

F R I D A Y

Water was everywhere. It was everywhere around Sam. It covered him completely.

He could not see, or there was nothing there. The walls of the swimming pool, covered in teal light, indistinct. As light always seemed to be.

He alternatively closed and opened his eyes. He watched the little orbs of air bubble from his lips, floating up. Floating above him.

Sam stared at the water around him, at the light swimming in it. He felt his skin drowned and wondered if this was how it was supposed to feel. Was this how it was supposed to feel when he did it. Or did he falter there, as well.

He had immersed himself by force. He had buried his flesh into the waters to save himself, without so much as a struggle. He submerged his body to save his soul, save his life, from the same hell that had swallowed everyone around him—the hell they had run to, willingly, not knowing what they did. Just as he had always wanted. As it had always been intended to be. Just like his Bible had told him it would be.

For hours Sam had remained in the water, coming up for air intermittently before forcing his head back under again. After night had fallen and the storm clouds dispersed, he had emerged and tried to get a sense of things. But every time he tried, a nameless feeling filled him, a feeling he could not withstand, and he would eventually bury himself back in the pool. Where everything was warped and opalescent. Where no sound from outside could be heard, and every sound within was a muddled roar, and was incoherent even to those inside it, incoherent even to he who had made it. And what would it be like to remain there, forever,

for long enough to adapt himself and give up on breathing entirely, to stay with held breath for the rest of eternity or else drown. What would it have been like had he proven himself to God. What would it have been like had he never come to Camp Havenside at all.

Sam emerged, gasped for breath, held onto the concrete ledge. He pulled himself up from the pool. He walked over to where he had left his things, his Camelbak and his phone, its signal long since dead. He lifted it and looked at the clock. It was nine minutes past midnight. Friday, then. Five days since he had heard the name. Three days since Judith had last been able to speak. Eight hours since Calvin. Eight hours since Molly. Since everything.

“... Sam?”

He thrashed, threw himself backward and to one side. Barely visible, standing over the formless and empty waters, was her.

“... Grace.”

She came forward. She came close to him.

“You’re still here, thank god,” she panted.

“And you’re . . . you’re here . . .” Sam swallowed. “What, what’s going on? What’s been happening out there?”

“I don’t know . . . nothing, I don’t think. I was just leaving the chapel when Molly was . . . was doing those, things, acting that way. And when the lightning hit, and everybody started running, I just, I went to the counselor’s office since it was right there. I tried to call someone for help, but my cell signal is completely dead, and when, when everything . . . got quiet, I looked around a little, but I didn’t . . . I didn’t want to leave just in case . . . just in case th-the . . . w-well, I, I don’t know. . .”

Grace’s eyes trailed off. Sam’s followed.

“Eventually I left and looked around the camp a little, but I couldn’t find anyone anywhere. Except, well . . . except Calvin.”

Sam sighed. Remembered the face. Remembered what had once been a face.

“Is there,” Sam said, “like, is there a way we can take one of the church vehicles? Go somewhere, find a phone, get help?”

“I thought of that, too,” she replied. “There’s all those buses and sprinters parked by the counselor’s office, but I couldn’t find the keys anywhere. Not inside the office or anywhere else I went.”

“Where all did you go?”

“I walked around the playground, the pavilion . . . I looked around the basketball and volleyball courts, just looking for others, then . . . then I just came here.”

Sam nodded, sighed. He looked at the ground.

“Well, we could . . .”

Sam looked up. “What?”

“Heather took her own car to come here, now that I think of it, and it’s parked by the counselor’s office. I don’t know where she is, but she may have left the keys in our cabin . . .”

Sam blinked. He looked down—then up. Up at the night sky. It would be the only source of light between there and the girls' cabins. He looked up at it as he had so many times. He saw lights and he saw blackness, vast blackness between the lights. He saw stars twinkling mutedly, holes opened in the fabric of the sky; he saw the moon like the eye of God. He tried to see them. He tried to see the stars making crosses in the sky. He tried to see through the holes into heaven. He couldn't. On that night, it looked more like the sky was bleeding.

sssshhcCKKT—!

The screen door shut behind them.

This image shows a full page of dot grid paper. It consists of multiple horizontal rows of small, evenly spaced black dots on a white background. The dots are arranged in straight lines across the entire width of the page, providing a guide for writing or drawing without solid lines.

Sam walked beside Grace. They kept at the same pace with each other.

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They walked together into the open field at the center of camp. It was empty,
of everything and everyone.

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“Where, um . . . where do you think everyone went . . . ?”

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Sam didn’t reply.

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“... I guess not.”

Grace swallowed. “Okay, well ... basically you just said you didn’t want to go to Hell and you kept, just kept saying that over and over and then ... then you just stopped.”

“Stopped?”

“Yeah. You were shaking and hyperventilating, but then out of nowhere, you just ... stopped. Stopped shaking, stopped talking, and you ... w-well, you ...”

“...”

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“You like, looked at me.”

“Looked at you?”

“Yeah. Like, looked at me really weird. Like your face was ... I don’t even ... I don’t even know how to describe it.”

“...”

“And then you walked away, just went off somewhere. I don’t know where, you wouldn’t tell me. You wouldn’t say anything ...”

“...”

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“You weren’t even walking normal. It was like ... like your legs were moving separate from the rest of you or something.”

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“... you don’t remember any of that?”

“...”

“Sam ...?”

“... no. I don’t ...”

“... well, what ... what was ... that?”

“I don’t know.”

“...”

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No movement. No sound.

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Sam gagged. He covered his mouth.

“Oh my god-d,” Grace choked. “What is . . . oh . . . oh-h, right-t . . .”

“ . . . my god . . .”

“I . . . f-forgot he was still there.”

“Good lord-d . . . wh . . . what the hell . . .”

“L-let’s . . . um . . .”

“Let’s . . . go around.”

“Yeah. O-okay, yeah-h . . .”

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They passed him.

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..... *tsb*
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They passed the log border, emerged onto the dirt road. The counselor’s office was just to their left.

“That one’s Heather’s,” she said, pointing to the van beside it.

“You’re sure?”

“Yeah.”

Sam looked at the van. Then at the playground gravel, the dirt road, then the trees and picnic tables ahead of them.

“Let’s go.”

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..... *tsb* ... *krtsb*
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They went up the dirt road. Passed the boys’ cabins.

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..... *ryb hdn*
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..... *dnt bdb*

..... *tsb* .

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Their feet met the sidewalk and they turned with it. Followed it down the long stretch of gazeboes and tables.

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..... *thrssh, tsb* .

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... *thss nthng* .

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Sam looked up at the lights strung above him, unlit. He could barely see them.

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..... *rbhb* .

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..... *wbr dd llth lv gh* .

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..... *ggh* .

... *cm bck* .

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..... *ill cm to y* .

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They stopped walking.

“I’ll just . . . go in and get them and you can . . . stay here.”

“...”

Grace nodded, left. Sam watched her walk—turned away. Looked out at the night.

Looked at the camp. At the picnic tables, the gazeboes, the trees. Their colors were identical to the color of everything else because there was no color anymore.

All was black, silhouetted. Identical in shape but unrecognizable. No matter how Sam looked at them.

He looked at the afterimages. The things that were not there but that he could not stop himself from seeing and that he could not make exist. Slung Frisbees hovering into the shade of trees. The long line of canteen along the building across from him. Girls leaping away from wasps out of the nest against its roof. And behind him, girls in towels and tie-dye shirts going from shower to cabin to shower, laughing. The laughter. He looked at the laughter that was not there. The laughter he could not see and could not keep from seeing.

Sam had seen so many things and they were gone now. He had lost them all, lost them like water between his fingers. He did not know how he had lost them. How could he have lost them when he had tried so hard to have them. Tried so hard to hold them, had cherished them so closely. How could he have lost so permanently what had been so precious. Had he lost them himself, let them slip from his view and then from his life, by fault of his idleness, of his confusion. Or had they been taken away from him. He didn't know. All he knew was that they were gone and he wasn't sure what would happen next. He looked at the dark silhouettes, and at the things he remembered and no longer had. He didn't know what was next for him. He didn't know what his life would be. What he would be.

A door opened behind him, closed. Sam turned around. Grace approached quickly.

"I got them!" she whispered hoarsely.

"Oh-h, thank god . . . oh my god . . ."

"I'm almost positive these are hers, I-I mean, there weren't any other keys in the cabin. And nobody else who's keys they could have been, everyone else came here on the bus."

"Right. Y-yeah, that, that makes sense . . ."

"Okay, now we just, just need to get back to the van and get out of here."

"I can drive."

"Good . . ." She handed him the keys. "Okay, let's . . . let's go."

". . . right."

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Sam stood still. Then he started walking.

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..... *bbbbbbb*
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Walking past the trees and tables. The gazeboes and flagpole.

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..... *gd thy hnd*
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..... *tll gd thy ftt*
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They began rounding a curv—

... *bbbhggghbb*
Sam stopped.

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“... what?”

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“... d-did you hear that?”

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“Hear what?”

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“... n-nothing.”

“What . . . what did you hear?”

“... l-let’s get to the car.”

“... I-I . . . I . . .”

“... we have to go quickly.”

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 *thRRSHb* . .

The dirt road came into view. The sidewalk’s end was coming close.

.....
 *so bytīfl*

 *plsure . . . frevr*
 *come*

They reached the road. Sam could see the car.

..... *thbbbRSSHb, thrRSSHHb, thrsh*
 *pleasr . . . forvr*

 *cm to th grdn* . . .
 *cme*
 *thrSSHSHb, tHRSSHSHs, thHRSSH*

“S-Sam . . . S-S-S-S-Sam w-what is—”

“Don’t look. J-just don’t look.”

“... o-okay . . .”

“Just don’t stop walking. If we keep walking, we’ll get there.”

bbbbbbHHHHHHYYYGGGHLAIIIIYYEE—!—!—!

Camp Havenside

“Obb-b-b my go—”

“Walk f-faster. W-wal—”

bhbhllp . . . mmie . . .

“K-k-k-keep walking.”

“Get the keys ready.”

rrnnNHYYAIIIGGH—!—!—!

“Jesus Chri—”

Sam clicked the keys. The car lit up.

bhbhllp mbb—

“Okay . . . okay, r-run. Run!”

“Ob-b god!”

The rocks crackled under their fleeing steps as the road thinned to dirt, then to playground gravel as they sprinted for the car, leapt over the log border, slammed into the car doors and opened them, entered them, shut them.

Branches were moving outside the windshield.

Sam slid the keys into the ignition.

Branches were moving. Twitching.

He turned the key.

GgrrkkkGGHHRRRVVVVM—!

Sam clamped his foot into the gas pedal, sending the car back in reverse, violently away from the chapel. He felt the back wheels meet the dirt road, felt them roll over part of the log border. He changed gears, swung the wheel back, launched forward.

VbKKKKRRRVVVRRrrr

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[illegible]

And Camp Havenside was gone from view.

This image shows a full page of dot grid paper. It features approximately 20 horizontal rows of small, evenly spaced black dots. The dots are arranged in straight lines across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting or drawing without solid lines.

Sam could not see the road very well. So he looked at his hands. His hands on the wheel. His hands taking him out, away from that place. Out onto a road he couldn't see.

[illegible]

[illegible]

They reached the campground limits.

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“Left or right?”

"I . . . I-I think right."

“ . . . ”

[illegible]

“You okay?”

“Yeah . . . I think I’m alright.”

“ ”
• • •

“Are you?”

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Sam looked at the rearview mirror. It was all black. A small wooden cross hung beneath it, beaded.

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“... Sam?”

“What?”

“Are . . . are you alright?”

“... y-yeah, yeah I’m, I’m fine.”

“... are you sure?”

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[illegible]

“Are you sure?”

“... I’m sure.”

“... okay, can you let go of my thigh then?”

“... oh.”

“Just . . . kind of starting to hurt, you’re really . . . holding onto it.”

“... right. Sorry.”

[illegible]

Sam looked at her. Then back at the road.

[illegible]

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“Sam.”
“...”
“Sam?”
“Y-yes. Yes?”
“... my thigh.”
“... r-right. Of course. Sorry...”
“...”
“...”
“Sorry, just ... you’re really gripping it tight ...”
“...”

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Branches hung over the van. Here and there they brushed against the windows.

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This image shows a full page of dot grid paper. It features approximately 20 horizontal rows of small, evenly spaced black dots. The dots are arranged in straight lines across the width of the page, providing a guide for writing or drawing without solid lines.

“S-Sam . . . Sam, eyes on the road.”

“... right.”

This image shows a full page of dot grid paper. It features approximately 20 horizontal rows of small, evenly spaced black dots on a white background. The dots are arranged in straight lines across the width of the page, providing a guide for writing or drawing without solid lines.

Sam looked at the road. It wasn't changing. Nothing seemed to get any clearer.

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[illegible]

“ ”
• • •

“ ”
• • •

“... S-Sam ...”

“... yes ...”

“Can I ask you something . . .”

“... of course ...”

“... w ... w-why are you holding my thigh again?”

“... I don’t know ...”

“ ”
• • •

“... I really don’t ...”

[illegible]

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“S-S-Sam . . . Sam, p-please . . .”

“... what is it ...”

“K-keep your eyes on the road.”

“...”

“Please . . . s-stop . . . stop looking at me . . .”

“...”

“... Sam . . . S-Sam?”

“...”

“Sam, p-please, say something . . . you’re s-scaring me . . .”

“...”

“... S-Sam . . . is that . . . y-y-you?”

“...”

“... is it still . . . still y-you right n—”

KKRRPPSH—!

Sam slammed on the brakes, but it did nothing. It could do nothing to stop the shape, the shape of Shane’s moss-covered body with claw outstretched, from colliding with the front bumper, going limp, rolling under the wheels with a crunch that Sam felt in his toes, followed by an earsplitting burst as the car lurched, diverted, derailed its way into the ditch.

The van settled, tipped at a stark angle, facing the ground, the windshield cracked.

Sam clambered out of the car. He stood, looked at the car. Scratches were deep on the left side, wrinkled and black near the base of the doors. They led to the back-left tire and flayed it open, sagging off its wheel a few feet above the ground. Grace appeared on the other side, looked at him. Sam followed her to the back of the car.

Shane’s half-exposed ribcage was caved in, what remained of his face was jet with spoiled blood, and the hair on the same side of his head was ripped and tattered from the tire. Sam covered his mouth and nose, as did Grace. The visible organs had been turned a burnt red, blackened. All that remained unbroken was the claw on his right arm.

Sam felt breath but did not feel he was breathing. His fingers still felt the wheel. His toes still felt the crunch of the body, vibrating through the car. He looked at the only eye Shane had, buried in a mass of blood. He looked at it and felt like it was looking back. Like it knew him, knew who it was looking at.

His vision went in and out. He saw her come close.

"Sam, Sam, listen to me, I need you to listen to me, Sam—"

He stared at her.

"—Sam. Sam. It's okay. Hey, we are okay. Understand? We are going to be okay. Listen. I need you to listen to me right now."

He stared at her but did not really hear her.

"I promise you, we will. We just have to get the car out of the ditch. Okay? We have to pull it out. We have to get the car back out."

He stared at her and her voice was like a drone. Like arbitrary syllables. He could not hear her so he just stared. Stared at her mouth.

"Sam, do you hear me? Do you understand? We're going to be okay. Okay?"

Her lips like a scarlet ribbon.

". . . Sam? Are you list—"

He felt every piece of him become stone.

He felt his skull tight and frail.

He felt something like a rod through his head.

He felt his nerves flailing. He felt his muscles writhing against bones.

His throat swallowed itself. He couldn't feel himself breathing.

The world became dim. His limbs felt phantom.

His hands stretched to hold every inch of her at once. To hold what was better and would not be taken from him—

Sam looked at her.

Grace looked back.

. . .

. . .

. . .

He reached out—

Two wooden claws, matching his movement, wrapped around her from behind, pulling her in.

Into the woods.

"Grace!"

Sam leapt.

Grace!

Camp Havenside

Grace!

Grace, please!

Grace!

Camp Havenside

Please, Grace

where are you

please

GRACE!

Camp Havenside

WHERE ARE YOU?

Please pleas-s-se please, no

Camp Havenside

Please, Grace

I'm so sorry

I'm so, so sorry

Camp Havenside

. . . please . . . please, Grace . . .

so sorry

C. S. W.

GRACE!

Camp Havenside

PLEASE!!!

Please . . .

Please . . .

Please . . .

Please . . .

Please . . .

Camp Havenside

The leaves around him were gray.

There was no color, no color in anything at all.

The trees were black all over. Not dead, not alive.

The sky was empty of stars, empty of everything. Empty even of the night.

Time was gone. It no longer existed. Night was no longer a time of day. Sam could not name them, could not name anything right, could not ascribe a meaning or identity to anything anymore. Too long had he wandered, stumbling through an imaginary world that wasn't even of his imagination, scribbling names like God and Devil onto the absence like writing on a wall. It was all gone. The verses, the redemption, the spirit, the cross, the son, the three days followed by resurrection, the great day soon to come. It was all gone. All that existed was the forest around Sam, the same forest he had immersed himself in just five days before, where it all started. It was first, and it was last. Alpha and Omega. It was, had been . . .

. . . and was to come.

"Hyygkeh, bbbbhgkeh, brrrlmgck, hnnngb, hggk, hygkeh . . ."

A pale shape darted past the corner of his eye. Sam stopped, turned. Squinted through the darkness.

It looked pallid, fleshy. It was moving.

His breath was shallow. He walked closer to it, trying to discern. He saw another.

It was next to the first one. It was similar in character, different in shape. Or the same shape turned in a different angle. He was coming close. Close until he saw another.

Distant. Far from the other two. And as his eyes scanned the distance between them he found that they were everywhere he looked. Distant, pallid, fleshy. Humanoid shapes.

Sam came close. Came close to the first two. Saw them fully.

The nude body of Joshua Green was rotting, putrefying before Sam's eyes, flesh sloughing off the grass-infested ribcage. Vines wove in and out of bone and meat, branches puncturing out through the skin as if to replace the bones. But he was alive. Alive and moving, undulating, thrusting his cock into the open mouth of Valerie Arnolds. Her body was much the same. On its knees, claimed, controlled by the foliage. Jaw forced open and spilling thick, black blood. But they were alive. Sam knew they were alive because he could hear them. Could hear them suffocating.

"Kccckynngb, bLGHYCKgh, ccgkckggbkYGHbb, hlllrllllgbckb . . ."

And he could smell it. Could smell the decay. Could smell it, dark and familiar, from them and from the others.

He found them one by one, recognizable face by recognizable face, one flayed nakedness after another. All locked in a dance dictated by the forest, inflicted onto them, given back double for what they had done. Caleb lay mired in a patch of nettles as Kylie continued a slow dying gyration up against his crotch, pushing his body deeper into sharp brambles with each forceful rub. Judith bent on reverent knees, her body supported by briars, her neck held up by a coarse, lowered branch, gripping her throat and holding her in position. A boy whom Molly had felled before the storm hung suspended, left inserted within Judith, his hands claiming the hills of her bent body, and another took her clutched open throat, to the agony of all. Tristan, small and slightly, the freshman confessor of pornography, stood in view of it, dead hand stroking himself. From his eye sockets sprouted massive, sharp branches, splitting out of the sockets where sinful eyes once had been. Gouged.

The ministers were there—there was no exception. Heather's miniature, front-fallen body bent against the angle of her spine, with Dennis's pale fist clutching her ratted, leaf-strewn hair and pulling her back as he thrust into her from behind, the slow motions of a dying puppet. Her eyes had rolled back, black blood dripping from the lids, and Dennis's tongue was hanging in his mouth by a single thread of blackened flesh. Malcolm, like a great beast turned scarlet by his own splattered blood, lay nearly inanimate as Molly sat with full weight onto his bloodstained face, burying his already suffocating breath. It wheezed out

alongside hers, stifled by twigs that strung through her throat, but clear enough for her voice to ring true, her helpless, half-dead eyes looking into Sam's:

“Help . . . m-me-e . . . h-h-h-help-p . . . m-me-e-e-e . . .”

Sam backed away. Lost balance. He threw himself around and vomited onto the ground. He stumbled to rise, fell, fell inevitably, face pressed into the soil, weeping. He gripped and pulled out blades of withered grass as if to epilate the earth, to wound the world, shaking in his fists. While around him the Rapture continued, and all who had been called into the forest continued to choke, to asphyxiate, to suffer their second death. Where once Sam had run with Molly, chasing campers and chasing the feeling itself, laughing just to laugh—there he now wept, wept among the suffocating puppets, their tears proving the worth of their suffering.

Sam held nothing. Nothing. All he had beheld between the constellation that was Camp Havenside, the face of god in the night sky. The answer to the question that was him. The meaning that was already there before he had to make it. The origin he could never recall but that he surely, surely had originated from. The greater host from which he had surely split off at some point—for which he had spent his life yearning to return to in those rare moments of hazy remembrance—the greater home that he would have found, rejoined, slept within it, nestled himself in the fold of its warmth. It was gone.

And he knew then what was next for him. Nothing.

Nothing at all.

Camp Havenside

...

Sam felt himself rising.

...

He felt his feet moving, walking.

...

His flesh was weak.

...

But a spirit was willing.

...

Camp Havenside

S A T U R D A Y

*When peace like a river attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say:
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*It is well, it is well,
with my soul, with my soul
It is well, it is well,
with my soul.*

*My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more—
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*It is well, it is well,
with my soul, with my soul
It is well, it is well,
with my soul.*

Camp Havenside

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