

Salt for a wound

My hand grasps for a steady rope, one I can use to ease the effort it takes to keep my head above the bottomless, decrepit ocean that holds nothing but endings for me. I grab these ropes, my lifelines, and value them, yet the person I thought to be my saviour, the one who helped for so long, loosens their grip. It is as if they, too, are bound to a rope that pulls them elsewhere. I try to offer them a strand in goodwill, but the aid of a drowning man is only a burden.

Perhaps we are all drowning in seas of our fears. The unexplored waters of the world are terrifying enough, yet what lies after drowning is worse. Though my lifelines grow ever shorter, I wonder where my placebo saviours' ropes lead. Of course, time shows me glimpses, but how can anyone see another's darkest sea floor when their own remains invisible?

My saviours were real. They held me when no one else would, they steadied my breathing, and they gave me reason when I had none. They did not lie; their kindness was not an illusion. But time has changed the weight of their ropes. The strength that once pulled me upward now trembles, and the hands that once reached so far can no longer grasp. They are still there, still good, but what once healed now only eases. Their ropes, once salvation, have become placebos: small comforts that no longer hold against the pull of the depths.

My hands, bloodied from sixteen years of rope burn, give in. I do not fall into my ocean, for I am already halfway down it. I have been sinking for an age. The signs were there; why did I not heed them? Was the first plunge not enough? And yet I do not regret, nor wish I had held on longer. The stillness of drowning is painless; sixteen years of struggle are not. My last placebo saviour raised the rope meant for me a little too high.

As I descend, freed from ropes that once restrained me from revisiting the depths of my own despair, the pressure strengthens. I let the water into my lungs that are virgin to the taste of life, so vividly beautiful, and my hatred for it plagues the palate. It tastes like any other salt water: horrid, yet somehow refinable, used everywhere and by everyone. So I sink further.

This is the point of no return. From here, only inevitability remains. No saviour, placebo or otherwise, can lower a rope long enough. Around me drift memories, unexplainable highs, indescribable lows. One glows brighter while just as dark as all the rest, not truly a memory but a dream, the dream of the saviour.

I let that ocean of memories flood my mind. The current stills, urging me to remain in the moment, the moment of the saviour. I wake into my lost dream. There is no shape here, only the absence of everything. Out of that void comes light: a feminine figure dressed in brilliance, enough to silence the surrounding dark. She approaches, placing warm hands upon my face. "You are lost," she says. "Let me give you the feeling you crave."

She embraces me. When I wake, tears run freely, and in that moment I know that everything will unfold as it must. At least that's how I remember it happening, was I saved in this memory of a dream long ago?

- You know your story. How does it end?
Do you reach once more for the rope offered to you in the dream, fragile, uncertain, but alive, or do you let yourself drift deeper, through the mirrored ocean where all reflection fades? Beneath it waits not life nor pain, only a quiet unmaking, a silence that asks nothing. The choice drifts before you, silent, as the ocean holds its breath.