

The Flight

by Steve Ersinghaus

You feel the sun on your face and the pull of gravity at the bottom of your shoes. Your shoulders spread the width of the planet, like ponderous wings. You hoist the apparatus of the glider and run to the edge of the cliff and leap into space feeling at once (as if they are three events generated from a common source or point) the air fill the flexible underside of the wings hoisting you up, the sudden emptiness of space drawing you down, and the momentum of your run drawing you forward to the horizon.

But what you don't expect is the sudden appearance of the distant hillsides and that on those hills you can see with unmatched detail children playing and a dog watching them as if he is on guard. A woman opens a screen door and waves at you. And you wave in return and she turns her back to you at the side of the house with a happy skip in her heels.

You find it incredible that you can see through and into the window of the monastery where you are at ply over old Latin pages, which is what you'd always wanted, but gave up, giving into other questions, which may or may not have mattered to your parents or even to you or to the world at large. Swinging, you follow your mother and your father holding hands. They're walking on that path you last saw them follow, when a call came that said, "They're gone."

It's somewhat disconcerting to see the birds beneath you and aircraft, which, you figure, must mean you're excellent at the innovation of hang gliding and have climbed above expectations, managing the currents with the deftness of crows. But you want to go back. You were intrigued by the monastery, by your wife and the children playing and that yellow dog on watch.

Of course, you're eventually struck by the thought that the house

you saw on the hill was not your house and that those children and the dog are purely matter for the strange. When did you ever dig through books in the monastery, though you can remember perfectly when that thought came at first, when your mother walked you through the sacristy (you can't remember why) and you saw what would eventually become the image of a monastery and the diminution of playground noises in the faces of the alter boys and their quiet hands and in the sad, tired eyes of the priest at whose knees your mother cried for the loss of something, perhaps her devotion to you and your spiritual health or something yet more trivial.

You see your wife disappear around the house but her name is lost to the width of your tongue. You find the image of the children in their white shorts and clean shoes in the grass and the dog watching them lovely and strange. They are sounds to listen for, colors to draw, mysteries to penetrate eventually, maybe on landing, and you wish you could remember her name. You wish you could touch her, the way you always did, which you, of course, can remember.

The wind is warm on your face, and you tell the world beneath you, which is the color of stone and glass, that you could always try harder. You could always try harder to remember but its impossible.

You feel the images of your wife and those children. The dog suddenly rushes forward for a ball, a yellow ball, tossed long for him. You can hear the dog barking. The images pulse. Your wife waves, closes the screen door and walks around the house with that skip of hers. Her name is like a quiet refusal.

You listen as the book is closed in the monastery. Large books fill that library. When they're closed everyone hears and the gaps they leave in the shelves when removed are like holes in the masonry. Your mother weeps at the knees of the priest. His strange icons have grown dull with thin accumulations of dust.

You feel the sun on your face and the pull of gravity at the bottom of your shoes. Your wings spread to distant edges. You've always envied the birds. You feel the earth rise at you swiftly, the sky reach down and snatch you up. The horizon fills your eyes and your mouth and your ears. Maybe you've become rain or understand the secret things minerals claim underground and in the stars as they bake.

And there are the distant hills and on those hills you can see children playing and a dog watching them on guard. A woman opens a screen door and waves high. She turns her back to you and skips into the distance. Your mother weeps at the knees of a priest. You excel at this and you excel and you maintain your climb as the earth pulls at your belly, and for a brief interlude you wonder if it's possible to breath above it all.

