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Simon Alleverde stood in place, as if he had been moving and suddenly come to a stop. He was standing before the bridge, and below it, a massive drop he could not see.

When one approaches a large, unfamiliar precipice one often attempts to peer downward, in order to inspect from a safe span both the steepness and to ascertain how far one might possibly plummet before reaching that bottom distance. What sort of a rift is this, and on what scale can one judge its abyss? Simon Alleverde, upon the occasion of approaching this promontory, did not. He did not investigate ahead, but turned to look backward over his shoulder.

But this may be forgiven, or if one prefers, forgotten; the difference between what he might have done and what Simon Alleverde did do are of no consequence here. He was not on a hike, as he was often wont to do, nor any other particular journey that would involve decisions of location, cardinal directions, and paths not traveled. Oppositional to such a pleasure stroll, his arrival at the bridge was absolutely nothing less than the pivotal moment of a universal journey; as such, his response so characteristic.

Simon Alleverde had, in fact, arrived at the end of his worldly life. Like all of his species thrust into this situation of death, he first looked backward, as he had been trained since birth. He put his hands in the pockets of his trousers while he looked over his shoulder.

Behind him was not a fog, but simply his life, much as it had occurred, free at last from the metaphysical friction of fallible memory. It, as a whole, existed—just as it once had been, in all of the color, odor, and warm vibrating aesthesia of living. Behind him was his child, his school, his mother, his uncle. They did the things that they had done in one grand scene played out as he watched; the things that he had come to expect during his life, living one day to the next, happened behind him with not one aspect missing or forgotten. These episodes knit the many objects and places into events through their clever semantics, like so many words and phrases into stanzas and paragraphs; this unfurling of time was always a clever surprise of course, but it never infringed into the absurd. His job, his garden, his kitchen, his car, his dog: after the grease of the first he pattered in the bright blooms of the second, using the dusty fourth to acquire materials for the dirt-smelling third, on the floor of which lay the warm fuzz of the fifth. An adjectival analysis could not really bring them to life—not in the way that they had lived for Simon. ‘On the page one dances in verbal acuties, only to stumble through life with vague circuities,’ as Simon had often said. There—he could see himself saying it, back in the course of his life. He had said it in a bar, there in the bath, and in the library, muttering quietly over the privacy of a book. There was none of the epic nicety of the well-formed couplet here in death. The man looked backward and saw only everything. In it was the same static worthlessness, the same disappointing lack of narrative and epithematic finality as in a room that one has just exited, upon turning to view it again from just outside the doorway. All he had known as life simply remained. It survived him—which was to say, ‘it was past,’ just as it was when he had lived it. His neighbors, his bank, his books, and his lover, were properly just as they were. Ah, his lover—Simon gazed into that past that lay behind him: his lover washed dishes, then he was kissing Simon in bed, then he was yelling at the newspaper, then he was making them tea. Then, then, then: his lover was now forever entombed in that vacant preposition of time-space. It was the same past that Simon, like all of us, had always had to view over his shoulder, only now there was nothing else. This was the experience of death.

Simon felt a breeze. It blew from in front of him, out of the empty space over which the bridge was sailing. It was warm, and lapped at the tails of his jacket, spinning his tie playfully in a flapping lap against Simon's round belly. He took a step forward toward the bridge, unable to reach any conclusions about what had been behind. In truth, he felt a bit betrayed at being taught in life that some sort of important derivative would be drawn up at this point—a sum, or total of some kind—but he decided to let it be, for now. The ground was rocky and his loafers crackled against the volcanic stone, shattered into shards by infinite tectonic speed. The sound of it was like crockery.

The beginning of the bridge began thirty feet before the edge of the cliff. He approached the transition, laying his rough, workman hands on one of two tall stone posts. It was carved with glyphs, or symbols, or cuniform; he wasn't quite sure which the proper term was. He couldn't glean any significance from the markings other than that someone had intended to mark the bridge in some way. It was very old. The surface of the span was wide, cobbled in a stone that was not at all like that which made up the substance of the cliff. It was smooth, and lain nicely without gaps. On the edges of the bridge were short walls, concreted of the same stone. The span was wide enough for several vehicles to travel abreast, but from all signs, none ever had. The stones were worn evenly across, not in ruts or lanes, but as if in a long, steady drag: thousands upon thousands of individuals over time, trickling alone in separate paths.

The best way for Simon to inspect what it was that lay beneath the bridge was clearly from the bridge itself; its construction appeared sturdier than the loose slag of the precipice. With his one hand brushing around the pillar lightly—a hand gently rubbing against the tree's bark within reach to ease the descent of a ragged slope—he stepped out. Simon Alleverde lifted one brown trouser leg and extended it outward in the direction of the hazy, far-side of the bridge. He put his weight down upon his foot, pressing into the bridge stone. He began crossing.

His heels made a quiet scuff-clap sound as his long strides moved the distance. Breeze lifted the air, scattering his hair into his eyes as he approached the beginning of the real bridge, where the edge of the land dropped. The blown air pierced through his clothing, lifting heat away from his skin. The light shining through the mist and clouds was surprisingly bright in the opaque air, but it was hollow, giving no sense of radiated heat. If there was any chance of it, he might have desired that this was a valley near a northern seaside, or even an overlook upon a high mountain road. It might even have been played host to such an exciting sensation as the smell of approaching snow. But there was no possibility of these at all, and this could not be mistaken. All was belied by the lack of any growth. There were no bushes, no wooden life, and not even sparse grass could be found among the rocks on the cliff flanking the rising causeway of the bridge. Despite the shade the walls provided and the cool clouds of moisture carried upon the breeze coming up the side of the chasm, there was not the smallest fragment of moss in the chinks of soft cobbled stone. This was not a place that was anything like anywhere else. It was only what it was, and nothing else at all.

The wind whistled around the jointed manifold of the land and the bridge. The abrupt drop of the igneous stone descending away from the cobbled brickwork resembled a lip, or perhaps more of an elbow. Maybe it was even a chin. Simon Alleverde drew each side of his jacket about him and fastened the large knit-leather button to keep the fabric from buffeting in the air. He brushed his hair to either side of his face, and pulled down the brim of his hat before realizing to his surprise that he was not wearing his hat. It had not blown off; it simply was not there. He wondered what had happened to it, or where it might be. Instead, he stuck his hands into his trouser pockets, and continued down the left-center of the bridge, towards a place where he might be able to gaze over the side.

He did not want to look over the edge—not yet. It would be best if he walked a bit out from the edge before attempting to look. It would yield a better perspective. Twelve paces out would be enough to view downward as well as back towards the walls of the cliff, or canyon, or whatever it was. But every one of twelve paces over an unseen abyss is each possibly an infinite plunge. Achingly, he tried to continue

forward, but his attention and course arced slowly towards the side of the bridge. After only about five paces out into the empty space, he decided that the shrewdness of patience had been satisfied. He skipped up to the wall with quickness uncharacteristic of his manner, and gingerly placing each palm on the foot-wide wall, he bent over at the waist to peer downward.

The cliff broke away sharply, as he had imagined. But not only did it drop in a very steep, near vertical angle, but some hundred feet below the bridge, the cliff seemed actually to retreat to a negative angle, dropping away and out of sight *negating* its original edge, as if the land from which he had just departed from was only a crust on top of a giant hollow. Through the haze he could only make out just two or three hundred feet of the rock wall behind him; after that, what lay below was only as far and firm as the mist, not unlike the grey clouds that formed the low sky over his head. This, however, was not the most startling thing that he saw.

Underneath the bridge upon which he stood, protruding out from the cliff, was *another bridge*, like a symmetrical shadow of the one on which he stood. Its curvature was opposite: hanging downward rather than arching. It could have been a double of his, but for this fact. He thought for a moment that perhaps there was water beneath his bridge, and the mirrored image was literally that. No bridge he had ever seen had such a supporting span below it, without some sort of cable or trellis connecting the two. Each echoed the other, as if by specific design. His span led from the top of the cliff, and the other began at the very lowest point at which he could see the rock wall, after which the mist blocked vision in its imposing grey cloud. Simon Alleverde was no engineer, and could not account for what strengths such a physical puzzle might hold.

Bereft of alternatives, Simon Alleverde continued across the bridge. From a different angle the bridge might yet make itself clearer. Each leather-bound foot was placed in front of the other in the time honored fashion, and he looked back once more, over his shoulder. He walked a calm, dragged step: each shoe pulled forward beneath suited shoulders, head turned backward, still looking the life over. Life in all its strangeness was much less mysterious than the bizarre structure on which he walked. He gazed fondly at its familiar vignettes. In that past he watched his child grow, again and again, from the moment of conception until the very last visit in the garden. The baby was a child, then a boy, then a man; he learned to speak, to write, and to think. He watched his dog run, play, die, and be buried. Now, from this vantage point, he observed all the other mundane *et cetera* that he had not really thought about at the time when they had occurred: his soup grew cold in his bowl while he read bad literature at the table; his urine circled the toilet as it drained away while he whistled; his hair, day by day, came out in small pieces upon his comb and he noticed no difference.

His strides slowed, and Simon let his worn, smooth soles slide a bit more against the cobblestones, twisting the ball of his foot with each step. The shoes were thin, and he could feel the cool stone in the palm of his foot. The wind had begun to howl a bit as it blew twisting over one side of the bridge and back down again. Simon's trouser legs buffeted about him in the moving air, chilling him and causing the old hairs that grew in thickets upon his legs to stand on end, but the pressure of his weight pushing against the soles of his feet was familiar. The flat at the bottom of each step was almost like a little friendly pat, he thought. He balled his fists in his pockets and pulled elbows in tight to try and keep his warmth. His lover had loved to indulge in giving him a little pat—an intimate, regular little tap with the four-ply tips of the fingers—on his bottom as he stood shivering in nakedness, toweling off from a shower or a swim. Simon had always been a bit peeved by it; the way his skin bounced, wet and a bit too soft, reminded him that he wasn't as in shape as he used to be. But it gave his lover pleasure. His lover's lips would glow with delight, and he might twist his mustache a bit; the mustache that he grew to hide just how much light there was in those lips. He would lie back on the bed, staring up at Simon, hands behind his head. Simon shaved while he would watch from the bed. Simon would play at great bombastic throws of annoyance as he pretended to be concerned with the time, saying that the reservations were for nine, and why wasn't he ready? They

weren't attacks, those little smacks on the bottom and words of admonishment. Each was a kiss. There were so many, many kisses. Some involved lips, some made use of other parts, and some were only words, or less.

The wind roared, and Simon Alleverde wondered what the hell he was doing standing out on this bridge. He went again to the side, and looked over. Everything was the same as before, but the lower bridge was even further away, the symmetrical arcs orbiting apart on their parallel ecliptics. He looked back towards the... but that was odd, he couldn't see the cliff behind him any longer. He had walked further than he had thought. How long had he been thinking, lost it thought? He had never been good at keeping time. Was he simply facing the wrong direction? His eyes sought outward through the wind that obscured the view through its noise and turbulence. He couldn't see anything but the bridge in either direction; below there was still the other bridge. Was he on the left side of the bridge? He crossed to the other side and peered over. Maybe this was the left side? Which way had he been walking? Simon Alleverde could not be sure.

As he pulled his head back from the breath of the wind that roared up out of the chasm, he could have sworn that he saw something on the lower bridge, and dodged his head back quickly to look again. Nothing to see, except for identical stones. He kept walking, looking downward over the edge. A fierce gust blew by, causing him to pull his head back and shut his eyes. But was that it again? He stopped, and forced his eyes to look down, scrutinizing the other bridge for anything out of place. But wait, there was something! It was a face! Incredibly, there seemed to be a person looking up at Simon, from the bottom of the lower bridge, a few hundred feet away. How was that possible? Was it hollow, with windows in the sides? He leaned over as far as he dared, but saw nothing but a band of stones in a span just like the one upon which he stood, with a face peeping over the edge, as he did.

He looked at the face below, trying to make it out. At first he had barely discerned that it was a human face, but now he was beginning to recognize features: brown hair, the top of a suit jacket, brown, with shirt and tie, no hat. Simon walked from side to side, examining this inverse person. The person below moved as well, almost as if he was walking on the underside of the lower bridge. The strangeness of it did not alarm Simon, who only wished there was some way to pass between the two bridges, so that he might speak to this man. What would he say to another man on another bridge? He had no idea, but he was sure that conversation would take its meaningful cues if only they were close enough to exchange words. Simon continued fifty feet further down the span, no longer sure in which direction, or in relation to what he was moving. The other figure proceeded as well, first in the same direction as Simon, then back the other way. Simon turned and walked back too, then his colleague turned again. They past each other on their own bridges and continued walking. Then Simon reversed direction again, and his companion did the same. The man below had certainly seen Simon, and seemed also to be studying him. Simon then stopped, and so did the other man. He bent forward, and shouted downward to the man, but the wind was too great. The other also bent over his own edge, and might have been shouting too, but there was no way Simon could have heard.

Simon turned back to the center of the causeway. The air moving around in the sky had reached the level of a maelstrom. The button was ripped open on his coat, and his tie whipped about like a broken arm of machinery. Simon Alleverde sat down in the middle of the bridge, crossed his legs, and pulled the jacket about him to try and shelter himself.

He tried to peer around his shoulder, longing suddenly for something familiar. There was only fog behind him. He looked both ways down the bridge, but could not remember in which direction his life lay. He stared off into the distance, sitting up a bit straighter to peer over each wall that bounded the bridge, but he found himself simply alone. He knew of one certain thing from that life, which he desperately wanted to remember at this moment. It wasn't in his head, but in the pit of his stomach, sagging a bit within his suit; there was something there inside him that he wanted to grasp. What was it called? They called it a...a

brief... a small... a passing... a what? What did it feel like? It was a glance of the body, it was intimacy.... But what was intimacy? Was that inside his stomach or outside? His torso now felt hard like a shell, hollow, and fragile. He couldn't be sure if the thing was wet or dry; warm, maybe, but it could be otherwise. Maybe the thing was outside the flesh. It was some electrical contact, there and then gone soon again: an embossing spark of the moment with raised, rough edges. It was something like that. Some thing, little, dark hole, folding all the body's desire into it: doing it again and feeling it again. He almost had it in his mind's grasp, but it slipped away every time. He couldn't remember. His mind had been getting old for some time now, aging along with his body. One day his back hurt more, and the skin around his throat and shoulders hung down a bit more than usual. Then he had misplaced things, and forgotten some of the faces. It all seemed so distant now. Getting old was something that used to happen, back there... but it had been there the whole time, this "aging"; it was always present even in the intervals between its blurred, infrequent communiqués—mailed with postage due, naturally—always arriving when least expected. But this was a different hole, a very definite thing-gone-missing, not a thing-misplaced. And now he couldn't remember, couldn't remember that, couldn't remember...

Staring off into the wind, his eyes watered freely. He tried to remember exactly what it was that he was trying to remember. He was... Simon was an old man. No, it was a different man, two men.... There was a man. A man had touched this man... maybe only a hand offered to another, one of so many during one's life. No! It was more than that, more important. How would this man have touched, how would he have been touched? And why? Why did anyone touch anyone else? And this man, touch this man? Men so rarely touched each other these days, and when they did, the shape, the touch, and the attention of those touches were not the way that they should have been. But it must have been. But why must it have been a man?

More of his hands than of his mind, he began to go through his pockets. He half-hoped that there might be something to trigger his memory, an artifact of an unknown past. His two interior jacket pockets had nothing in them, and the outer pockets were unfortunately sewn closed, and only for fashion sake. What could this man have looked like? What was it that a man looked like? Like a man? Like himself? A body, there was still a body in this suit. A body gets old after a period of time, time that cannot really be remembered. The body's oldness is never in doubt. Old was its own gland, a supplementary organ filled with the fluid of age, growing like a callus on the heavily worked areas. It grew brown, drab, but bulbous and bursting with functioning crepuscules each secreting the cytoplasm of time, in kind with all organs, manufacturing and storing their function's substance within their own soft, interior flesh. He was certain that a man was more than a collection of organs, but organs were the only thing that he had left.

He dug into the trouser pockets again, and turned up nothing—but there was something—a very small, round pebble. Simon Alleverde twisted the pebble between his forefinger and thumb, trying to find something similar in his memory onto which he might grasp. Perhaps there had been no man, and he had touched no one. Had he ever wished to touch? Why? What would it have felt like to touch, or to wish? Might it have felt like the pebble—small, rough, and hard, but more certainly real than anything? These questions did not make any sense. He could not think; he could not remember. He could not touch anyone or anything, and it seemed he never had. There was no thinking here, no aging body, nor memory—on this bridge it seemed there was nothing at all.

Simon Alleverde sat on the bridge with his head tucked into himself. He felt a small pebble. He felt the fear—the only thing that he was able to feel—the feeling that he might be completely alone.

The wind attacked with renewed vigor in heaving gusts, and he gasped on the air that forced its way down his throat and into his lungs. As what was left of his body turned on him in spasms and chokes, he dropped the pebble, and the wind took it. He put his palms down on the cobbles of the bridge underneath his knees: only the bridge in this world of wind. He tried to think of something, anything, but he could not. He could not remember even his name. He sat, but he did not know where. Words filled

him, words that he did not know. The words spoke—shaking the bridge with each syllable, stones reverberating with the enunciation of the wind.

*In wind and stone moves flesh and bone; they mint life's treasury as breath fills the chest.  
In life's small room, bodies pay out for each move, and so to memory we gamble the rest.*

Simon Alleverde pulled his head up, as the wind slacked and the ambient light shone through the cloudy mire, illuminating the bridge. He felt a bit dizzy, sitting there alone on the cobblestones. Perhaps standing and walking a bit would do him some good. Getting to his feet, he let his arms swing freely at his side. Yes, it felt much better to be ambulatory. It felt like himself. He moved quicker in the soft, warm breeze, his tie swinging with each step, heels tapping. He whistled a tune to a song that he did not know. There was a man he had known who used to sing that song—but the identity escaped him. Something about when you know that you love... but Simon thought such lyrical odes foolish. Nobody actually ever said such things, such rhyming couplets empty of everything but good intention. He continued to whistle, as unconcerned with the words as with the speaker. Simon Alleverde looked down at the other bridge below him. His double had stood up to walk as well, heading back, the way that Simon had come. Simon did not look, instead gazing ahead, and listening to the scuff-clap of his soles, and feeling each worn stone beneath his feet. In succession, each stone touched him briefly as he passed, and he felt them all. Every step was a kiss, a kiss from the bridge that spanned out through the wind-filled sky. Each was a kiss. Simon hummed the wordless melody, and walked on across the bridge.