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CONCRETE DREAM

ZOE MEAGER

When she wakes – if she wakes – the building seems to be asleep. With all its eyes switched off or blinded, the honey-trap mouth alone drools light onto the street. The sleepers are snuggled, bees in their cells, so the only sounds are the breath of the bodies and the breath of the building, its air-conditioning sighs and floor polisher slowly tonguing the lobby.

Tiptoeing the hallway. Sneaking a thieved key into a maintenance door. The soles of her feet are padded paws to the ladder's steely rungs.

Come on, it's easy.

The night is cold. The concrete roof is gritty. She is naked and the moon looks down on her through the smog, pasting its second-hand light over her body.

Across the dark expanse of roof she steps to the edge. Somewhere behind her, a generator switches to a deeper rumble. So far below traffic slides around the grid. Strident complaints of horn over shushing tyres over off-key radio stations muffled in cabs.

The sweep of stars, the spread of bitumen. Neither look so very far.

She mounts the ledge, her white backside mooning farewell to the sleepers below.

She walks a length. The ledge is sister.

A breath. No breath. The balance of a one-legged bird.

Welcome.

There she is deposited. Crouched in a rigid, watchful pose. Neck lengthened, teeth bared, eyes needling the city's span.

It begins at her feet, the once-tender soles now unfeeling. Inside her, muscles and tendons harden. Bones already the colour of stone change only their density. As skin ices over, toenails bore into stone, cementing her there with a diamond love bite.

Face unstung by slapping wind. Eyes unwatered by neon fields.

Her heartbeat, stopped.

Transcendent over the echoing black below.

Cold, still, fearsome. Monumental.

At last. Grotesque.

THE PLANTER

RACHEL SMITH

Gardens grew differently up here Mila had discovered. Higher altitude perhaps, closer to the sun, more wind and rain. Somehow the plants knew though, that no matter how deep they sent their roots they would never be able to wind through soil and clay and gravel. Up here there were limits and rules.

The theory was that up on the 1000th floor the air was purer, above the metallic tasting smog that Mila could see out her bedroom window. Water was pumped from an aquifer deep underground, a pipe that edged its way up past carcasses of old construction and the basement hovels. On occasions when the power cut out it was pumped up by hand to ground level and then delivered, in a never ending relay of men from the bottom to the top. Mila thought the plants could tell, could taste the salty beads of their sweat. They grew faster, leaves shiny, fruit plump and ripe.

She had stretched her gardening expertise to get the job; slipped in a horticultural qualification and the few pots in her flat became a boutique organic garden. And no vertigo.

The first time she stepped onto the roof top Jun Jie was with her. Officially her assistant, Mila soon realised he could easily do the job himself – just didn't want the responsibility that came with a dying crop. All she knew about him had come in a thin cardboard folder – Jun Jie, 27 years, 2 years employment. No floor level noted.

The 20 beds were spread across the roof top, the closest two metres from the edge. The edge itself was fenced in thickened glass, impregnated with UV protection on three sides and open on the other.

"There's a laser that runs along here," Jun Jie said, pointing around the building's rim. "It's designed to disintegrate – stop anything small from falling and injuring someone below."

"Like a carrot?" Mila asked.

"Even a melon. Not a human though. Too heavy. So don't get too close."

Mila nodded. In her mind she built an electric fence half a metre in from the edge.

"Do you want to look? Like this." He lay on the warm concrete and slid forwards on his belly towards the open side. "Come."

Mila followed. Her breath began to falter as her fingertips curled around the concrete lip.

“Now just pull your face up.” Jun Jie hung his head over the edge, an up-wind pushing back his long dark fringe.

Her arms would not pull. Her eyes were shut. “Nope. I can’t.” She wormed backwards – half a metre, a metre – stood on wobbly legs and said nothing to his mocking grin.

* * *

This morning Mila arrived as the sun rose. She watched it slip between the buildings, skipping from shadow to shadow, falling on her face and her garden first.

Her grandfather had been a gardener. Ruler-straight rows of carrots, broad beans and beetroot on his patio down on the 10th floor. She’d worked next to him, her nails filled with dirt and a head full of questions. It was why she got worms so often, according to her grandmother. “There’s no other explanation for it...you don’t look dirty but...” The dirtiness was implied, a stain that bled through her organs, impossible to fully diagnose or remove, that somehow seemed to be paired with the fullness of her hips. Then, all too quickly, it had been her turn to move up.

On the day she turned 20, Mila was assigned a room in a single sex shared flat on the 103rd floor. She wasn’t surprised when her assigned skill set was of a practical nature. What she did with it was up to her – her resettlement period was over, the next round were coming into the flat and they all had to be out. Nobody cared where. Up or down, a bit of cash to get her started. The job had been more than a relief – it had meant not having to find her parents.

And her grandparents were proud. They didn’t come out and say it, but she was sure her grandmothers’ face pinkened when she told them she would be on the 512th floor if they needed to contact her. Grandfather’s rough fingers had pinched at her cheek when she kissed him goodbye, promising she’d be back in a year when her two weeks of leave was due. Still five more months to go.

She walked between the beds, checking that the surprise storm in the night hadn’t left its mark. The wind had woken her, spinning around her

room. It whipped through the tunnel that threaded down the building's centre, a strangely designed well on the lower levels where all the bathrooms met. Rain had pinged on her windows and she knew it was too late to do anything but hope.

It had been Jun Jie's suggestion to close the covers the night before. He had a feeling, he'd said. Mila had looked at the cloudless day and watched the aluminium covers slide into place. UV lights were embedded in the framework, creating exactly even days and nights. The plants had been covered for over a month last year, when the 50-day storm lingered over the island. It was the longest anyone could remember and over half the crops had been lost.

She found only torn bok choy and a bundles of beans slumped in the corner. It was a timely reminder though. The monsoon was coming – wind and rain, and hail as big as rats.

On her belly, Mila moved to the edge, pulled until her elbows bent and she felt the first breath of breeze on the top of her head. On the floors below, people slept, ate, shat. 805th floor and nails were manicured with purple French tips, eyes hidden behind sunglasses. It was the shoes that gave it away though. Below 600 and the heels were smaller, functional footwear worn by someone who had a purpose in their day, someone who needed to walk somewhere, do something.

Mila put on white cotton gloves, hooked a cane basket over her arm and lined it with a soft cloth. She moved along the rows, reaching out for tomatoes the perfect shade of red. Snake beans of purple and green wound around her forearms. Her fingers were deep in the soil, cutting soft new buds of ginger, turmeric and galangal when Jun Jie arrived. He put on his gloves and joined her squatting beside the garden.

"Storm OK?" he asked

"Yep. Good call to cover up." Mila scratched at her face with a dirty finger. "Big penthouse dinner party. They're coming to collect it at 10."

Jun Jie nodded. "What do they need?"

"Everything."

He took the biggest tomato and the fattest bunch of grapes from her basket, placed them in front of the small shrine in the corner. His machete swung high, its blade catching the sunlight, and a hand of bananas fell. Words

of prayer and song wound through the scent of incense that swept across the garden.

Five baskets stood in the shade by the lift when the door opened. Chef was large – fat hands with no knuckles. He moved over the baskets, clicking his approval, moving produce from one basket to the next.

“No bok choi.”

“Wind.” Mila watched as his hat moved in the breeze.

He called to Jun Jie, directed him to take two of the baskets, and picked up the third himself. The wind gusted, his fat fingers grasped at his hat and missed as it was plucked from his head. Jun Jie dropped the basket and ran to catch it. Mila watched, fascinated, as it filled and ballooned higher. She had been waiting for this moment for something to fly, to fall.

Jun Jie leapt, too close to the edge, but it was gone. The updraft sent it higher for a moment, and then it fell, not far, caught on invisible threads to burn and disintegrate.

Chef stood with his hand on his bare head, cursed at Mila, and left, calling Jun Jie behind him.

Alone Mila moved to the edge, curiosity pulling her closer than before. Breeze met her forehead and then her eyes were over. She gulped in the air that that pushed at her face. One strand of white cotton floated in the smell of burnt fabric.

* * *

That night, she lay on her bed, naked, the fan spinning slowly above her. Her body was changing. Despite her best efforts her skin was slowly tanning. New bones were appearing at her hips and torso. Her arms were tighter, more toned, as were her legs. Her grandmother would be pleased.

She took two steps from bedroom to living room to bathroom, brushed her teeth in front of a wall in her living room that shimmered in shades of green – a forest of glossy pages torn from magazines and her own drawings that grew from the skirting up to the ceiling. If she looked straight ahead she could almost imagine it was so.

* * *

The sky was heavy, air dense with moisture that could not fall. Not yet anyway. Mila's order of new storm covers, complete with air moisture activated vents, was due to arrive any day. She only hoped it would be in time.

At 8am, the lift door pinged open. Chef stepped out, white and sweaty, a beaded moustache sliding down his face.

"You don't have an order today," said Mila.

"Exceptional circumstances," he said.

"What do you need?" Mila slipped on her gloves. He pointed and she picked until the basket was full, and then two more.

"Done. Come." He picked up a basket, leaving Mila to carry the two heaviest into the lift.

It was a quick trip down one floor. The door opened into a vestibule. "Leave them," Chef said, pointing to the floor next to the internal doorway. "Go."

Mila walked back into the lift, was sure she saw Jun Jie's face appear in the open doorway as the doors slid shut.

* * *

When Jun Jie didn't turn up that day Mila knew for sure. She transplanted delicate brassicas, the soil a perfect consistency of clay and sand. It smelt different from real earth, missing the feral odour that had stained her grandfather's palms. She trimmed the passionfruit vine and lay down for a long lunch break in the shade of the banana tree. At the end of the day she opened the bee box, laid some sugar bait and welcomed them back home for the night as they appeared one by one. She hoped Jun Jie would be back tomorrow.

* * *

The fan spun and warm air moved, thickly as if the effort was almost too much. It wasn't until the sound came for a second time that Mila recognised it as a knock at her door. She saw Jun Jie's face in the peephole, undid a series of locks and opened up.

"Come in," said Mila, locking the door behind him.

"Sorry – for not coming today."

“It wasn’t busy.” She waited for him to say something more but instead he moved to the living room wall, reached out to run his fingers over the paper.

“I want to show you something. Come.”

* * *

Mila wasn’t sure why she said yes. She had never been out there at night. It had been explicitly detailed as a no-go zone in her contract and she had never thought differently of it. Out here now though, she was back on her grandfathers’ patio, sowing seeds by the third full moon of the new year.

Jun Jie led her to the edge. This time Mila was not so afraid, something about the darkness and the rustle of leaves in the light breeze. She followed him around the base of a garden bed, felt her foot hit something before she fell forwards to land hard on the asphalt. It was a root, thick as her arm, growing out of the base of the bed to disappear over the edge into nothingness.

“Look,” said Jun Jie. She slid along to where he lay on his belly, pulled her head forward until only emptiness lay under her face. She squeezed her eyes shut, gulped at the air that spiralled up and up.

“Just breathe. Look.”

One eye at a time. And there it was. The root wound its way down the building, twisted with others even thicker, all woven into place by fine threads and hairs to cover the exterior surface. They were going home. Mila smiled at Jun Jie and together they lowered themselves over the edge to begin the long climb down.

WOLVES

FIONA PERRY

WOLVES

We entered their bodies as completely
as ink dropped into water and now we wait.
Only full lunar phases hinder us, producing
glitchy distortions. The bulging of tides
and particles of white light call us
back temporarily. Our real selves pulled
like thread from velvet. We float through
chimney stacks, seep through window frames,
leaking into the sky. But by morning, as always,
we find ourselves capsuled and contained, pushed
back under heavy human eyelids.

EDEN

TONI WI

My lover puts her arm around me as we lie on the soft, damp grass. “Where are we this time?” she asks.

I lean back on my elbows and check the panel on my watch, tapping the map icon to bring up a dusky blue hologram of our location. The rooms in the hotel show up as little squares spread out over three floors. We’re on the west wing, on the second floor. Our bodies together make a bright green dot. We are the only ones in the building.

“It’s the Eden room,” I say. My programmers still had to write the code for the interactive holograms, so all we see is a grassy meadow, stretching out on all sides.

She raises her head slightly to look around. “Fitting,” she says, before yawning, and placing her cheek flat against my stomach. I put my hand on her head on instinct, twine my fingers into her curls. I bring her here after the workers leave for the night. I could commission them to work through – the board advised it would slide the opening forward three months if I did. But I like having somewhere that’s just for us, even if only for a little while.

“Where do you want to go tomorrow night?” I ask.

She pokes an exploratory finger into my bellybutton. “Ancient Egypt,” she says, matter-of-fact.

“Sure thing,” I say, lying back down again. “I’ll take you anywhere you want to go. Anywhere in the world.”

“Anywhere except outside.”

I curl over, resting my head on my arms, my hands a pillow. I’ve created a little nest. She mimics me, drawing her knees up so they touch mine, our heads connected at the top. We make a circle on the grass. A light breeze, engineered to blow softly every thirty seconds, tickles the skin of our backs.

“It’s not safe outside,” I say. I trace the line of her forearm, down to the elbow

then back up again.

“I know,” she says, in a far off voice. I can feel her hunching her shoulders, making herself smaller. I grip her arm, tightly at first, and then lighter as I remember my breathing exercises.

“Don’t go just yet,” I tell her, trying to keep my voice playful.

She meets my eye and I can see the glint of numbers, a flash of neon green before she blinks. Somewhere, on the other end of the line, she is writing me out of this story.

“Please,” I say. “Eve?”

“If this is Eden, then I’m not Eve,” she says with a laugh. “I’m the apple.”

She plants a kiss on my cheek before leaving, my fingers grasping at empty code.

ONLY ROGER

ANDY SOUTHALL

Roger gripped the wheel with his padded gloves and steered our rover into the gloom. He was a good driver but too fast, bouncing the skeleton of our vehicle — no doors, no windscreen, no roof — over every rock in our path. We wore spacesuits and harnesses, yet I still held onto my seat fearing I would be thrown out. How Roger could see through the murk, I'd never know. The rover's yellow headlights barely penetrated ten feet. We might have been driving along the floor of a lake with only a fragile bubble of light around us.

"Don't be nervous, old boy." Roger's rich voice boomed inside my helmet.

"We'll be fine."

"Yes, sir. Of course." I addressed him as my superior, although we'd both been out of the forces for years.

"This charabanc's not as duff as it seems." He pointed at a green display where the music-player should have been. "Sat Nav finder, and radar too, so I can see what's coming up."

"Glad to hear it, sir." I shifted uneasily.

"Be there in a mo." He waved into the haze. "The southernmost shore is two clicks away. T-minus-fifteen and we'll be on the water."

"Jolly good, sir."

"I know this isn't the same as our usual jaunts, but let's stick to protocol, shall we?" His glove patted my arm. "I'll take out V₁, and you follow in V₂. We'll have to paddle. Can't use outboards, not here!" He laughed.

"Of course not." I nodded inside my helmet. You had to hand it to him, he planned every detail in advance.

He hadn't mentioned how we would launch the two polymer-bubble boats

though. Shifting anything in our spacesuits would be a struggle. Not to mention the atmosphere that pawed like a heavy curtain, the temperature that rimed our face plates, and a visibility of only ten paces.

Shifting the boats would be my responsibility. I did all the manual work. All the filming too. Roger paid well and besides, I've always been at his side, ever since we fought in the Marines together. My privilege and my pleasure. Anyway, he had to prepare. Rehearse his words, throw back his hair, look good for the camera even though his face was concealed inside his helmet.

The viewers would know it was him. He might be inside a bulky spacesuit, a bulbous helmet, but they'd recognise how he swaggered and waved. They'd notice his enormous fishing rod too, sticking out like a mighty sword, and how with one swing of his arm, he cast his line for miles.

His first TV series, Fabled Fish of Planet Earth, had thrilled audiences worldwide. Only Roger had been intrepid enough to canoe up cola-coloured rivers in search of the legendary three-headed catfish. Only Roger had the balls to confront a swirling hundred-toothed monster known as the Flying Crocsman. Only Roger had lowered himself down a narrow ice-hole to reveal prehistoric fish in a long frozen sub-glacial lake.

Only Roger.

I'd followed him everywhere of course, but then I was never on camera. Now we were filming his next TV series, Extra-Terrestrial Fish. We'd explored the seas of Mars and the Moon looking for fish fossils and traces of alien plankton. Then we'd voyaged out here to Titan, Saturn's largest moon, to try our luck in its seas. They were the only bodies of surface liquid in the Solar System outside Earth.

He stopped the rover as its headlights glinted on something. "This is it, George! This is it!"

We climbed down. No wind, everything deathly orange gray. Ahead a

slab of something like a polished gravestone.

“Doesn’t look much, does it George?”

“No, sir.”

“A puddle back on Earth would be more inspiring.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Still we’re here now.” He traced his glove along an invisible horizon. “The company’s forked out a lot of dosh to fly us here. We need to make the most of it.”

“Yes, sir.”

I knew he was being ironic. If this was the right place, then that quiet surface stretched far beyond the dimensions of a puddle. Beyond the edge of our beams, it continued for hundreds of clicks, bigger than any sea back on Earth.

I started unloading our equipment. Meanwhile Roger trundled up and down in a straight line, no doubt practising his commentary. Anyone else would have dubbed his voice on afterwards, especially as his lips wouldn’t be visible. But not Roger. He was old-school. Everything had to be authentic.

I dragged the two boats down to the sea’s edge. They weighed so little in the reduced gravity, I could pick one up in each hand. Whether they floated or not though would be another matter. Roger’s boat would be weighed down with his precious fishing rod. Mine had the main camera, sound equipment and lights. And this sea had lower buoyancy than on Earth.

It wasn’t saltwater.

But liquid methane.

A shiver ran down my spine.

“You ready, George?” Roger stopped pacing and came down to join me.

“Yes, sir.”

“Like I said, usual drill. I’ll paddle out first and you follow. I want you filming constantly. Anything could happen. Don’t miss a second. And stay close, I’ll need your light.”

“Yes, sir.” I’d mounted my two brightest halogens on V2’s stern.

“Right, well let’s stop pussyfooting around and go!” Roger leaped in slow motion into his boat. As he landed, it swayed perilously, gunwales bobbing within inches of the methane’s surface. Without looking back, he sat, seized his paddle and shot out.

I crawled into my boat on all fours. Then — holding my paddle well away from me — I tea-spooned after him. I didn’t want to splash any of the liquid on my suit. It was three hundred degrees below zero, cold enough to fracture steel. My suit was made of a special carbon fibre, guaranteed resistant, but if the liquid did pierce it then I’d be finished — simultaneously asphyxiated and frozen.

“Come on, George! Stop playacting. This isn’t a Sunday School picnic.”

“No, sir.” I paddled harder, dipping my paddle deeper. But it wasn’t the same as paddling on Earth. Instead of pushing against the liquid, it parted it. Thrust minimal. I might have been using a fork.

“Hard going, isn’t it!” Roger was having the same problem, splashing liquid everywhere. “Still thirty or forty feet out should do it. Then we’ll get cracking.”

“Yes, sir.”

I was glad when Roger stowed his paddle and signalled me to stop.

I had my camera rolling. It was mounted on one side of my helmet, with the viewfinder under my visor and with voice controls for tilting, zooming and panning. I focused on Roger as he took up his rod, unclipped the hook and swung the line behind him. He looked so photogenic in his goldfish bowl helmet and shining white spacesuit. A pioneer, a warrior, a latter-day Neil Armstrong going fishing.

Like a whip, he cast. The line soared and disappeared into darkness.

“You getting this?” His face plate turned.

“Yes, sir. Every frame.”

“It’s time I did the intro. Is the sound good?”

“Perfect.”

“Good man!”

To my alarm, he rose to his feet. His little boat rocked, tipping from side to side. I was sure he was going to fall. Then he held out his free arm, and his rod too like it was a tightrope walker’s pole, and pronounced his stage voice.

“My name is Roger Tyne.” He bowed slightly. “And I’m an extreme fisherman. No matter how deep, how dangerous, how desperate, nothing, nothing, NOTHING, ever gets away from me. You’ve watched me fish in some of the most remote places on Earth, the upper reaches of the Amazon, the frozen depths of Lake Baikal in Siberia, even Lake Vostok in Antarctica. But now I’ve gone one giant leap farther. I’m no longer on Earth, I’m on Saturn’s largest moon, Titan! Or more precisely, on its largest sea, the enigmatic, expansive, eminently cold Kraken Mare!”

He waved his rod at the darkness, taunting his own good luck. Then as his boat wobbled dangerously close to the methane again, he crouched down.

He might play the joker, but he would never capsize, not Roger. He was TV 7's biggest star — the gymnast who danced in his boat, the daredevil who braved monsters, the fisherman who always caught something.

Nonetheless I breathed easier once he was sitting again. He wound in his line, checked it and re-cast, settling in for the long slow business of fishing. We had air and battery for four hours, and ironically water too – a tube in our helmets — for drinking.

For a while, everything was still. I zoomed in on Roger for a close-up, his gloves grasped awkwardly around his rod, a reflection of orange sky in his face plate. All stark and sharp, very space-age. Yet lacking intimacy. On Earth, I always focused on his face, his lips pressed together in concentration, his eyes flitting like butterflies, his white hair whipping in the wind. Not here though. I couldn't see his face. It could be anyone in that suit – a stuntman, the producer, even me.

I panned out for context. Beyond our little sphere of light brooded darkness. We drifted in silence, a sense of time being stretched until it was thin enough to burst.

Then Roger jerked. "George! Did you see that?"

"What?"

"A bite!"

"Yes, sir!"

I zoomed in on his line. It twitched. Something was pulling it.

Roger stooped forward, quivering. "It's a big one! Fifty pounds or more."

"Do you need any help?"

"No! Just keep filming!"

“Yes, sir.”

I felt his excitement. Fear too. I panned out for a wide shot, a tableau of his epic struggle, spaceman versus sea monster on this strange alien moon.

“Damn it, it’s so strong!” Roger pitched to his knees, both gloves clamped around his rod which flexed and fought. Then lunging, he had to release the reel. The line shot across the surface into the dark.

“Is everything alright?”

“Bloody thing’s getting away.” He stood up, bobbing madly again. Then he reeled in a second time. Slowly, as if he was tugging a beast as big as his boat.

“You sure you don’t want any help?”

“God dammit, George! I’ve got this.” As if to demonstrate, he clutched his rod to his chest. The top end jerked and bent into a question mark. Beneath it, the line stretched vertical. He was on the verge of landing something.

I zoomed in.

His rod jumped. He almost lost it. With a gasp, he released the reel again. The line spun away like a bullet.

“God dammit, George! It’s so bloody strong!”

“I can see that.” I didn’t offer to help, not a third time. Yet I felt his tension, his anticipation, his disappointment. Forward and backward like tug-o-war. The viewers would feel tension too when they watched this.

“One more go. Damn thing’s not going to beat me.” He reeled in. Slow and gentle. The line tightened into our pool of light. I zoomed in on his stern where the fish would emerge.

“I can see it, George! I can see it! All red and green and shiny. Huge!”
“You can do it, sir!” My heart raced.

“Keep me in frame! They must see me fish it out.”

“Yes, sir! Of course!” I panned back.

The sea frothed and boiled. His rod bent double, its tip in the methane. For a split-second, something protruded. Not green or red. But black. A snout or tentacle.

“Hell, it’s a fighter!” Roger leaned back. But he was losing. The rod was slipping from his gloves. His boots slid on the floor of his boat.

The snout appeared again. I wanted to zoom in on it, let its image fill my viewfinder. But I had to keep Roger in frame. Zooming on the fish would be a betrayal, switching to the other side.

More of the snout emerged, dark and leech shaped. An eye, gleaming and white. A purple duck’s mouth. I was revulsed but curious too. I just had to get a close-up. I had to. This was history in the making. Everyone would want to see.

I zoomed in. The creature’s surface was criss-crossed with lines like ridges on a slug. The eye wasn’t an eye but a sucker, pinky-white and gelatinous. And the mouth was a beak, all curved and blotched and bony, with rows and rows of eel teeth inside.

I felt my stomach churn. This had to be the ugliest fish. Dangerous too. Perhaps Roger would do best letting it go. Cut the line.

“Sir, maybe you should —”

Then Roger shrieked. “George! GEORGE! God damn, I’m —”

The snout vanished in my lens and the sea exploded.

I panned out.

Bubbles shattered the surface. Roger's boat rocked like a crib. Bawling, bucking and empty.

"Roger! ROGER?" Heart thumping, I paddled over.

His boat was full of liquid. Rod and paddle gone.

"ROGER! Where are you?"

Hell, this wasn't in the script. Roger was invincible. He couldn't fall in.

I peered over the edge of my boat. If he was down there, I'd fish him out. I couldn't see anything though. Upending my paddle, I prodded. No resistance. No sea floor. No Roger.

"ROGER, if you can hear me, please say something! Anything!"

Not a ripple now. Mirror smooth. No hint of the shore either. We'd drifted out. In every direction, darkness.

Hell, hell, hell!

I breathed hard and quick. My face plate misted. A whiff of gasoline too as atmosphere leached into my suit, my air supply running low. We'd been out here longer than I realised. I didn't have much time left. What would Roger have done if our roles were reversed, if it had been me who'd fallen in? He wouldn't have abandoned the expedition, that was for sure. Not Roger. No fish ever got away from him. Never.

Tentatively, I picked up the spare rod from my boat. It felt odd holding it, angling it outwards, knowing that anybody watching would think I was Roger. Roger in an identical spacesuit, Roger fishing, Roger determined to land his prey.

Then I leaned over his boat and switched on its camera. Suddenly I felt excited, proud, a new surge of adrenaline coursing through me. No longer was I background noise. For the first time ever I was in front of the lens.

And, thrusting madly, I cast my line into the darkness.