K2

by Félix Saparelli

Now it's late. I am hanging upside down from a rope coiled around my crushed left ankle, the pain too sharp to be really felt, as the excess blood to my head makes my thoughts fuzzy. I am almost two meters from the rock face, thirty-five hundred meters above sea-level, the titanium pithon holding me solidly anchored in the ice about 40 meters higher.

I had been climbing down from my successful ascension of K2. Alpinists die every year, yet we always try to assume it was because of mistakes, or faulty equipment, or sickness. But luck, karma, chance… these aren't in our thoughts. Or rather, we banish these away. Because we want to be in control, of our fates, of our lives, of the mountain.

But we're not. Luck is always there. Luck makes us pick a route which nobody has attempted before, and skill makes us go through it easily. Luck makes us find the perfect place to bivouac when retracing our steps because the radio warned of possible avalanches. Luck makes us get to the top just as the weather clears and lets us enjoy the sight of an incredibly clear sky. Luck makes us step on a slippery patch just as a burst of wind gets hold of us. Luck makes the worst thing happen at the worst possible time.

Luck makes us walk to the dairy and be grabbed by a man and be raped in his car and kill him afterwards and be charged with murder by corrupt justice and go to juvee and get beaten by foster parents and get taught to climb by a pretty boy in senior year who couldn't care less about what was in the yearbook because he loves the mountain and he loved me until he hung himself on the second monday of our fourth year together because he couldn't live with having killed a little girl in a car accident and I promised his dead body I would complete his dream and climb through a route none

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has gone before and come back down through a different one and brave the cold and the snow and the ice and the risk and the fear and the euphoria that feels so good but is so dangerous up on the mountain.

I did it Arthur.
I did it.

(silence)