His name was Jake. Or- it might have been, names didn’t mean much when nobody was around to speak them.

Rays of light darted through otherwise unrelenting fog. Dawn had come, another sleepless night. Sleep was a commodity that you could afford only if you trusted the waves- and to do so would be lunacy. Jake shifted on his raft. The recent addition of a locked briefcase added weight, not enough to lower into the water, but enough to make him nervous. Lowering means to drown, to lose himself in the endless chasm of the ocean. Deep salt corrodes all, his body no exception.

Recent scavenges lead to the discovery of a still-functioning revolver- which he judged to be rather rare due to the majority of the cities containing arms being long since submerged. It had only one bullet, one he was not sure what to do with. It had no use for hunting nor fishing, and there was not much to life other than that. He peered over the edge of the raft, glancing at his unshaven reflection whilst contemplating whether or not to toss the gun. If it had no use, it was just more weight. The locked briefcase may have a use if he could figure out how to unlock it, but he was ready to dump it if necessary. Let the creatures that lurked the deep find their uses.

Fumbling around in a pile of cans to find his flask, Jake noticed a vague shape take form from the beyond. Cautiously eying it, he grabbed his flask, took a generous gulp of water, and placed some salt under his tongue so that the hunger would hurt less. Shapes weren’t of much concern; generally some stray debris or remnants of the past, but he peered forward nevertheless.

As it drew closer, he started to recognize details; familiar in a way he couldn’t quite place. An animal? No, something else alive.

A human.

Jake never directly assumed he was the only one left, or that seeing another human would be downright impossible- but those thoughts did dance around the corners of his mind. Possibilities, just more possibilities. He considered that this might be a hallucination, a desperate mental grasp for communication, but his value for other people had gone long ago. Just extra weight.

He could fully recognize the shape as a man on a rather beat up boat, as the man began to wave and shout, Jake attempted to recall his own language. Beasts that roamed the drylands never spoke- so he had no need to do so. Days, months, years, he wasn’t sure how long it had been since he had last uttered a word.

“HEY!” the distant man shouted

“HOLY HELL DUDE!”

Jake glanced at the man but made no effort to respond or motion back. His raft drew up against the side of the other’s boat, and they made eye contact.

“I- I… I never thought I’d see anyone again. God damn, look at you! This is real, right? Totally real- it has to be.” the boat man tied a rope to the edge of Jake’s raft and hopped on board, pressing his hands against Jake’s face.

Weight.

“My name- Albert. Al. Just Al is good, sorry, sorry I’ll get my hands off you now but I can’t actually believe this. Or if there was anything to believe- it’s all been one long, empty dream. I never knew if I would wake up. But you, another human! It’s been so lo-” Al paused and looked at Jake’s blank face. “I’m blabbering, I know, I haven’t talked in ages! Even this, this” he pointed at his lips, “Talking! It feels so weird!”

“I…” Jake began, “It has been awhile since I have spoken. My name is Jake, I believe.” Each word felt foreign, invasive and unnecessary.

“Jake, man, this is amazing. It’s unreal. Totally unreal.” Al sat down next to him.

They shared a long moment in silence, before Al spoke again. “Do you remember any of your life before the water?”

Jake attempted to recall anything, a childhood memory, a job, a loved one- nothing came to mind. The only thing he could remember is the day prior and a few stray discoveries. Out in the ocean, everything blurred together. Memory wasn’t important. Survival- weight, was.

“No.” Jake responded.

“I used to be a CEO. Was actually up in a plane when the first waves hit.” Al scoffed, “CEO- that position used to mean something. Now it’s just this- this useless amalgamation of letters.”

“We have no power- the water has what we do not.”

“Our power is living. Succumbing is a concept that never changes.”

Jake didn’t understand this. There was nothing before the water, or anything that had more control. Even if he could remember the past- there would be no comparison.

“We used to take it all for granted. Interacting with people, every day. Society.” Al pressed his palm against his forehead to shield himself against the sun. “We only realize these things once they’re gone. Once everyone we knew was gone.”

“It’s all taken from you. In an instant. You never get that back.”

Jake rubbed his thumb against the cold metal of the revolver.

“Jake. I wonder- are we more alone than the dead?” Al asked, staring down into the deep.

Jake wrapped his index finger around the trigger, aimed it at Al’s head- and pushed.

With a deafening bang, Al’s body slumped forward, off the raft and into the water. Jake cut the connecting rope, and tossed the gun into the distance.

There was too much weight.