

VEGARD FOTLAND

Far Beyond the Seams

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One foot in the grave

Breath. As if I was drowning in the desert, scorching the inside of my lungs like embers. No longer empty. Suddenly filling with cold stale air. I didn't know if I was choking or living. Living. I was living. For the first time in what seemed like forever, the surrounding flesh was my own; movable, cold, prickling.

I gasped for more air, but there were none. What little had been in here with me was taken with my first drag. I was choking again. I flailed around to get some sense of direction and realized, I was in a wooden box. The sense of self was fleeting as I felt my sight return to darkness. I struck upwards against the seemingly mildewed and rot eaten wood. A crack. No light. Adrenaline pumping a hole through my chest, I struck the wood again. And again. And again. Until my knuckles bled. Until my bones cracked. Until what little oxygen inside me was no more.

The wood cracked open and a mound of dirt fell on top of me. It filled my dry mouth, but with what might I had left I started digging. Pound after pound, I dug through the dirt. Inching my way towards a hopeful something. Then, in the

darkness of giving up, my hand felt the slight breeze of cold wind as it pierced the dirt. Freedom was within my grasp. I seized. Clenched my fist around a nearby piece of cold and wet crabgrass. I pulled until the fibres in my muscles were aching, screaming for repose. The crabgrass released their roots, but with the last of my all I dug my hand into the ground, my nails breaking against the coarse compacted dirt. The pain did not even enter my mind. It was pure desperation. Pure will to live. With a final push, my second hand broke free of the dirt, grabbed a hold opposite of the other and pulled my head free. I could yet see as the dirt was plastered on my eyes, but I could feel, breathe, take in the wind. I coughed up what must have been a buckets worth of dirt from my mouth and throat. Thick globules of sticky saliva infused dirt. I could breathe once again. With my body buried, and my hands in a resting position, with the dirt filling the creases and crevasses, I gave in to the exhaustion and lay there. I was safe.

After a minute of mindless repose, I started the arduous task of getting the whole of me out. After some minutes of struggle, I emerged like a newborn baby calf. Just as unstable and weak in my legs. I stumbled a bit as I started picking the dirt from my eyes. My hands were shaking. Trembling with each grain plucked. Sore and pulsating i managed to get the last piece of coarse dirt from my dry eyeballs. I could see.

A barren waste of misty, desolate wetlands. Beside my now collapsed hole, a small wooden plank with a name halfheartedly carved into it.

"Vosh". Is that me? I thought. Come to think of it, I couldn't recall anything. It was as if I was born anew. My mind was churning thoughts like an engine running on fumes.

Nondescript, lightning, flashing and disappearing in fractions of a second, but my memories were none. A blank canvas.

Looking around gave me nothing. Looking down gave me worry. I was clad in dirty, mildewed leather armour with a large open rift over where my heart was. It stank, like that of a cat's corpse in an alleyway. It was hard to tell what was underneath, as the clothing felt more like an excess layer of skin than a separate item entirely. As if I had never worn anything else. It was hard to tell anything. Was I wounded? Everything hurt, so locating a single part of my body felt impossible.

"Okay, first thing first", I thought to myself. There has to be some sort of explanation somewhere. I patted down my clothes to no avail. Seemingly nothing hidden as far as I could tell at the time. So I started to dig up my own grave. Maybe I was buried with something. Spending longer than I would have liked, and expending more energy than I could afford, I dug out the site. As my hands tore through the mix of loose and compacted dirt, my bloodied fingers touched something. Something metal. I started feeling it out with my fingers to see if I could get a grip. Long and somewhat cylindrical. I managed to find perch on the object and started pulling it up like a gardener to a weed.

The dirt gave its grip on the object and I fell backwards, making a bosom sized indent in the earth below. In my hands lay a long, double cylindrical, metal object attached to a finely carved and sanded wooden handle of sorts. The cylinders were hollow and betwixt the metal and wood were a set of mechanism. Though I could not bring to mind any former experience with this object, I knew what it was. I knew its intent. This was a weapon of sorts. Neither a sword for cutting, nor a bow for piercing, this thing was special. On the back of the wooden piece there was a letter finely carved, now filled

with dirt, making out the letter “V”. Vosh. I am Vosh. And this thing was mine.

As I aimlessly looked around, I realized something perturbing. I had no food, no water, no shelter and no idea where to go or why. My stomach felt empty, as if there had been unfilled for years. My throat was so dry, no sound came out when I tried to speak. I could feel the vocal folds in my larynx struggle to close and move. Dry and cracked like a masons foot in hot summer months. I needed water. I had but taken my first breath, and I was already dying.

Shallow puddles of black water scoured the surrounding place. No matter how much I wanted to bend over and suck up every speck of it, I somehow managed to bar the thought. *I would shit myself to death within days*, I told myself. The only way to survive this was by being smart, keen, careful and resourceful. From my situation, I could only portend that I was not the most careful nor smart person. Most smart or careful people don’t end up six feet under. Or at most they manage to get buried in a graveyard.

As I started to walk in a completely random direction, I could feel tensing sharp pinpricks in my foot. No doubt about it. Something was broken or cracked, and everything was bruised and brittle. Left foot then right foot, step after step, sagging with every rhythm I crept across the wet fields. No brushes, no plants, no animals or birds. Wet dirt and crabgrass was all my eyes could see. Upon new misty horizon bare new wondrous views of wet dirt and crabgrass. To this day, the sight of crabgrass annoys me. On rare occasions, I would see tall shadows emerging in the mist. Obscured and hauntingly tall. Stretched out like a man waiting for a hug. Dead hollowed

trees. Every time I got excited. Every time a new tree.

For seven hours I walked. Till my right foot was so swollen I could barely feel it anymore. Till there was no more sweat to produce. Till my sight was blurred and unfocused. Till I finally saw a structure in the mist. A cabin. Run down and broken. Maggot infested wooden walls and no door. Just as cold as the outside, but less wet. Had I any fluid to expel, I would have cried a river and drowned in it. Making sure to not make too much noise, I entered the door frame and looked inside.

Standing still, like a statue, seemingly not even breathing, I saw the back of a humanoid. It was upright, naked, hands limp, and facing a wall at the opposite end of the entrance. Its skin was tattered with skid marks and bruises, and it seemed paper thin, like that of an old man. It had weird proportions, its hands were long and its torso elongated. I felt a cold static run down the back of my neck. Something was off. I looked over my weird metal and wood stick. Seemed heavy enough to do some damage. As I stepped towards the creature, one of the planks beneath my feet creaked with the intent of spoiling my light steps. The creature jerked around and looked at me. Its eyes were hollow, its mouth agape, showing white teeth with black plaque. I took a step back at the ghastly sight, but before I could adapt to the situation, it lunged at me. By sheer coincidence, I swung wildly at it with the stick. Teeth and blood went scattering across the oak wood floor. The jaw of the creature was ajar and crooked, hanging loosely as if I had broken it, but it did not seem to react as if it were in pain. It lunged at me again. What little teeth it had left lodged itself into my shoulder. I released a painful wail as I stuck my fingers into its eye holes to force it off me. My fingers felt a cold chill as if the cavity was frozen solid. I ripped it out of my shoulder,

some of its teeth still halfway stuck in my flesh. I stumbled backwards. It located me again and lunged as i managed to poke my stick into it mouth. I touched a small lever on the stick by mistake and a loud booming explosion went off. Flashing lights. Blood and flesh splattered the foyer like a painting. I was covered in thick crimson. There was a sizable hole in the wall on the other side. I stood there. Still. In shock.

What in the ungodly abyss was that? I thought.

The cabin stood before me, a foyer full of closed doors. I decided to keep a light foot while traversing the interior, as any more of those things could have taken up residence here. As I crept further into the cabin, slowly opening doors, being careful to listen before turning the handles, I soon realized I was alone. The whole cabin was empty. Only some makeshift furniture and past rodent sanctuaries made this their home. Yet no rodent or man was here today. Until now.

The cabin, which appeared to be an old hunting cabin, was mostly consisting of larger rooms with old bed frames stacked closely and a single general area for keeping warm with a long defunct stove. I managed to find a smaller room with a cracked and broken bed frame and a mold eaten mattress. I spent what energy I had left to take a bed frame from another room, and replace the broken one. As the final piece of rubble was out of the room and the bed was as ready as it was ever going to be, I lodged a piece of wood between the door handle and an old commode. I was not about to waste my life on a tiny mistake. Before I even realized, I fell back unto the hard and smelly bed. My head hit the wood beneath the thin woollen mattress. I did not care. I fell asleep.