

Catching Forks

by David Varno

Last night Jim taught me how to catch forks. Meaning, he taught me how to throw them. But he called it catching forks. It was late, and we were low down 3rd street, south of the Bay Bridge, the baseball stadium, all the people and cars, on top of a warehouse. There were a lot of forks up there. Good ones, too, stainless steel. It was all in the feet, according to Jim.

"You've got to watch where you put yourself, Chuck. This planet is moving so fast that one wrong move could toss you right into space. I've seen it happen, believe me. Also, think about all the water in our bodies. And then think about all the water in the city. It's like we hardly exist! Sometime I'll tell you about the moon, and why it does what it does to the oceans. Now look here," said Jim, waving a fork as he gathered what he could of himself together, "just do what I do and you'll be okay."

I met Jim a year ago in People's Park over in Berkeley, one of those nights when I was wandering late between places to stay, and the big city had grown too cold. Or maybe I met him looking for food in a big city dumpster. But he showed me how to sleep outside and we saw each other a few times a week. I never told him my real name, because in our first encounter he immediately called me Chuck. At first I took it for a nickname, like Charlie, or Kid, but lately I wonder if it's a case of mistaken identity. Either way, I'm happy that he calls me Chuck.

"The way it pulls the water forward, then back," he said, about the moon. "That's space working. Space is trying to cover the Earth in water. It wants us wet. It knows we're moving too fast. It knows we're afraid of the water and that we're trying to shrink the oceans. It wants to drown us before it's too late. Space is tired of us. That's what I figure, anyway. But like I was saying, it's all in the feet."

He had me stand with my back to the nearest body of water, facing west toward the hills and away from the lights of the bay. Feet side-by-side, moderately spaced—for better anchoring, Jim explained. Then we threw the forks, one at a time, like miniature harpoons. We didn't have any targets, but Jim was happy with my accuracy. "That's it, you've got them on the run now, Chuck!" he said, as I fired them.

We caught forks for the rest of the night, until the land on the East Bay started to appear through the fog and everything around us glowed through the sunrise. We found some apples in a corridor inside, and there were stickers on them with long messages. They didn't say anything in particular, probably something to do with state fruit regulation. Jim said nothing about them, and I wondered what they would suggest to someone who didn't read the language. Then I wondered if Jim knew how to read. But I didn't ask, because there was plenty to eat that day.

