Elsewhere

by stephen hastings-king

1. I do not remember him sitting down across the table from me. He is not from here; he talks about elsewhere.

They say that when the surface of a photograph gets like this that it has gone blind and what was captured in it has been let loose again.

On the table, he turns over a photograph, a gray square with a white border.

But what was captured has grown used to its flat tiny world. Once released, each has nowhere to go.

He holds a pile of photographs. He handles them like playing cards.

The air is an ocean and they are among the plastic things that drift through every town, transparent and disconnected, unmotivated and unnoticed.

On the table between us he builds a row of gray squares each of which is identical to every other, each with a white border that is identical to every other.

Far from here there is a zone of fog and snow that forms a non-differentiation where the currents deposit them.

I watch and listen.

They say the zone is beautiful and that going there is like dreaming, so much that all forget most of what they see and many forget to come back.

Available online at *«http://fictionaut.com/stories/stephen-hastings-king/elsewhere»*
Copyright © 2011 stephen hastings-king. All rights reserved.

But I know that elsewhere is contamination.

2. The last town before the zone is made of outlines.

At its edge a tiny store sells supplies. Inside, a circle of faint people was arranged around a woodstove. After I spoke, one of them said: “You probably don't need that.”

Each item came with a tag on which was written the names of other people. I added my name to the bottom of each list.

3. He turns over a gray square the same as every other with a white border the same as every other.

This is the edge.

He is silent and still.

4. When he places another photograph on the table and says:

I remember walking into a white fog over snow.

The gray spreads from the square, spills over the frame.

And as he continues: I remember leaving my provisions in a pile, thinking I no longer needed them, that there was no forward or backward, that I was likely walking in circles

I am losing my bearings.

When he says: After I do not know how long I encountered things: first enormous serpents made of waveforms shaped from wire that moved in silent groups over the plastic ocean floor;

I see the enormous shapes swimming through the gray that is all around and

Piles made from backgrounds: pastures with bales of hay; the Grand Canyon and Taj Mahal;

A forest of 2-dimensional Christmas trees organized by the color into which each had been dissolving, a sector of flat trees smearing into yellow, a sector into red;

Tear gas and magazine stands; the stone heads of kings and queens; crop circles and snowmen.