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ALSO BY SAMANTHA HARVEY

The Wilderness

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All is Song

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They've come, they've come, he was thinking, and there they were all around him spinning through the darkness, and lighting the darkness. It was all just an illusion, they said. You weren't ever alone. How happy he was to hear it. He opened his eyes to their bright limbs and was repeating to himself that saying, Nothing happens until something moves. And thinking, therefore, I must move. Lovely formless limbs wrapping around him, or were they just drifts of light? Extraordinary beauty anyhow, extraordinary. Behind him a sound drew on his mind and stole his rest away, a semicircular sound that scooped anxious shapes into his thoughts, and began, though reluctantly, to make sense to him. I know this sound, I must move.

Then he opened his eyes and sat up. These were the first bruised moments of waking, the moments when the sleep-softened brain was so susceptible to fear and the world was at its least consoling; he spent these few moments thinking hell had come. Ah, Leo, how ridiculous you are, he thought. Hell and all; you only ever think like that when your back foot is still in a dream. There was the ululating of the sirens that had woken him up. The room is on fire, he told himself, but it was a lazy warning; there was no heat and there were no flames. He got up and went to the open window.

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The view showed smoke not more than half a mile away to the east. It was pushing the night apart with a strange, muscular solidity. It could have been any number of buildings – the residential streets between there and Shoreditch would pass fire freely between their terraces. There was the school and the shopping streets, and the hospital, though he had to hope not the hospital. The idea alone could make one shudder. And yet, no, thankfully the hospital wasn't quite there, it was much further south towards St Paul's. He opened the window wider and the air was warm and smelt burnt, and the sirens pitched deep along streets. He closed it entirely.

He went back to the sofa where he'd been sleeping. But for his underwear he was naked by the necessity of the heat, and still he was too hot – such a queerly warm July they had just had, and too hot to have the window closed. He lay down and tried to sleep again with his palms facing upwards in relinquishment. Be gone, he thought, and then said, Be gone. It might have been that he meant the heat, or the noise, or in truth any number of things that drove vaguely at the mind and kept it littered and clumsy.

When he closed his eyes there was only the feeling that flames were creeping around his feet, and four times he opened them against all reason in order to check, and then to sigh, and then to close them again, and then to curl his toes up against an imagination that wouldn't let him rest. He saw flecks of light that ordered and disordered themselves in and out of human shapes and he remembered that was what he'd been dreaming just before, but he couldn't think where the dream had been going or what he should make of it, except that it had for a moment given him happiness.

Finally he settled for looking up at the chandelier in the centre of the room, and at the outside lights that travelled palely across

it. The Bellevue displayed an unusual vulnerability, or so it seemed to him, in the occasional hot and tired creak somewhere deep within the floorboards. Maybe it was just that he was so unused to sleeping there, and that the room always felt that way at night, but he became convinced that it was flinching from that fire, having known a fire of its own. The creaks in the floorboards were empathetic little recollectings, the way a healed bone would always recall being broken.

He got up and poured himself a glass of wine from the open bottle on the table in the hope it would help him sleep, and after ten minutes he did feel sleepy, and lay down again. It was after three a.m. and his journey and the trauma of the day before had made him tired. He went into chatter and circular pre-sleep thoughts about the time he and William had redecorated the Bellevue, after the fire, and of how they'd spent those long hours playing games. It was word games sometimes, or riddles and logic problems, all while they swept up cinders and the deformed stalks of wood that had once been table legs, or chair legs. That was when they'd invented the shape whistling game; one would whistle, one would guess. Four equal whistles was a square, three an equilateral triangle, and it went on in that way – but inevitably it got more complex. Tetrahedrons, dodecahedrons, parallelograms, spirals. William had perfect pitch and could take a spiral from its central inception out through sound into the last expansion, the last curve, and end promptly with air still in his lungs. The first time the spiral had been sounded Leonard had guessed it right away, because it could have been nothing else; it had been drawn with air, onto air, and was almost traceable with the finger. But he'd let the shape complete its beautiful audible form all the same, just for the pleasure of hearing it, and for the pleasure of feeling so close to his brother. Only then had he inhaled on his cigarette, exhaled, pointed the cigarette's tip diagnostically at the

space the shape had occupied, and said with confidence, A spiral, William. Precisely, William had answered. A spiral.

Outside the sirens had stopped, and maybe they'd stopped some time ago, Leonard couldn't be sure. He took a last sip of wine, pulled the blanket over him for comfort and not for warmth, and pressed his cheek into the cushion, which smelt of tobacco and all the years of something unwashed.

In the morning William came. Leonard watched from above, leaning slightly over the rail of the spiral staircase as he emerged. The body angled sideways to account for the narrow space, and corkscrewed slowly upwards. It was never easy to climb that staircase, the feet had to pick at the treads, which tapered to an inch width at the centre of the spiral, and the right hand was always feeling ahead of itself for support. Even so, the awkward climb held a small spiritual consolation. Hadn't their father breathed repeatedly just before he died: Up I go. Their father, who claimed to know all about the glorious things that happened after death. Leonard could be forgiven if, for a moment, he fell upon the idea that revolving upwards around a central column might get you to heaven, or if he held an inbuilt bias for the vertical in general, or if he felt in some way that his position at the top of the stairs asserted his benevolence and his welcome.

Halfway up, William's dipped head entered the sunlight. Apparently he'd still not noticed Leonard standing there. Some fortunate gene in the Deppling line had granted them both hair for life – in William's case a thick mess of it, now greying and wiry, curling protectively against his skull. The morning sunlight spilling from the high, rear window in the Bellevue Room made the last black strands glow blue. William's head was notably large,

a feature which made him look comical. There were, surely, sound physiological reasons as to why a human head should be the size it is, and why its furniture – nose, mouth, eyes, ears – should be in proportion to it. William seemed to prove that the slightest variation from this design stole an ounce of the human and replaced it with an ounce of the animal, so that all his life he'd been likened to some creature or another. A bull, a seal, a St Bernard, a bear. Now that head, that face, found the light falling from above and basked momentarily in it, upturned, eyes squinting, and Leonard took the moment to make his presence known.

'William. It's me.'

William peered into the blanched space, and then he must have made out Leonard's figure. He smiled warmly, without excitement. 'So it is, at last.' Then he dipped his attention back to the act of climbing.

It had been more than a year since they'd seen each other, which, in a sibling relationship of such consolation and deep, quiet dependence, was considerable. So Leonard opened his arms to William's ascent.

'There,' he said, as if a long choreography were drawing to a pleasing end. He hugged his brother, closing him reverently in.

In that second in which the light spilt down on William's face, Leonard's heart quickened for a beat. He felt like a point of salvation, and he felt the responsibility he'd used to bear towards William when they were children. The younger child wasn't supposed to bear such responsibility for the older; their parents had worried that this would affect them both in all sorts of staggered and difficult to measure ways. But what else could be done? William had never been a proper child. How seriously he used to sit with his toys and stare at them quizzically, how joyless he was about other children; he would make them cry with his staring

and questioning. Leonard in turn had been gregarious and bouncy, a proper ray of light. Socially, he'd been his brother's saviour, and in that brief lit moment it was as if he were his brother's saviour again.

'I'm glad to see you. I'm glad to be back,' Leonard said, withdrawing from the hug.

'You haven't changed. Have I changed?'

'You haven't changed.'

Well, it had only been a year. But they would always check, to be sure. For fifty years they'd run this test, briefly looking behind ears, peering into eyes, stepping back to appraise. The consensus was always that no change of any sort could be registered; the stacking up of years was so seamless, so delicately done and relentless, that in generous moods at least they could both say honestly that it hadn't happened.

'There's a bike protest outside,' William said. 'They're about to come down this way, in a couple of minutes. I think they're passing through into town, maybe to Westminster.'

'I can hear it, the horns. I did get wind of it anyway, that it would be coming past here.'

The two of them stood somewhat adrift in the morning light of the room. William went to the window, opened it and looked out. The noise amplified, voices and the bleat of car horns, and as background some distant, unrelated sirens that were as indigenous to London as the song of finches.

William was in silhouette against the large rectangular window; in a way they were alike, both in their fifties – Leonard the earlier part, William the later – with their hair an inch or two longer than was common for men of their age, and their ill-fitting clothes, so generic as to be, in essence, invisible. That was to say, if they robbed a bank in their everyday clothes, witnesses would struggle to remember anything useful or exceptional. Their only defining

traits, Leonard thought, were bare feet in William's case, and in his own, really spectacular eyes. When they talked about their tendency for the mundane they concluded happily enough that they were to humankind what pigeons were to birdkind – workaday, diurnal, indiscernible.

Beyond these generalities they weren't equivalent. Leonard was taller, which gave him an advantage, and he was gentler in the face; his expressions were diplomatic and couldn't always be read. William's expressions, in contrast, were knotted, and belonged to clear brain states: surprise, happiness, sadness, amusement. He went from one to another as an engine slides between gears. But it was of no real use. Leonard thought this even now as he looked at his brother in silhouette, unable to see his face clearly, but knowing it well. Readable William's expressions might be, but not necessarily believable. Even Leonard couldn't always tell whether William was being ironic. It was the eyes that caused the problem, because they gave nothing away and thus left nothing to be trusted quite. They were inscrutably blue and deep-set, always lit from beneath, always moist.

'There were well over a hundred when I saw them,' William said, motioning to the cyclists who weren't yet outside the window.

'No doubt it will grow to a thousand. A nice Saturday morning will always bring people out to fight a cause, I suppose.'

'As we know, principles are solar-powered.'

'You're right, of course.'

Leonard went to the long oak table in the centre of the room and uncorked a new bottle of wine. The remains from the night before was not enough to share. He poured a glass for each of them. William was indifferent to drink, but Leonard was the reverse – he never felt better than when he had a glass of wine travelling his blood, and he was conformist enough to find sedition in it, which in turn glorified the conformity. When drunk

he loved the little things and the simple things. Being human seemed really quite agreeable, quite unarguable.

'Will you have some, William?' He gestured for him to come and sit at the table.

'It's barely eleven o'clock.'

'Well, these are hard times.'

William came, and sat opposite. Leonard pushed a glass of wine towards him.

'Scotland was difficult,' Leonard said, in answer to the unasked questions. *How was your trip? How have you been?* He knew William would never ask. 'I wish you'd been there, William, at least for a visit.'

No response, but then it hadn't been a question, so he continued as if unperturbed. 'Mind you, if you had come what would you have found? Me drinking wine too early in the day and watching films and scratting through boxes of things in the attic, like a weird animal. I can't say I've really been in possession of myself.'

'I don't know what that would mean anyway. To be in possession of oneself.'

William smiled with intrigue as he said it. No comment on the events and outcome of that prolonged stay in Edinburgh, no query or evident grief over the loss of a second parent within a year. Leonard realised he would have to go through the usual process of assimilation that always followed any absence from William, in which he let drop his expectations about the norms of brotherhood, and calibrated, realigned, and finally – and with hope, efficiently – came to the island of understanding they had together managed to occupy for so long.

'I think I've found some peace,' he said.

'At last, that's good.'

'I think Dad had to die before I could find it. I don't feel regret that I could have done more, should have done more.'

William sat equably in the sunlight, his shoulders falling to a relaxed hunch as they did when he was composing a question.

'What use would regret be, Leonard? The dead are in a good place, I do believe that.'

William reached his hand across the table and Leonard extended his in response, meeting for a moment, a firm squeeze, and that was the extent of it. Yes, Leonard thought: What use would regret be to a man who's passed into eternity, as their father believed he would? Indeed, what use.

'Do you know how wealthy we are now, William?' It was pointless to evade the question any longer. 'We inherited everything.'

William offered an expression of plain happiness – a smile, the eyebrows rising to meet the new altitude of his assumed mood. The tone, however, was neutral, and his shoulders didn't lift. 'Well, parents have to have some use, I suppose.' And then, 'I'm joking.'

'Do you want to know how much we inherited?'

'Only if it would help you to tell me.'

'Help me? No, it wouldn't help me especially. I just thought you might be interested.'

His brother looked more distracted than interested, in truth; he appeared to have no concern for money, an unlikely trait that had nonetheless been tried and tested against circumstance and prevailed as seemingly sincere.

'We'll have to arrange the ins and outs of the finances at some point,' he persisted. 'I need to talk to you about it. Not now, but soon.'

'Of course,' William said. 'Whatever I can do to be least trouble.'

'It isn't about you being trouble.'

William flashed a grin. 'Oh, but I *am*. Always. You've said it yourself.'

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'I didn't say you weren't, I just said it isn't about that.'

'The grin ebbed to a kind, focused smile. Whatever's mine, you can have, Leo,' he returned. 'I trust you to do the right thing with it.'

'William, don't be ridiculous, I don't want your inheritance.'

'Then we have something in common.'

'You have a wife and children.'

'So I do.'

Leonard tossed the cork in William's direction and it bounced off the chair and coiled across the floor. William smiled at him as though to say, Let's talk about something better than this. Leonard was prepared to do so. Born into wealth, every family loss the two men had ever suffered had made them richer. Surely in the furthest reaches of their psyches they were always waiting for the next person to expire? Well, it was a dire thought, low and bad. To talk about inheritance felt in some respects unclean, and William's indifference only added to this; Leonard was happy to let it rest for the time being. The death of their father two months ago had left them in a state of indisputable prosperity, and William must have known it, but was incurious. It was the kind of prosperity that could change one's stature and outlook. It delivered the weight of total freedom, a difficult weight overall and one which could, with the wrong handling, become a burden.

Leonard leaned back and put his thumbs in his trouser pockets. He found his brother's eyes. 'People were angry that you didn't come to the funeral.'

'People are always angry, Leonard. I wish it wasn't so, I wish it as much as you do.'

'And they were sad, too.'

William gave an understanding shrug. 'It was a funeral, after all.'

Leonard exhaled and extended his arms outwards along the

table, hot, frustrated. The two men had always slipped into these starched dialogues when the topic became personal. For all their closeness over the years they still didn't know how to negotiate the extremes of one another, and as soon as the *I think* became *I feel*, they faltered, as if they were constrained by the awkward fact that they were human.

It wasn't just a funeral, William, Leonard wanted to say. It was *our father's* funeral. He took his wine and trod the length of the room with it. The Bellevue Café itself, on whose first floor they now stood, was the fruit of family loss. Leonard had bought it almost twenty years before with money they both inherited from their grandparents; William had handed over his share without a blink or tremble. They'd cashed in their rustic, blowsy, big-hearted grandparents for a fire-blackened building in the city, which, as it turned out, they'd never even used as a café. Downstairs the chairs and tables, the empty shelves, the boxes of crockery never unpacked – a whole life they hadn't got round to living.

Leonard felt the whole truth of that, sitting there orphaned with his brother. They didn't speak for two or three minutes. Was it an easy silence? He must assume so, otherwise he could count himself as a man who had no true friend in the world. He thought of what he could say, and wondered if he should share those things he'd been thinking about regret, or maybe he could mention the chickens he'd heard about on the local news earlier that morning, who'd had their necks stamped on. Such things wouldn't normally bother him – the welfare of a chicken; there were enough other things to worry about. But in the vision of its feathery head bulging wide-eyed from a flattened neck he seemed to see all the futility of loss, and of anger at loss, and some flood rose in him without his willing it. Why? he'd thought in repertory with a mash of other journeying thoughts. Why the stamping, *stamping* of all things, why?