

The stars that night were beautiful from the shore. The ocean was a vast expanse of dark blue, waiting beneath the inky blackness. Those stars, however, were like a majestic impressionist painting. Only away from the city could you see it in the full glory, away from the cheap street lamps. I couldn't resist walking down the shore, my eyes to the heavens. It was a bit chilly at the time, but I was dressed for it. A simple long sleeve t-shirt kept the sea breeze at bay, and my long jeans were practically impervious. Starlight illuminated just enough to show the water's edge, lapping at the path ahead.

My mind was elsewhere as I walked in silence, no one around for miles to break the reverie. The only sound that mattered was the waves. They licked at the sand almost hypnotically, white foam nipping at my feet. After a moment of thought, I took off my shoes. It was like being a child again, running through the surf. Water tickled my toes, aided by mischievous grains of sandy muck. The stuff clung to my feet while walking, only to be washed away in mid stride.

The waves grew a bit stronger, soaking my jeans to the knee. In retrospect it was a sign to get out, but hindsight is ever 20/20. So I walked onward, shoes in hand. My feet sank a bit deeper in the sand, the water crashed a bit higher towards my waist, and yet it was still an enjoyable night. The stars above were practically swirling for my entertainment. All my focus was above, and it was rewarded. A single shooting star streaked across the sky, or perhaps it was a plane. Either way, it drew my focus. Such a rare moment took my breath away, and I made a wish. It was also the moment that I tripped face first into the waiting waves.

Water took my wish away and my breath. It soaked me to the bone, washed away my shoes, and drew me out into its warm embrace. Worst of all, it rushed into my eyes, and contact lenses fell free. The world suddenly transformed into a vague, confusing mess. My eyes burned at the touch of the salt, which made it even harder to get find shore. I could barely touch the ground on tip toes. The only option was to swim towards shore, or at least the fuzzy outline in the distance. Taking a breath, I dove forwards and tried to make a straight line.

After a few powerful strokes forwards, I stopped to get my bearings. My heart sank, followed by my entire body, as I went to touch the floor. Beneath me was ocean. I had only gone further in. The water soaked my clothes, making them heavier than I thought possible. With a sigh, I unbuttoned my pants. It was exceedingly difficult, but after a few moments I kicked them free. They sank below me, but my mind was on other things. There was no longer even a hazy outline of shore. Only a black expanse surrounded me on all sides. Trying not to panic, I tried to paddle in the opposite direction. Trusting in blind luck as my guide, I swam forwards, saying an inner prayer.

God didn't answer, and luck failed miserably. My feet still couldn't touch, and it grew a bit harder to tread water. I had never been an expert swimmer, hands more accustomed to driving then dog paddling, but at I was in good shape at least. Once again, nothing seemed to have changed. The ocean around me, and nothing else as far as the eye could see. It broke my spirit. I could have been a few feet away from the water, or a hundred yards away. My only hope was to wait, hope my eyes could adjust more, and I could squint out the shore. I floated there for a while, letting the currents push and pull me like a bobber.

The pain started after only a few minutes of floating. It started out like a small bite near my tailbone, right beneath the boxers. At first I suspected a fish, but it didn't stop. There was a strange sensation from my lower back, radiating up my spine. Something was horribly wrong. I let out a gasp, sinking into the water as the air left my lungs. In panic I took a deep breath, floating on my back. My hands felt around in a panic, trying to find the cause. They stroked under my shirt, and even into my boxers. At first nothing seemed out of the ordinary, until I found the bump.

It started like a mosquito bite, right on the base of my tail bone, but was swelling even under my touch. My first reaction was to try and squeeze it like a pimple. It didn't work, the mass only growing alarmingly larger. I went from trying to pop it, to trying to palm it like a basketball. Whatever the thing was, it grew longer behind me as well. My boxers strained to contain it, but they quickly failed. The material slid downward, pushed by the ever growing bulk. I could feel it like a part of me, as if my own leg were doing the work. Before my legs could get entangled, I brushed away the boxers.

I bobbed up and down, my breathing erratic. Water rushed up to meet my face. The pain grew worse, as it spread up my spine like lightning. It pooled in the center of my back, another mass soon pressing against my shirt. The collar of it nearly choked me. In self-defense, I tore it off of me before it could get even more right. I was truly nude now. The water was at least warm, despite the night chill. The new mass on my spine kept growing. I could just make out its shape when I floated high, an almost triangular shape between my shoulders.

The real scary thing was their connection to my body. I'd have been afraid of a parasite, had it not been for the feeling of control. The mass between my legs would undulate at my thought. It felt so unnatural, and yet it easily kept my head above water with a few powerful strokes. After a moment, I stopped having to paddle at all with my legs, finding it easier to let the new part prove its worth. The thing on my spine, however, remained utterly useless. My only thought was that I needed a doctor, and fast. Waiting in the surf was only going to make things worse.

I made a line straight ahead in the water, swimming forwards with all my might. The new thing behind me crashed through the air. Some new part of me knew what to do, and I slipped under the water. Now my body seemed to work like a finely tuned machine, the thing behind me taking off like a propeller. It was an unbelievable sensation, as if I had suddenly become an Olympic athlete. My only buzz kill was the pain, it moved away from my back as if it were alive. It spread down my arms and legs, but desperation made me push onwards. I paddled through the pain, my hands finding more purchase than before it had started. Even my legs kicked more powerfully. Something was definitely going on, and it didn't seem to be killing me.

Once more I stopped, letting my head come back up above the water. Light nearly blinded me. In shock I looked around for the source. Above me the stars had flared to life, shining like beacons in the sky. Without glasses and contacts, I had always been blind to anything of that level of detail. To see them, unaided, was just wrong. A trickle of salt water dripped from my hair, making me blink it away absently. More shockingly, it hadn't even burned. Instead it felt like nothing. Ducking beneath the water on impulse revealed the truth. I could see perfectly clear, above and below.

The first thing I noticed was my feet. During the pain, the toes had grown together into a new shape. Focusing showed toes between what looked like a thick webbed hide. The second thing was the ocean floor. I could see all the way to the bottom. Fish swam enticingly in the distance, so close that I could smell them. Which, strangely enough, I did. It made my stomach rumble, which was quite disconcerting. But I had more problems. I swam a bit in the water, looking myself over along the way. The changes were shocking. My skin had taken on a stark white over my belly, the other half of me seemingly the color of stainless steel. If I focused, my skin looked exceptionally rough.

The mass swishing behind me, maintaining depth wasn't a second foot, it was obviously a tail. It paddled effortlessly in the water, swaying behind it a crescent moon of a tip. This new part of me never seemed to tire in the water. It at least alleviated the immediate fear of drowning. With a bit of twisting, I stood up under the waves. My new tail easily kept me level. The only other thing that seemed to have changed was my hands. They had grown together as well, a thick membrane between the knuckles. Experimentally, I tried to bend them, finding it a fair bit more difficult. They wanted to move together, bound as they were by the new webbing.

Somehow my body had adapted, but beggars couldn't be choosers. My new eyes were easily picked out the shoreline in the distance. I had accidentally paddled out into the middle of nowhere. Had I remained normal, there was no doubt what the results would have been. I swam easily forwards, my new limbs perfectly suited to the deep. The pain however, once more returned. It was infuriating. My entire face had exploded into agony. I nearly bit my lip, trying not to let it distract me from the looming beach ahead. It was so close now. Each stroke brought me closer by yards. My back fin broke the water, slicing the waves as I paddled forwards.

Licking my lips nearly cut my tongue. That same force which had changed me sharpened my teeth to near knives, but I would not be stopped. The goal was too close. I could see sand just up ahead, coming in fast. It only drove me to put more power in my strokes. The pain had made me cross eyed, or so I thought, as suddenly my nose came into full view. It wouldn't stop me, beach looking so welcoming. The sand was a gift from the gods, and my hands had nearly grabbed it. As soon as they planted firm, I hoisted myself upwards and tried to cry out in triumph.

My lungs burned in the air, pain radiating from my neck. It was worse than drowning. Reaching up to touch the new slits nearly stopped my heart. Gills, they had to be gills. I could not even cry, drawing in breath was too much pain. In my imagination, tears formed in my shark eyes as I slipped back into the waiting ocean.