stopped walking. Standing at the base of the mountain, the end of the valley—their valley—he turned to lock eyes with her, breaking her concentration aimed at piercing into his innermost thoughts. His eyes matched hers for just a second before hers fell away, dropping quickly to the valley floor.

"What do you really know, Suzie? What do any of us really know?" He said. "I mean, really? Suzie, where have you ever been that you ever felt like you were meant to be there?"

Her eyes searched the ground not rising again to confront his sharp gaze. She wanted to ask him why he had insisted that she come with him out here. She wanted to look straight at him and demand he take her back right then. She wanted to—she was sure she wanted to—but she did not. Something was bothering her that had been bothering her all afternoon—why had she come with him at the first? Why had she followed him at all? She thought about this, and it scared her that she did not know the answer. Still facing the ground, she closed her eyes tightly.

"Stop it," she said. "I don't know what you want from me. Why are we out here? Why did you bring me here? We're not—"

"Supposed to? Meant to? Suzie? And you ever think for once, why? Suzie, look at me. Suzie, please."

She sighed forcefully, attempting to make known her frustration. As if waking from a restless sleep, she forced open her eyes letting in the vision before her. Slowly, her head lifted. As her gaze made its way from the ground up to face her companion's eyes once more, she saw before her the same thing she had seen earlier that afternoon when he had first interrupted her in the middle of her chores.

As she looked at him, each part encountered by her sight was at once so easy to describe in so familiar terms. At the start, there was the pair of large—but not overly so—black shoes, worn around the seams, chipped and unpolished from being used too often for play and adventuring. Overlapping them at their lip, the blue dyed cotton pants—old, weathered, and stained by the boyish pursuits and passions of youth—started, then ran up long legs to the slim—but not overly so—waist. Around the waist, a mismatched dark brown belt held tightly a haggardly tucked-in white washed shirt, wrinkled through in every exposed space. The shirt covered over a wide torso and wrapped the full length of the two long arms. It came together and buttoned tightly at the base of the throat. Above the shirt, though, where the covering of clothing ended and skin and throat and flesh began, lay uncovered something that for her, then at that moment for the first moment perhaps, felt much harder to describe, much different than what she had seen even earlier that afternoon.

"Yes," she said. Her voice came out barely audible, a whisper—an anxious breath of one desperately trying to breathe more. Her eyes tried—and failed—frantically to escape his. The rest of her body froze as warmth enveloped her. The thunderous clamor of chaos, as if of some wild brute stirring about, awakened within her chest—a thumping growing more rapid by the second. She breathed shallow with despairing hope that the roar, the thunder, the sound of stampeding from within did not escape out into the open valley air.

"Suzie," he said.

"Yes," she said. She felt the world swim—herself, the ocean—and blinked hard to keep the consciousness of her mind from fading from the moment.

"Suzie, what would you say if I told you there was something up there? I mean it can't just be this like they always say. It just can't. I'm nearly seventeen now, and all I have ever known is this valley, but there must be more—out there, over this mountain, beyond that precipice. Don't you think it's possible? That something's out there worth finding."

"What do you mean there must be more? You know what they've said, *don't go beyond the valley's edge*. There is nothing out beyond the precipice. We've gone as far as we can go. What's the use of pressing at the edges? All you can hope to get is hurt or killed or much worse. There's nothing out there. You've been told to stay away from the mountain. It's for your own good. You know it just as well as I do."

"But, I don't know it, Suzie. That's just it; I don't know it at all. That's why we're here. I'm going to go. I'm going to press at the edges. I'm going to climb the mountain

and go up to the precipice and keep on going to the other side. I'm going to go up and see, and then I'm going to go over into somewhere I've never been before."

"But you can't," she said. She wanted to yell at him, to grab a hold of him and to keep him from taking any more steps anywhere. She wanted to yell at the top of her lungs so that someone, anyone, would come. She wanted to, but she did not. She could not. She stood there shaking, afraid, but not sure, anymore, why.

"Suzie, I need you to be here, so that you can know. You will know and then you can tell them what happened. You can take it back and tell them everything—how I pressed at the edges. How I climbed up to the precipice, and how I kept going. You can tell them, Suzie. You have to tell them. They have to know. They have to see."

She did not speak. She just stood and looked at him. She saw a tall young man wearing wrinkled worn clothing. She saw the valley—her valley. She saw a confused boy, and she saw everything everybody had always said. She could hear them now—*He's no good, Suzie. He's trouble. Stay away from him. What's wrong with the other boys, Suzie? He talks of nonsense and terrible visions, things that just never were, never will be.*

"I'm afraid," she said.

"I know," he said. "But, I knew you would come anyways. I knew you would stay. You're different, Suzie, from all the rest of them. One day, maybe you will go up, too, beyond the precipice. I hope you do. I think I would like to see you again. One day."

She looked away and down at the ground, and hoped for everything in her that her face did not betray the emotions swelling up within. She could not bear to look at him anymore. She could not bear it to think he might be right, to think that there could be

more than this valley—her home. She could not bear to look at him and see more than just a ruddy faced boy talking nonsense and of terrible visions, things that just might be, might always have been.

"I've got to start climbing now, Suzie. I need you to stand here and watch until I make it over. I have a few hours of light just yet. I should make it to the precipice before nightfall, and then you can go back to them. You can tell them all that you've seen, all that you've learned. You can stand here and watch and know that I'll be just fine."

He clasped her hand tight in his and then let it go, letting it drop to her side. He turned and started walking up the mountain.

"Frederick."

At hearing his name, he stopped. He turned and looked at her. He saw her.

"Frederick, what do you see? When you look at me? What do you see?"

His head moved up and down slightly as the rest of him stood still as the mountain itself, fixed fast in place. His lips loosened as his eyes unfocused just for a moment and gazed much farther beyond her. He blinked and squinted his eyes. With the intake of a long deep breath—a breath taken before embarking on a grand endeavor, to prepare the heart, the soul, and the mind, to summon the courage to step out of the shadows and beyond the fear—he looked at Suzie and smiled wide.

"I see," he said. He breathed out, a slight laugh escaping with the last of the air. "... absolutely everything. The whole of everything, wrapped up in brightness and bigness, warmth and excitement. Suzie, I see life itself and all its wonderful possibilities. Suzie, I see you, and you are more wonderful than you could ever imagine."

He nodded and laughed. A smile took over his face and transformed his features. He was Frederick, and to her, right then, he was something more—something beautiful, something grand. He turned and started to move again in the direction of the precipice.

"Frederick," the soft voice came up again after him. He stopped and turned. "I've never seen anything... not like that."

"Keep looking," he said. "You will. Eventually, if you don't stop trying to see, you will see. You will see what's always been there."

Neither of them said anymore, letting the gentle breeze whistling between speak for both the unspoken feelings hidden within. He breathed in deeply once more and turned one last time. Forward he continued, and in doing, finally began what he never before could because he always had supposed he never should.

She stood behind and watched him for what felt like hours. He had been just like her when he had begun, but after awhile he seemed to be more of the mountain than of anything like herself. He became more of the wild, moving away into the distance, than anything of the valley, than anything she had ever known. Eventually, she lost him amongst the outcroppings and the veins of dark stone rising with the slopes. He became a movement of the mountain itself. He had pressed at the edges, and the edges had taken him in.

She yet remained, even as the air around her began to chill as it prepared for the onset of night, and kept her eyes fixed on the precipice and the light streaming over the summit. It was there that she saw him arise once more from out of the rock of the mountain. There he climbed up, a silhouette against the fading light beyond—a new being, separate from the valley, divided from the mountain, something all his own.

From atop the mountain, Frederick—without looking back to the valley, to Suzie—made the last step to the edge of the precipice. From such a vantage, he looked beyond. There he saw. There he found. There he discovered.

"Never would I have thought. Now that is, I suppose, quite something for certain," he said. Letting himself free from the constraints of the ground upon which he had always seemed content to stand, he stepped forward. There, finally, once and for all, he chose no more to be any longer what he once always was.