

Anderson's Fork

Anderson and I are at Shaken, this tourist bar right on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Mediterranean. Of course he picked a table right at the edge, by this flimsy rope rail. We must be a thousand feet above the sea. Just sitting here makes me sweat a little.

"Think people jump from here?" Anderson says.

My stomach lurches at the thought. I know he's messing with me, but I can't help it. I look at my feet, firmly planted on the rock. White veins jig across the smooth black surface. The black is dusty and muted, like a giant chalkboard, the veins a lunatic scrawl.

"Can't be more than two hundred, two hundred fifty feet," he says. "I bet they do."

"Do what?" the waitress asks as she walks up with our drinks.

"Jump from here," Anderson says, taking his drink. He ordered the Caldera, this giant glass rimmed with shaved chocolate cliffs and filled with a frothy green sea of liqueur. It's big enough to have its own tide. "Thanks, Katrine."

She's Danish, he's a flirt.

"Not here," she says. "Around the north side there's a spot." Katrine's watching Anderson as she sets my drink down and it spills a little. I pull my napkin from under the heavy silverware, careful of the wind, and wipe up the spill.

"You've jumped?" Anderson's leaning forward. He's such an adrenaline junky.

"Yeah," she says. "It's why I'm here. If you want, I'll show you after my shift."

"Night jumping?"

"It's the best."

"Awesome," Anderson says, "I'm in."

His charm can be nauseating, but my drink helps: the Cliffside Shake, cream swirled through cocoa liqueur. It looks great until I take a sip, then it goes all murky.

We drink and admire the view. It's ridiculous, if you can get over the yawning edge just beyond our toes. If I focus on the horizon, or the island across the bay, I don't feel quite as queasy. The drink helps, and soon it's gone.

Katrine comes back and stands in the narrow space between the table and the rail.

"How was the Caldera?" she asks.

"Epic," Anderson says, winking at her. She settles down on the rope and starts gently pushing herself back and forth, like a kid on a park swing. I swallow and study the ground.

"Can I bring you another one?"

"You bet," he says. Anderson always wants to bet things. "I'll try the Sunken City."

"Good choice." She looks away from Anderson for a moment. "You?"

"I'm good."

"What?" Anderson draws his lip up and bunches his brow, looking like I just vomited all over his head. "Bring him"--he turns to Katrine--"what do you recommend?"

"Do you like olives?" She asks me like I'm Anderson's little brother.

"Not really."

"How about gin?"

"Not so much."

"How about the Seven Sunken Souls," she says. "It's our take on a Gibson. Blue curaçao and Jaeger with pickled onions."

"Perfect," Anderson says.

I don't point out that a Gibson is mostly gin. I won't be drinking it anyway, why distract them from what's really going on?

Katrine hops up as if she's been lounging on a couch. They're both beaming at each other. I want to push them over the cliff.

When our drinks come, Anderson's looks like a normal martini, stuffed olives in the oily clarity of gin and vermouth. Mine looks like whore sauce, iridescent blue with little onions swirling around the bottom, rimmed with lemon and lime wedges. It's big enough to kill me.

Anderson slouches in his chair, cradling his drink between woven fingers. He stretches his legs out, slides his feet under the sagging rope rail, and hooks his heels over the cliff's edge.

"How can you do that?" I say, looking away.

"What?"

"Sit there like that."

"C'mon, there's a rail." Anderson leans forward and gives the rope a good shake.

"Give it a try."

Anyone else I would call an asshole, but this is Anderson. His enthusiasm is ridiculous, clueless.

"Man, the waves are hammering the cliff down there." Anderson leans over the rope, drink in one hand, tipping up his sunglasses with the other. Wind balloons his shirt.

"Check it out!"

"I'd probably seize up and take both of us down." Just thinking about it makes me want to puke.

"Looks doable." Anderson sits back down. He picks up his fork and his napkin skips across the table and sails over the rail. The wind feels strong enough to blow a person over.

Anderson says, "Loads of silverware down there, I bet."

The way he says it makes me look over, which is what he wants. He smiles, wide-eyed, casually flicking his fork over the edge.

"Cut it out!" I look around for Katrine, but we're safe. Who am I kidding? She'd probably jump after the fork before she'd scold Anderson. Or it would become some kind of crazy, hyper-sexualized contest that ended with both of them crushed on the rocks below. Or, with Anderson's luck, both of them swimming off into the sunset.

"I bet she takes our plates as soon as we're done."

"She'll take yours if she's smart," I say. "What else do you think's down there?"

"Atlantis."

"Whatever." I notice a coin in a thick seam of whitish rock running under my foot, and wonder how many coins are lying among the lost flatware on the seabed.

"Believe it," he says. "Did you know the bay's a giant underwater caldera?"

"Like your drink?"

"Obviously. A caldera's a volcano that erupted, leaving a giant crater behind."

"Wouldn't the water be boiling?"

"Come on, it blew like ten thousand years ago."

"Bullshit."

"Wanna bet?"

I don't.

"It's still active. Haven't you felt the tremors?"

"Whatever." Classic Anderson, this. It smells of a bad punchline.

"They happen all the time."

"Really?" Anderson is charming, but he's not an academic. "And how do you know all this?"

"Those Canadians on the ferry were talking about it. Remember that redhead?"

I definitely remember her. "Vaguely."

"You remember her, whatever. She was all about this place. I'm surprised she's not here."

"So that's why we're here," I say. "Katrine will be so disappointed."

"Dude."

"Maybe she already jumped--"

"Not cool."

"Swam down to Atlantis."

"It's down there."

"Whatever."

"It's on the back of the menu if you don't believe me."

Anderson knows I'm going to look, and of course I do. I can't help it. But he's telling the truth: according to the menu, the bay is a caldera. It also happens to be the best place on the island to feel the frequent tremors.

"You might have mentioned the tremors," I say.

"Didn't think about it." He probably didn't. Anderson doesn't do much thinking. He climbs tall things. He dances along their edges. He throws things from them, forks and sometimes himself. He does lots of other ridiculous things, but he doesn't do much thinking.

"The island was inhabited when it blew," he says. "The original city slid into the sea."

"That's not on the menu."

"It's still true."

"Sure it is."

"Wanna bet?"

It's best to ignore him. "How deep do you think the bay is?"

"No idea." He's leaning out over the edge again, bowing the rope, surveying the sea below. "They say it's still inhabited."

"Anderson."

"They do! They even have a festival for it."

I look at him.

"The Canadians told me. I swear."

"I have a hard time believing you were talking about Atlantis with the redhead."

"Believe it. Anyway, sonar doesn't show anything, but they don't fish certain areas. Wouldn't want to snag a relative."

"You are one twisted--"

The ground suddenly moves. I grab the table. Anderson whoops. "There you go! There's a tremor!"

As fast as it comes, it's gone. I let go of the table, wondering if I screamed. I feel like I did. In that split second, I thought I was slipping over the edge.

"I need to go." I say, swallowing. "Now."

Anderson takes a sip of his martini.

"You okay?" Katrine is back again. This time she's looking at me, like she knows Anderson is fine, but she's worried I might be crying or something.

"He's good," Anderson says. "Not a big fan of the shakes."

"Why did you come up here then?"

I look at Anderson. He looks at Katrine and says, "So what odds would you give me to survive a jump from here?"

She laughs in that way Anderson makes girls laugh. "It's too high--"

Katrine lurches with the ground, grabbing our table. "That was a strong one," she says. She tries to act like the tremor is no big deal, but I see the worry in her face. She smiles at me, then longer at Anderson. "How about another round?"

"I think I'll dive into another Caldera," Anderson says, holding out his glass for her. She's blushing as she reaches for it. The ground shakes again, this time it's sharp and violent. Katrine's outstretched fingers miss Anderson's glass as she pitches sideways over the rope. The last thing I see is the underside of her sandals, the worn leather and dirty stitching.

"Oh God!" someone screeches. It might be me. Somehow I'm lying on the ground, face down.

Anderson half stands, his face slack, looking after Katrine, as if he's not sure if she just fell or if she beat him to the jump. Like this might be extreme flirting.

The ground rumbles again, harder and longer, tables chiming hollowly on their lemming run for the precipice. I throw myself to the ground. Everything becomes a confusion of strange sounds and jarring motion.

I think I'm screaming again, but when I open my eyes, I see it's actually Anderson. He's got an elbow crooked around the rope, his other arm hugging one of the posts. I thought he'd be thrilled, that I'd see him, legs bent, arms outstretched, surfing the quake.

I dig my fingers into the white seam, pressing myself tightly against the rock. The coin pings across my vision; I follow it with my eyes, over the edge after Katrine. A deafening pop shakes the air. I feel a shockwave through the rock. I'm holding tight, but somehow I'm still sliding and falling. I look up and see the cliff has split along the white seam. The side of the cliff I'm clinging to has become a giant wedge, shearing and sliding down, tipping outward. Time slows, like it's being sucked down into the churning sea, which has become an impossible mess of swirling valleys and foaming plumes.

"No-no-no!" Anderson screams, over and over in short bursts, like he's denying this is happening. It's happening, and I'm not sure when or why I stopped screaming.

I must be in shock, because I watch myself skitter across the plummeting rock, completely out of control, like some merry devil-spider. I grab Anderson's arm and yell, "We have to jump!"

Anderson won't let go of the rail.

"We have to jump or we'll die!" I pull on him. "Now!"

"We're going to Atlantis," he says, hugging the rail tighter.

"Jump or die!"

"Wanna bet?" Anderson says. He sounds pathetic, and he doesn't let go.

"No!" It feels like we've been falling for a long time. My gut tells me to jump. I run to the edge and leap into the air. For a moment, I feel like I'm floating. Then I hit the water. A brief pause, resonating with the pain of the impact and the sudden silence. Then I'm drawn down into the sea, fast and deep. The water is cold and powerful, pushing and pulling me.

When I stop spinning, I open my eyes. Lights dance beneath a vast, translucent dome. It could be the surface far above, calming after the earthquake. Or maybe Anderson's right, it's Atlantis. Whichever it is, it's my only option, so I swim toward it.

It isn't Atlantis, it's the surface. I swim up among the shimmering billows of giant jellyfish-shaped plumes of air. By the time I reach the surface, I'm seeing spots and my muscles are cramping. I breathe and tread water.

I survived.

It doesn't seem possible.

I swim toward the cliff. The entire face is gone, torn away like a chunk of pumpernickel. The rock is new, raw, garish against the weathered cliff, a skinned knee before the blood has welled. A single chair silhouetted on top.

It takes what feels like hours to reach the shore, which turns out to be a jumble of newly fallen rock. I have to be careful not to shred myself as I climb onto it. The waves make a slurping and sucking sound as they strike and recede.

The earthquakes seem to be over for the moment, but for some reason I'm not scared. I feel like I'm on autopilot. I feel like Anderson must feel all the time, calm but exhilarated. It feels pretty good.

I'm looking around, trying to figure out how to climb back up, when I see someone lying further along the shore, beyond where the cliff collapsed, where it's actually sand.

I make my way across the rocks. It's Anderson. He rolls his head toward me. His smile is huge, wet, like his eyes. "You made it, man."

"Not a bad place for a jump after all, huh?" Anderson is holding tightly to his leg. "I can't believe you're alive."

I see bone between his bloody fingers. I wonder if I should bind it or if it's best to wait for help. I say, "I figured you and Katrine were honeymooning in Atlantis."

"You see her?"

"Not yet." She was probably crushed by the falling rock, but I'm not going to point that out right now.

He nods up toward the cliff. "She's climbing out. To get help."

I can't believe it. I scan the cliff and sure enough I see her, about a third of the way up. Anderson groans. I don't know what to say, but I've got some talking to do. It could be hours before Katrine's back with help. "Better hope that leg heals fast. Loads of great jumping spots up there."

Anderson laughs. "Who are you?"

"Katrine said people jump all the time."

"You'd jump?"

"Sure."

"No way."

"Why not?" I tip my head back toward the cliff. "We owned that."

"I know you," Anderson says. "You wouldn't jump again."

I'm bluffing to keep his mind off his leg, we both know it. But it was pretty epic.

And like this feeling. So I say, "Wanna bet?"

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