

Before the Sunrise

by Desmond Bradshaw

Have you ever woken up before sunrise, when you are all by yourself, as solitude and joy mix up into one jumbled emotion? It's like a bubble of freedom where no one but you get affected by your actions. This is the space where I thrive - where I can fly with the seagulls, feeling the warmth of the sun while it emerges over a calm ocean. A perfect morning is seldom appreciated. Daily commuters might drive past a tranquil ocean, disinterested and unaware of the pure beauty they are missing. But I always notice. Every morning, as I dance across the sand, as I feel the pull of the tide, and as I fly with the crooning birds overhead, I notice.

Sadly, this feeling doesn't last very long. Each morning, as I walk back to my house on the beach, barefoot and soaking, I put my mask back on. I hide all the wonder and excitement I feel inside. I learned to do this because I have no other option.

With three boys, two girls, and a father, my family home is far from functional. I'd like to say I keep our family stable, but I contribute to the mania most days. I don't believe it's my fault. My siblings are the greyest and blandest people I know. If they were food, they'd be oatmeal. When they aren't at school, they are usually in their rooms. If they knew what I did every morning, they would have a heyday teasing and pushing me around as they do with the rest of my friends. My friends aren't people I connect well with. They are just a crowd I can roll with at school. I believe my siblings and their clique don't like my friends because they do not equate to their idea of 'normal'. I guess they aren't used to people who don't fuss over their looks and what people think of them. Sometimes I call them out on it and that's when the fighting begins. My family always says, "Wendell James, you are hopeless.", but I would like to think that it's the other way around.

That's why I let my guard down at dawn when I'm alone. Sometimes I feel only the ocean doesn't pass judgment on me. It sounds sad, but that's how I perceive it. Occasionally, I send out a plea to the waves as they reach their climax and fold crashing over themselves to meet the rest of the water. The thing about waves is that they forget. You can tell them anything, but as they join the ocean, they don't remember what you said. I used to think I like to be alone. I realize now I just want someone with whom I could be myself.

One morning, I walked up to the waves, my bare feet in the surf, and said in a low whisper, "Please, I need someone I could talk to with words coming from my heart, not my brain." The wave I addressed started building up speed. The waves of this beach never reach

higher than a couple of metres, but this one was spectacular. Its whitecaps rose up and up, higher than what would seem possible. It started curving around itself and eventually met the rest of the water, disappearing into the surf that soon after rose to my knees. This, I decided, was the perfect wave.

That morning, as I returned to the house of grey people and grey conversations, it seemed a little more colourful. The wave brought a glimmer of hope into my mind. Next morning, the air was thick. It seemed to leave a film all over my body. Relief only came when a cool summer breeze floated in from the towering oak trees on the west side of the beach. This is typical of the humidity in the air at that time of year. As I walked, shoeless, to the cool wet sand, I heard a voice in the distance. It rang out, reverberating in my ears like a loud bell. It stood out against the usual background sounds of the seagulls overhead and the crashing waves. It sounded a bit masculine as I followed it. I started to break out into a run, every step bringing me closer to it. The voice was singing with a clean round tone that made me even more desperate to find who was behind it. The thought that it could be the person I wished for sent butterflies into my stomach. I traveled at least a kilometre and when I turned my head our tiny house could barely be seen. My breath started to become heavy. I felt an unbearable tension in my chest. Frost was creeping down my throat and into my lungs. What if it wasn't such a good idea to follow the voice? From fear of being seen prancing along the sand, with jelly legs and wheezy breath, I decided to return to the small house on the beach.

As I reached the rotting wooden steps, I heard my dad, "Where is that boy? It's half-past seven!" Oh god! I didn't realize I was out for so long. The voice got me carried away! Do I sneak in or do I just head to school without my stuff? I finally mustered up all the courage I could and strode into the living room. The strong, cold stare of my father, almost immobilized me. "Wendall James, you...", he started to say. "I know, I know. I'm hopeless," I said. Anger, like hot fire, rose from my throat. There were a million things I wanted to say to my dad, but I caught myself before spilling them. It's not worth it! I repeated over and over in my head.

I woke up to the sound of footsteps underneath my bed next dawn. That was not good. How could I get outside to find the voice if there was someone downstairs? Suddenly, the rusty swinging door creaked as it scraped against the old hardwood of the floor. Whoever it was, it had gone. "I'll wait two minutes," I told myself decisively. The longest two minutes of my life. I counted every second in my head. Excitement flooded over my body like a broken dam as I reached the minute mark. "Oh, screw it!" I exclaimed, as I pulled on my jacket and stepped, light on my feet, down the wooden stairs. I knew which stairs creaked and which were stable, so I

stepped down, walking in a strange pattern that only I mastered. The sun rising from the ocean was visible, sending its pink glare into the open window in the kitchen.

There it was! The voice surfaced again as I stepped down onto the beach. I had gone over it the night before, I wouldn't have forgiven myself if I didn't find out who was singing. Without faltering, I bolted across the dark sand. My feet sent up fat droplets of water in their wake as I ran in the surf. My chest was throbbing, like the morning before, but I pushed through it hoping it would subside soon enough. I have never been a runner; laps around the gym were the closest I had gotten to long distance. The voice was getting clearer! Its deep timbre resonated in my ears. There was a bend in the path. The beach curved around a tall cliff. On the other side of the cliff I saw someone that looked like a man, but I wasn't sure. I had never gone this far out from the house. I stopped to catch my breath. I tried to keep my wheezing to a low volume, however, that only made it harder for my breath to return to its steady pace. A few minutes later, I regained my senses and took one large step to face the other side of the cliff. As my foot left the ground, I began to rethink everything I had done since I left the house up to that point. What if this person got angry by my intrusion? Many worries flooded my mind when I saw the face of the singing voice. It was my dad! I couldn't remember ever hearing my dad sing, much less seeing him dance. His eyes were closed. His face was free of tension. He spread his arms out and began mirroring the seagulls in the air. He was radiating joy. The air around him seemed to glow. Maybe I wasn't the only one who put on a mask to hide my true feelings. Maybe everyone else feels wonder deep inside. I slowly moved closer to him. "Dad?" I uttered, but he couldn't hear anything. He was flying.