

Rough draft	Second draft
<p>I have to confess that I am the sort of man who wakes on beaches, perhaps still drunk, perhaps still nude, perhaps now alone. The tide pulls at cold nude me. Salty water mixes with the vomit that covers me, bright orange vomit, peppered with little blue partly digested powdery pills. Panama beaches, at least the Panama I live in, are like this. I'll hope it's mine-the vomit, the chow, the Technicolor yawn. The Ralph, most of it closer to yellow, smells sharp enough to almost clear my mind.</p> <p>While I crawl about looking for the jeans I swear I wore the night before, I'm already comforted by its sounds, the ocean has always been my friend, by the especially fuzzy this morning pinkness on the horizon. In fact, I crawl to the waves, to the sun rising. No better way to get clean: churning salty surf does a body good. Even does a headache, a hangover, good.</p> <p>If I'm here alone, then where are the others? Who were those others I shared with last night? I like to think, like it to be, that this sort of thing, this sort of waking, is rare for me, no more than weekly, perhaps. These "friends" of mine. The people I party with, we feel bad when we, you know, accidentally leave each other laying around unconscious, rather than, I don't know, tending to drag each other back to the condos, the complex where most of us live.</p> <p>The waves have rinsed me, the water warmer than the air even now and I find those jeans, a shirt, shoes yards apart in some sort of oddball constellation on the sand. The shirt is like the one I think I was wearing last night, but tiny, tight enough that I worry about the seams and it seems inside out, backwards, the buttons on the wrong side. I'm trying, one slow step, to stand and get the Levi's on without filling them with sand. The beach doesn't help. Easy fit, they say. Balance is a difficult word to define, much less to really have, to</p>	<p>I confess that I am too nice. I glow, I'm polite, open, friendly, far too eager to share my love. It's Lisa's Christmas party. Her Panama friends, she says. Her tropical condo. The drink is abundant. The warm night air through open doors lifts long white curtains. Sharing always seems like an excellent idea.</p> <p>I'll start with Lisa because we are buddies. Close enough to scratch all of our various itches. I'm with her here. Her divine face. The women she talks with are as attractive. They stand in a triangle, holding thin wine glasses, talking quietly compared to the other conversations and music. Everyone's in a shape, triangles, squares, oblongs, sitting and standing and chatting. The lights are low. Candles burn and flicker in the breeze. Later the music might get louder. More people, then dancing, then wild bopping around the room.</p> <p>But right now, Lisa is talking and between her words "ordinarily" and "sacred," I lean in and kiss her on the lips. Her breath is cherry sweet, but her teeth are hard and, as my lips brush them, I remember sharp. She smiles at my interruption and continues talking about God. The African woman on my left listens to Lisa, watching her closely, so carefully she must be in oracle mode. I lean in and kiss this woman, touching her softly on the lips. Lisa is still talking, faster now. The woman looks at me then around to Lisa. I step forward into the middle of their triangle and kiss the third woman. She turns, planning to offer a cheek, but I adjust enough to taste the soft corner of her mouth and then step toward and around a piece of the jungle, a giant fern.</p> <p>Next to the fern and against the wall are two men. Mark is one. He knows me. He's been to Lisa's parties before. He needs to shave or just grow the beard until it is</p>

really hold on to and the jeans are not coming on. Sand in clothes is hell. So I'm a little loose on my feet, a little less attached to the earth than I might be, a little groggily in the world. I mixed I think the throbbing in my head, the throbbing of the tide with a throbbing in the air, with the clapping of helicopter blades low over waves. I turned and the sight knocked me down, those silhouettes, black and loud against the pink sun. Low enough to raise sand. The sound, I can fill it pressing against my skin, is on me; I like it loud, but this is bad. BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM Sand seals my eyes and the sound, you'll go deaf. Won't you? I worked for my dad, landscaping, wearing a leaf blower, going deaf for less than minimum wage. My old man.

What can I do but wait and pray they pass (forget foxholes, there are no atheists with hangovers). Wish, wait, and pray. I'm thinking I'll change my evil ways, thinking I'll be different in the morning, something else, one last big binge, huge, to push me over the edge, to really teach myself to stop. The sound, the sand, and then the tide, wash me. The wave rolls in heavy enough to lift me, so I'm floating blind for a moment, face clinched against sand. A second there, the water has me, smooth and cold on half my skin, moving toward the land, and the sand blasts the other half, billions of sharp, stabbing needles. And then the sound begins to fade, it is past me now, up beyond and behind and I wonder because I think those helicopters where that green, the one the U.S. Army or the Marines or somebody uses and the thing is what are they doing here, here in Panama? (39)

full and soft. Coarse stubble burns my lips.

Mark says, "Why wouldn't he get drunk first?" while I kiss the other man. I get both his lips and swoop around the couch. The couple there hold hands, stare into each other's eyes. The other person sitting must have seen. He says, "Watch out."

People have to know they are loved.

I lean in, get the woman, her lipstick tastes like paste, turn my head, and kiss the man. He's been eating the onions out of his martinis.

I can hear them talking about me now. Some laugh. "Again?" they say and "God damn it" from Lisa. I plan to pass the other man on the couch, the one who tried to warn the couple, but I faint back and leave second-hand lipstick on his chin. The next person leans back in her chair, opens her mouth wide, tries to snake an arm around me, but our tongues only touch briefly before I'm moving on to a woman who ducks and weaves until I have a hand over each of her ears and hold her for a quick smack. I slip away from her kick, ignore her profanity.

"Calvin," Lisa says close behind me.

The next man doesn't blink or fret. He closes his eyes and points his chin.

"Calvin," she says again.

After him is a woman who backs away too fast, even in her heels. Everyone is suddenly out of range.

Lisa takes my hand, turns me toward her. "You embarrass me. You told me you wouldn't."

"He's just playing," someone says. "Drunk."

"But who knows where he's been," from another voice.

I reached only a fifth, if that, of the party. "It's a good thing," I say to her. "Love." People on the other side of the room have not even noticed me.

"You said," she says, "you said and I trusted."

I lean toward her, kisses are cure-alls, and the crowd says "Ahh," until she tags me, her slap up from her hip, her whole body behind it. The kind of blow my daddy'd warn me against. I've my own boxing instincts and I step back from her. My fists are low, but fists they are and I'd never even be mad at her, but I guess I've blown it big time. So now the room is silent, so quiet I swear I can hear the dolphins clicking to each other out in the bay. And the silence is spreading into every corner.

"Go away," she says. She'd swung so hard and fast her entire body turned and she says it over her shoulder. "Go on."

"Can I come back?"

She points toward the open patio doors behind me.

Outside her apartment is an umbrella then rough beach grass. Her condo shares the peninsula with Panama City and some tiny airport. She can't really want me gone. We are deep in like. In no way can she want me out of her life. Not really. I'm too much fun. But, fine. I can live without her. Some people in the world like to be kissed. I can find them. I'll sleep with them tonight.

The grass grows thick, high. I need the beach, the ocean. I need to walk around the airfield and this grass to find water. Someone young and lovely is waiting there for me.

Lisa doesn't even know what she just did. She invited me down here. She did. I told her I'd be alone all the Christmas break and she said come down. So I did. And her dissertation. She won't get it done without me. Graduate students think they know everything. They don't know how hard it gets to sleep alone. She'll see. A night without me and she'll be the sorry one. I can sleep on the beach. I can find

someone who actually likes me. Likes me for who I actually am.

She still wants me. I know it.

The lights over the landing strip are bright with blurry halos around them. The waves sound closer now. Not so far. City lights are bright. Shiny windows on buildings and people with normal lives distant behind them. No one else around the beach. That smart woman I'd hoped for isn't here. The moon is full and high, silver on the water.

All my excellent ideas are like this. I always think things will be understood, graciously received. And I did promise her, but I wanted to spread the goodness. I walk along the fence that surrounds the landing strip, plodding out toward the Caribbean. Just a kiss. Let people know someone cares. Early Christians did it all the time.

We do well by each other. We do very, very well by each other.

I am liked.

Water has always been my friend. I have to confess that I've been drunk on public beaches before, perhaps nude. Swimming. That's what I need. To clear my head, get the alcohol, the night out of my blood. The sting off my face. Comforting sounds, waves. No better way to get clean and clear. The surf is white against the dark water, against the dark sand. Flat spots of moon light shine on the water. So many things come together here. Water, land, north, south, Pacific, Atlantic.

I pull the tee-shirt up over my head. Alone. Not coming together with anyone.

Maybe Lisa followed me out the door. She could be behind me, to apologize. I use the toe of one foot to pry the tennis shoe off the heel of the other. Take a moment to keep my balance and look back toward her place.

Of course, no one, just the city.  
Balance is a difficult word to

define, much less to really have, to really hold on to. So I'm a little loose on my feet, a little less attached to the earth than I might be, a little groggily in the world, but I grab each sock by the tip, tug it off. Drop my pants and I'm naked, wind on my skin.

She can't disappear.

The water feels warmer than the air as I walk in to it, turn to float on my back, pants, shirt, and shoes yards apart in some sort of oddball constellation behind me on the sand.

I'll change my evil ways, I'll be different in the morning, something else. I'll care what promises I make. I'll find something that can change me.

The sounds, the sand, and then the tide, wash me. The waves roll in heavy enough to lift me, so I'm floating blind for a moment, eyes closed. Silence under the water. A second there, the water has me, smooth on half my skin, moving toward the land. I can feel the sand on my back, then the tide warm against me, beginning to pull me back out. The earth and water take turns holding me while the wind blows over my belly and face.

A flash bright enough for me to see through my eyelids, yellow as flame, and I hear a muffled boom under the water. Fireworks?

I see what look like falling stars, a cluster of them, as I sit up in the water.

One of the buildings is burning at the airport. People in black are prone with weapons, automatic weapons, on the runway. They are shooting into the building and it looks like the planes. But Noriega's guy's at the airport are shooting back.

Now, my dad was a cop, first at the University of Colorado in Boulder, then as chief of police of a tiny southern Utah town, right on the boarder of Arizona. He taught me cop boxing every single night

	<p>after work, whether I wanted to or not, in the bottom of the empty swimming pool he couldn't afford to fill. I've some understanding of violence. Going is what I'm doing. Some sort of shelter seems wise, even with the distance. No knowing which way these things will turn.</p> <p>Muzzles flash and then the sound carries over the tarmac, the long grass, the sand, the water. I climb the beach, pick my pants up, the shoes, as I run. Get dressed as I go. Bush and them back in the States had been making noises. I can't tell who is shooting at who really. Could completely misunderstand. May be they are shooting each other over a plane full of drugs.</p> <p>I've decided I'll go back and say sorry. I've decided Lisa still likes me. I can shake off any slap. Who cares what those people at the party think. I don't know them. I should have tried to keep my promise.</p>
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