

The house was enormous, but tastefully big. The architecture, along with tall trees on the front lawn, hid the actual size of the house well. Patrick worried he was in the wrong place for a few seconds. Few lights lit up the home and nothing appeared to stir at the presence of his headlights.

Eventually Will came out and trudged across the front patio with a bounce in his bow-legged step. He wore a familiar shirt — a fuchsia fraternity tee he sometimes wore several days in a row during the school year. But he looked different — a scraggly black beard covered his face and neck. Patrick was oddly nervous to see such a close friend. He feared events of the summer had changed Will.

Will invited Patrick inside. Take-out pizza and buffalo wing boxes, scattered across the kitchen island amused Patrick; the rest of the house was pristine. The kitchen told the story of the week.

“Have you been living here alone?” asked Patrick.

“Yep, all week. My favorite place in the whole world.”

They discussed the empty home, the second of Will’s wealthy uncle, a private equity partner in New York City. The house seemed criminally underused; Will hypothesized he had used it more than his uncle over the years. The boys lamented the uncle’s career path and validated their choices to avoid finance, but silently realized the temptation of such luxurious surroundings.

They drank beer out of cans, ate cold pizza without plates. They poured white wine into red plastic cups and went for a walk in the dark.

“I’ve been walking around barefoot a lot.”

Patrick laughed, “Why?”

“I want to have tough feet.”

Will thought it careless for humanity to let feet get so fragile; for millennia humans walked shoeless.

A salty, warm breeze blew from the water down the long flat road. A bright moon, nearly full, beckoned toward the sea. Turning onto Ocean Drive, a busier road, occasional headlights glared at the two figures walking along the shore.

While they walked, Will and Patrick shared stories from a summer apart. They spent the summer working, preparing for life after college. Patrick read accounts of human cruelty working with a Human Rights Organization in New York. Will spent summer abroad, touring

and learning at an entrepreneurship workshop in Nice before disaster devastated the program. They came here to Newport to cap off their summer before school began.

The sea roared and crashed against rocks shaped by years of tides, rolling in and out. Patrick and Will sat on the concrete wall holding up the sidewalk. The vast ocean overwhelmed. They felt small sitting by the water, searching for a way to leave a mark on an impossibly big world.

They spoke of stories, powerful and permanent. Perhaps they would leave only stories behind. The eroded rocks told them a story eons long.

Will and Patrick rose and continued walking the concrete slab between road and sea, plastic cups now empty. They navigated through brush to walk along the rock cliffs. The sea hissed beneath as if to tease them. It would be there long after they were gone. The treads of their sneakers gave little traction on the slick rocks.

They talked about death. It had been watching them all night and stalking Will since Nice.

They stopped and sat on the bluff, thirty feet above rocky waters. Will walked a similar ocean promenade in France a month earlier. That one was more crowded. Then, crashing waves and bursting fireworks could not drown out the roar of a truck speeding down the ocean walkway, plowing people in its way.

Suddenly the drop to wet rocky demise didn't seem so far.

"People are evil," Will muttered into the darkness.

They planted themselves far enough off the road they couldn't feel passing cars or see streaking headlights across the sky. Will had spent a childhood visiting this bay. Never had it seemed so powerful.

Two young men walked back to the house. They would return two hours later to cleanse themselves in frigid black ocean. Then, clouds obscured the moon. Low tide tried to pull them to sea.