

THE AQUA VITAE PARALLAX

Written by

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Based on, *The Aqua Vitae Parallax*
by Austin Ross.

Address
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EXT. KHUMBU GLACIER, HIMALAYAS - DAY

Altitude: 8000 meters.

EXTREME WIDE SHOT of a bright blue clear sky. The sun is a blazing sphere throwing off sharp light. The Himalayas lay sprawling beneath the brilliant sky. A minute figure makes his way along the landscape.

CLOSE UP of a YOUNG MAN, in his early twenties. He begins his ascent across the glacier and in the direction of the highest peak- Everest. A roughly sewn and ragged bag is slung across his shoulder. He is the only living, moving being on the range. All around him fierce winds blow, swirling the snow. The Young Man walks on.

As he approaches a blocked passageway, he slows his pace and looks pointedly at the obstacle. An minor avalanche begins. It clears a pathway where none existed before. The man climbs on. He's making his way toward the top of Mount Everest.

He stops at a mountain outcropping and takes in the view. He's only a few metres away from the peak. His visage and expression are serene. He takes in the view and a small gentle smile appears on his face. He sits down cross legged in the snow. He pulls the bag off his shoulder. From inside the bag he extracts a ragged, faded woolen shawl. His breath is cloudy as it leaves his mouth. He gently unfolds the shawl and drapes it around his shoulders. A gust of wind buffets the snow around him and the Young Man pulls the shawl tighter around himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. KHUMBU GLACIER, HIMALAYAS - TIME LAPSE SEQUENCE.

The sequence shows the Young man in the same pose barely moving.

He occasionally picks up a corner of his shawl to wipe some perspiration off his face. It's always only the one particular corner.

A circular cycle of day and night occurs numerous times. All the while the Young Man sits in the same pose, meditating.

The snow and ice around him gradually begins to melt away as time passes on. The brown earth beneath the snow eventually begins to show.

CUT TO:

EXT. KHUMBU GLACIER, HIMALAYAS - DAY

By the time his immediate vicinity is devoid of snow, the Young Man opens his eyes. Much time has passed.

He looks around at the scenery. He slowly stands up. The shawl slides off his shoulders and gently falls to the earthy ground.

The Young Man glances at ground where the shawl lies. He then turns from it and walks away.

CLOSE UP of the fallen shawl. The edge of the shawl bears the perfect imprint of the Young Man's face.

CUT TO:

EXT. KHUMBU GLACIER, HIMALAYAS - TIME LAPSE SEQUENCE.

CLOSE UP of the shawl lying on the earth covered mountain outcrop.

SLOW ZOOM OUT as the wind picks up. Slowly the snow and frost return to the area once again. A fine covering of snow begins to encrust the shawl. Eventually layer upon layer of snow buries the shawl until it is completely hidden from view.

WIDE SHOT of the outcropping covered in snow, no different from the rest of the mountain range.

CUT TO:

INT. RAINBOW TEN TENT, BASE CAMP - EARLY MORNING

Altitude: 7,970 Meters.

Fifteen sleeping bags lay about the ground of a large camping tent. Five of the sleeping bags are in a separate corner. Ten sleeping bags, some paired up, are spread across the remaining space. One of the campers, STEVE LEISURE, a blond 35 year old man is the only one awake. He's standing at the entrance of the tent poking his head out into the early morning darkness. He turns away from the entrance, letting the flap fall back to cover the opening.

STEVE
(slightly hoarse voice)
You guys.

CAMPER 1
(GROANS)
Shh!

STEVE
Come on sleepy heads, we've got to start climbing soon!

CAMPER 2
It's not even 4 o'clock yet!

CAMPER 3

C'mon Stevie. Come back to bed.

STEVE

We've got to start moving at first light! We won't make it to the top in time if you sleep in.

CAMPER 3

I'm still exhausted from yesterday. Please Steve. Come back to bed. Just a bit longer.

STEVE

(sighs irritably)

Fine.

(mutters huffily)

If there's a storm and we don't get to the peak in time you'll be wishing you'd listened to me.

Steve makes his way across the tent and stops at an empty sleeping bag. It's placed close to where CAMPER 3 is snuggled in his own sleeping bag. Steve, still seeming huffy climbs in to his accommodations and snuggles up to Camper 3.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASE CAMP - TWO HOURS LATER

Early morning sunlight shines on a cluster of eleven tents, their surrounding landscape covered in snow.. Ten of these are small two-person tents. Outside the largest tent, nine puffy eyed men are eating power bars and sipping steaming beverages from thermos flasks. They wear brightly coloured soft-shell mountain jackets.

Steve exits the large tent, fully geared up. He has his goggles on and an oxygen tank strapped to his back. He's dressed like the others in a bright soft-shell jacket with the hood up. He stops when he sees that his friends aren't fully ready to go.

STEVE

(groans)

You'll are still *eating*?

CAMPER 4

(rolls his eyes)

Jeez Steve, relax. This is supposed to be *fun*.

Steve opens his mouth to retort when a SHERPA exits the tent and walks up to the group.

SHERPA

(accented English)

Ok. Everyone has to get ready now.
No more time to waste.

Steve's friends and fellow climbers hurriedly chomp down on the rest of their power bars and gulp down their beverages. All the while they briskly walk over to their large tent and enter it to retrieve their gear.

STEVE

(mutters)

Sure. Take *him* seriously but call me a killjoy.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIMALAYAS - LATER

Altitude: 7900 meters.

EXTREME WIDE SHOT of a large portion of a steep side of a mountain. Eleven people- the Sherpa leading the group comprising of Steve and the other nine climbers- make their way up the mountain. All eleven climbers are connected by pitons, carabiners and climbing rope. The terrain is steep but the Rainbow Ten are agile. Steve brings up the rear in the line of climbers who move upward in a single file.

Snow covers much of the mountain but the sky is clear and the sun shines bright.

All of a sudden a strong wind picks up and begins buffeting the climbers. The gale begins swirling around the snow settled on the landscape. The climbers are obscured from view.

WIDE SHOT of the group of climbers. The Sherpa at the top stumbles.

CLOSE UP of his hand slipping and losing it's grip on the ice pick buried into the side of the mountain.

LONG SHOT of the Sherpa being whipped away by the ferocious wind. He flies off the side of the mountain. The force of his body being thrown off yanks at the climbing rope attached to his body.

CLOSE UP of the various pitons being ripped away from the side of the mountain.

CLOSE UP of Steve forcefully imbedding his ice pick into the mountain face. He then swiftly pulls out a small sharp knife tucked into his jacket and slashes through the climbing rope connected to him.

WIDE SHOT as with a low RUMBLE, an avalanche starts up higher up from the climbers.

CLOSE UP SHOTS of various climbers scrambling to get a hold on the mountain surface as the pistons and ropes yank them downward.

WIDE SHOT as the avalanche picks up speed and draws closer to the climbers.

LONG SHOT of the Sherpa SCREAMING as he falls downward.

WIDE SHOT as all the climbers connected to the Sherpa also begin to fall. They fall in order of who was closest to the Sherpa in the ascent.

Steve is the only member of the climbing expedition who isn't yanked away with the Sherpa's descent. He clings onto his ice pick and digs his studded boots into the snow. However the avalanche is gaining on him. The ice begins to lose it's grip in the mountain slope as the RUMBLE of the avalanche signals it's approach. The snow around the ice pick loosens and the ice pick starts slipping along with Steve's shoes.

Once the avalanche reaches Steve, he begins to fall albeit at a much slower pace than his fellow climbers. With the force of the avalanche he's flipped on to his back and his large rucksack acts as a giant sled. He begins gliding down the mountain slope while his friends fall rapidly.

The free falling team reaches the edge of a cliff. The other nine climbers fall right off the cliff and into the abyss. Steve, who's riding the tail end of the avalanche, reaches the cliff a few seconds after his friends. As he nears the edge of the cliff his rucksack slows down his descent. A part of his rucksack snags a protruding rock in the snow, stopping his fall mere centimeters from the edge of the cliff.

As he is stopped by his rucksack from falling over the edge, Steve hits his head on the tightly packed snow. He falls unconscious.

FADE OUT.

EXT. HIMALAYAN CLIFF - DAY

24 hours have passed.

The weather is calm. The sun is bright in the sky. Steve still lies unconscious on the cliff where his rucksack was caught. His body lies diagonally with the edge of the cliff falling to his left.

Steve's eyes are scrunched as he struggles to open them. He is beginning to regain consciousness. He moves his arms upwards, stiffly. His left arm, when moved, hangs over the edge of the cliff. This startles Steve.

He jerkily pushes his body further away from the edge. His face is crumpled in pain. He only manages to move a miniscule distance.

He pushes his left hand into the snow covered ground to get better purchase and propel himself. Instead on hitting solid packed snow, his palm sinks into a soft patch of wet snow. He grabs and gathers up fistful of the snow and brings it up to his face. He squishes it in his gloved palm. He flings it away.

He tries to move again, this time using his right hand to grab at a tightly packed patch of ice. He uses this hold to yank himself away from the cliff edge. His right arm trembles from the strain and stiffness due to the cold. He's still only able to move a small distance.

He keeps pushing and sliding his body away from the edge in small increments. He's using both his hands now. He pulls with his right hand and pushes with his left. This causes his left hand to sink lower into the wet patch of snow. Steve stops attempting to move. He lifts his head up off the ground and winces in pain. He sees the depression in the wet snow created by his left hand.

Using his right hand and the compacted snow, Steve slowly moves himself closer to a protruding boulder a foot away from the cliff edge. Steve grabs hold of a groove in the boulder and pulls himself up. He leans sideways against the boulder. He PANTS from the exertion. He rests his head against the boulder and passes out.

FADE OUT.

EXT. HIMALAYAN CLIFF - LATER

The light has dulled when Steve regains consciousness again.

His lips are cracked. He begins struggling to reach the flask holder on the side of his rucksack. He finally manages to grab hold of his water flask. He yanks it out of the holder and with trembling hands unscrews the cap. He gulps water thirstily. He breathes heavily in relief.

As he screwing the cap back on his flask, Steve notices the wet patch of snow. From his vantage point he can see that the wet snow is limited to a certain area. Carefully he digs his heels into the compact snow and leans forward toward the wet snow. He begins digging with his gloved hands.

CLOSE UP of wet patch of snow as Steve has dug in deep.

Steve makes a fist with his hand as he grabs hold of something buried in the depression. He pulls. He slowly, but with a firm grip, yanks out the ragged shawl that the Young Man dropped centuries ago.

Steve pulls it toward him, letting it bunch up in his lap.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASE CAMP - NIGHT

Steve is seated on a sleeping bag set on the ground outside the large tent. He's huddled up in a bunch of blankets that are wrapped around his upper body. His rucksack is placed on the ground to his right. He's gripping, with both his gloved hands, a steaming cup of some warm liquid. He takes careful sips intermittently.

Few feet away, in front of one of the smaller tents, a small group of the other campers stand huddled. They MUTTER to each other incoherently. They glance over at Steve on and off as they talk. Some frown as they look over at him.

Steve takes a few shuddering breaths clearly trying not to break down. He barely manages to retain his composure.

CUT TO:

INT. KATMANDU AIRPORT SECURITY CHECK - NEXT DAY

Steve is standing in line for security clearance at the Kathmandu Airport. He's the second in line to meet the SECURITY PERSONNEL. The line moves forward.

Steve is now the first in line. The security personnel looks up at Steve.

SECURITY PERSONNEL
(bored monotone)
Anything to declare.

STEVE
Nothing to declare.

The Security Personnel waves Steve on in a dismissive gesture. Steve steps on looking relieved.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK AIRPORT - LATER THAT NIGHT.

Steve is standing at a giant electronic board with the list of flight departures. He stares for a few moments clearly steeling himself for a decision. He looks tired and has dark circles under his eyes.

After a few more moments, he turns away from the board and begin walking in the direction marked for Departures.

CUT TO:

EXT. GULFCREST, ALABAMA ESTATE OF PASTOR LEISURE - NEXT DAY

A grey Ford Sedan, driven by Steve, pulls into the driveway of a white 1884 Greek Revival Manor house. Fifty acres of land surround the house.

PASTOR JOSHUA LEISURE, Steve's father, is seated in a rocking chair on the front porch. He's sipping beer from a bottle covered in condensation. He's dressed in a red checkered shirt, well worn jeans and hunting boots. His hair is snowy white and is tucked under a red baseball cap.

Steve gets out of the car and swings a backpack onto his shoulder in a fluid motion. He slowly approaches the porch. He climbs up the steps and Joshua stands up.

Joshua hugs his son and claps him once on the back. Steve grips the shoulder strap of his bag and gingerly puts his free hand on his father's shoulder. At his touch, Joshua draws away from the hug. He holds his son at arms distance.

JOSHUA
(wrinkling his nose)
Go shower boy. You reek.

Steve disengages himself from his father's grip and walks into the house. Joshua sits in the rocking chair once again and takes a swig of beer.

CUT TO:

INT. STEVE'S BEDROOM, ESTATE OF PASTOR LEISURE - AFTERNOON

It's 3:00 P.M.

Steve is in his bedroom, freshly showered and wrapped in a towel. His hair is slicked back and wet. He moves a little slowly, as though slightly weak. The sky as seen from his window is bright, sunny and cloudless.

He strains as he picks up his bag from the floor near his bed. He places the bag on his bed. He unzips it and begins rummaging through the contents. He stops moving when his hand touches the shawl right at the bottom of the bag.

He gently pulls the shawl out of his bag. He sinks down onto his bed.

Outside his first floor bedroom window the wind suddenly picks up. Both of the window panes are open. One of the panes slams shut with a BANG due to the wind. The glass shatters.

CUT TO:

PASTOR JOSHUA'S BEDROOM

Joshua is putting on his black cassock. The loud BANG makes him startle. The sound of glass shatter follows immediately. He runs out of his room.

CUT TO:

STEVE'S BEDROOM

Steve is standing up near his bed and staring dumb struck out his window. Both panes flap violently in the wind. One is glass-less. The sky as seen from the window frame is overcast.

Joshua rushes in noisily. Steve turns around at the sound of his hurried footsteps.

JOSHUA
(worried)
Steve in the name of the good lord-

Joshua glances at the shawl on Steve's bed as he speaks. He sees the imprint of the face on the corner of the shawl. He GASPS.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
(whispers)
Mother of God!

He swoons and falls to the floor unconscious. Steve can be heard faintly.

STEVE
Papa!

FADE OUT.

INT. PASTOR JOSHUA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Joshua is laid out on his king-sized bed. A singular but powerful bed side lamp lights the room. Steve is clutching his hand and weeping. Joshua's wife ESTER, a full bodied woman dressed conservatively, stands in the corner of the room closest to the bed. She watches Joshua intently, her expression one of worry. Six other people surround the bed, standing at a respectful distance. Most are teary eyed.

Joshua scrunches his eyes as he slowly begins to regain consciousness. Ester GASPS.

ESTER
(trembling voice)
He's waking up!

Steve clutches his father's hand even tighter and leans closer to his face. He gently touches his father's cheek.

STEVE
(voice thick from crying)
Pa? Can you hear me?

Ester cautiously approaches the bed.

ESTER
(faintly)
Joshua?

Joshua opens his eyes and squints at the bright light emanating from the lamp on his left.

JOSHUA
(gruffly)
What's-

He notices the other people in the room. He struggles to sit up. Steve and Ester try to help. He pushes their hands away.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
What's going on?

STEVE
You fainted Pa.
(small sob)
You hit your head as you fell. You
were out for an hour!

Ester reaches across the bed and pats Steve's hand that rests on the mattress.

ESTER
(soothing tone)
I've called for Dr. Barking. He was
tending to another patient but
he'll be here soon.

JOSHUA
(barely audible)
So I'm not dead?

STEVE
(upset)
Dad of course not! Don't say that!

Joshua doesn't even hear Steve.

JOSHUA
(still speaking softly)
I could have sworn I saw him.

One of the people assembled frowns. He looks at Ester.

PARISHIONER 1
(nervously)
Saw who?

Joshua looks at the man.

JOSHUA
(intensely)
Jesus our lord that's who!

Everyone in the room, barring Steve, GASPS. Some people cross themselves. Steve glances at the parishioners, nervously. He clears his throat and looks at his father.

STEVE
Um... Pa. Actually you did see something-

Joshua stiffens and widens his eyes.

JOSHUA
That's enough boy.

STEVE
(startled)
Pa-

JOSHUA
(very stern look)
Enough I said. Be quite when I tell you.

Steve looks hurt.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
And I'll have no more sniffing out of you.

Steve clenches his jaw, stands up and exits the room.

CUT TO:

STEVE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Steve is zipping up his toiletry bag. He opens up his travel bag and puts the toiletry bag in.

Joshua opens up the bedroom door, without knocking, and walks in. He stays close to the doorway and keeps some distance between him and his son. Steve is startled and whips around.

STEVE
You still won't knock.

JOSHUA

(scoff)

No, I won't knock to enter a room
in my own house!

STEVE

(turns back around to face
his bag)

It was a mistake to come here.

(his voice wavers with
emotion)

You'll never stop treating me like
an outcast.

JOSHUA

(smirking)

Always crying like a little girl.

Joshua's comment makes Steve want to sob but he purses his lips together to keep from making any sounds.

Joshua walks up to the bed and sits down. He still keeps his distance from Steve. Steve doesn't look at his father.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

Let me see it.

STEVE

(avoiding eye contact)

See what.

JOSHUA

(grabs Steve's wrist)

Don't toy with me boy.

Steve flinches. He looks at his father. He grits his teeth.

STEVE

(looking at the wrist his
father is gripping)

I'm going to need *both* hands to
work.

Joshua lets go. Steve rummages in his bag and pulls out the carefully folded shawl. He packed it in a plastic sealing pack. He hands the shawl to his father.

Joshua takes the packet, reverence clear on his face. He stands up and turns around facing the bed. He slowly unpacks and gently draws out the shawl. He unravels it, holding the shawl up in front of him. He zeroes in on the corner with the imprint.

He drops to his knees. Steve jerks forward instinctively, to help his father. Joshua places the shawl on the bed and begins to weep. Steve sinks to his knees beside his father.

Joshua and Steve both look at the shawl and in unison cross themselves in front of the imprint of Christ's face.

Both men silently pray for a few moments. Steve also begins to weep and SNIFF occasionally.

Joshua crosses himself once more and slowly stands up.

JOSHUA
(softly)
Where did you get it?

CUT TO:

STEVE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's 2:00 am. Joshua and Steve have been talking for hours.

Joshua is sitting at Steve's desk. The shawl is spread out on the desk. The desk lamp, fitted with a white LED light, is switched on. The imprint on the shawl glows starkly in this white light. Steve is seated on his bed.

JOSHUA
So you were almost at the top of
Mount Everest by then?

Steve looks exhausted.

STEVE
(heavy sigh)
Pa we've been over and over this
for *hours*. This finally confirms
what western historians have been
unwilling to confirm. Christ our
lord-

Joshua crosses himself. Steve doesn't notice.

STEVE (CONT'D)
- spent his youth in that part of
the world.

Joshua runs his hands over his face. He's exhausted too.

JOSHUA
(short laugh)
Some hours ago I would have slapped
you silly for having said that.

Steve smiles wearily.

STEVE
And as usual, you would have been
wrong.

JOSHUA
(frowning)
What do you mean boy?

Steve EXHALES forcefully making an impatient sound.

STEVE
If it hadn't been for me and my
friends-

Joshua grimaces when Steve says 'friends'.

STEVE (CONT'D)
- this shawl would never have been
found! You wouldn't have ever seen
it.

Joshua stands up and slowly begins walking toward the window.
It's pitch dark outside and dead silent. Steve also stands up
and turns in his spot so he faces the window as well.

STEVE (CONT'D)
(emotional)
If who we were and how we were
treated our *whole* lives hadn't made
us want to go up that mountain...

Steve's voice trembles so he stops for a second. He inhales
deeply.

STEVE (CONT'D)
(clears throat)
If we hadn't been there when the
avalanche hit. If I hadn't been
thinking fast- the shawl would
never have been found-

JOSHUA
(speaks softly. Still
gazing out the window.)
Are you saying if you hadn't
been... abnormal... the shawl would
have stayed hidden?

STEVE
(gritting his teeth)
If by "*abnormal*" you mean
HOMOSEXUAL-

Joshua flinches at the word. He turns around and swiftly
strides towards his son.

STEVE (CONT'D)
- then yes. That's what I'm saying.

Joshua grabs his son's shoulder with one hand and raises the
other to strike him. Steve flinches away and makes an
involuntary WHIMPERING sound. At the sound, Joshua freezes.

He quickly glances over at the shawl. He slowly lowers his hand. He lets go of Steve's shoulder. He takes a few steps away from his son. Steve watches his father, wide eyed and shocked at his father's restraint.

JOSHUA
(low mumble)
Everyone is right.
(grips his forehead with
his fingers)
And everybody's wrong.

STEVE
(cautiously)
What do you mean, Pa?

Joshua shakes his head and begins shuffling over to the bedroom door.

JOSHUA
(wearily)
I need to sleep on it. I'll tell
you everything tomorrow.

Steve looks at the shawl.

STEVE
(whisper)
But what do you want to do with it.

Joshua stops at the doorway and leans against the frame.

JOSHUA
(sighs)
I need to sleep. I'll tell you
everything tomorrow.

STEVE
You said that already!

JOSHUA
(wrinkles his face in
irritation)
Go to bed Steve.

STEVE
(grumpy)
Fine. If you don't want to talk-

JOSHUA
(angry growl)
Do not test my patience boy! I told
you I have to think.
(sighs)
Just let me be. We'll speak first
thing tomorrow morning, alright?

Steve smiles.

STEVE
Alright Pa. Good night.

JOSHUA
(small smile)
Good night son. And get some rest.
You'll need it for what lies ahead!

Joshua shuffles out of the bedroom. Steve flops down onto his bed.

CUT TO:

INT. STEVE'S BEDROOM - NEXT DAY

The sky seen from the window is over-cast. It lends a gloomy look to the bedroom. Insufficient light enters the room. No sounds of birds chirping. Steve is sitting on his bed, looking out the window. He takes a deep breath and lets out a SIGH. He stands up.

CUT TO:

LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Steve walks into the room and takes a look around. The coffee table stands on top of a white faux fur rug. A steaming cup of coffee lies on top of the table. Three straight-backed wooden chairs are arranged around the table. The shawl is draped over one of the chairs. The imprint of Christ is facing outward. Steve gazes at the imprint for a few moments. He slowly walks toward the chair with the shawl. He kneels down in front of it and makes the sign-of-the-cross with his hand. He then genuflects on the floor in front of the shawl.

Joshua walks into the room. He stops when he sees Steve kneeling. Steve is crying and his shoulders are shaking. Joshua walks forward and kneels down next to Steve. He looks at the shawl.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK: EXT. PASTOR TONY LEE'S HOUSE - DAY

A much younger Joshua is dressed in a leather jacket. He is POUNDING on Pastor Tony Lee's front door. TONY'S WIFE opens the door.

YOUNG JOSHUA
(gruff)
This Tony Lee's house?

Tony's Wife look worried.

TONY'S WIFE
Ye-yes. He's not at home.

YOUNG JOSHUA
Where the fuck is he then?

Tony's Wife flinches when Joshua swears.

TONY'S WIFE
At church.

YOUNG JOSHUA
Fine I'll look for him there.

Joshua turns around and walks off down the street. Tony's Wife calls after him. She's very scared.

TONY'S WIFE
WAIT! Who are you?

CUT TO:

INT. BAPTIST CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER