

## **A Leap of Faith**

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Topic: Trust

I am already mid-fall. I have been since you fell seven years ago.

So why do I hesitate to jump?

Eyes like shining streetlamps gaze at me from all directions. Some expecting, a few worried, others frustrated, glancing periodically down at their celestial wristwatches, waiting for my turn to end. Below me, the ocean looms ominously.

It is said that the jump will reveal your strength. Your soul. Your true nature. That it only ever will be revealed in a life-or-death scenario. In a turning point that will determine your destiny, your everything.

Tilting my head upwards, I gaze into the air in front of me. Through the mist of dawn, I can just make out the shapes of the stars. There is the spiral shape of Ourugan, the sea god of old, the rose-gold gleam of the warrior queen, the tri-star belt of the hunter. Beneath them all I see their dyres. The forms that, at some point, had saved them in their fall. Though blurry in the rising light, I know there are more figures to be spotted. I could trace the constellations with my eyes closed, scour them as I have for years, trying to find you in the silver mass, to discover the result of your disappearance. I never did.

I shudder. The day seven years ago is still engraved in my heart, like a tattoo.

I was the last thing you touched before you jumped. It is tradition to allow the family of the dyrator to give the final wish of luck, before the no-longer-child grows beyond the need of their company. Our parents, with both of their dyres engraved in ink into their skin, patted you on the shoulder with a smile. Having seen numerous of these rituals already, their emotion leaned further towards pride than towards worry. Why should they worry? Our family is one of the ancients, its generations littered with successful jumps and powerful dyres. If anyone could survive the fall, it would have been you.

I felt differently. I did not want you to leave, to uncover anything that would part you from me. As a child, change felt like a ghost. It was always hovering somewhere up the path, filling

me with inevitable fear, but was easy enough to ignore. That is, until you unwittingly walk right into it. A chill filled me in that moment, as though I had indeed stepped straight through the ghost's empty heart.

So I held you close. I wouldn't let go, to the point where they had to drag me away. One last glance. An unworried smile filled your kind face before you leaped off the cliff with all the confidence in the world.

I remember the silence that followed. Everyone held their breath in anticipation. But as the minutes ticked by, it soon became clear that you were one of the few whose dyra had not shown up. Perhaps you never had one. Perhaps you lacked the necessary faith. Perhaps you were just unlucky.

Soon, the only thing that echoed off the side of the cliff were my sobs, their sound blending with the waves pounding against the rock.

Those same waves beat against the cliff below me now, as I take another glance at the space separating them from me. It is said that the height of the cliff is as great as two of the oldest redwood trees in the forest on top of each other.

My legs have gone numb. I don't know how long I have been standing for. I feel the gaze of our parents searing the back of my neck. They are worried now. They fear that our bloodline has been cursed. I am their only remaining child. What if it is here that it ends?

The sun has almost fully risen. I may have but a few short minutes to complete my fall.

I used to imagine this moment, to look forward to it. My imagination whirled with questions of what form my dyra would take. Would it be a swan, like our father's? Something small and gentle, such as a moth? Or as our leader, an eagle?

Now would be a great time to find out, I think silently.

I take a deep breath, perhaps the last full breath I take, as I fix my gaze on the horizon. The worst mistake I could make is to stumble awkwardly off the cliff. One must not show any sign of hesitation. You are supposed to trust yourself. It's a leap of faith, they say, but the faith must be fixed in your conscience from the start. Only then can the strength of your dyra be uncovered.

I never trusted myself. I trusted you.

Your face fills my mind. The way your eyes, silver like moonlight, crinkled when you laughed. Your hands resting firmly at my waist, lifting me up and spinning me around in circles. In those moments, I felt as though I were flying.

Grounded in this memory, I leap into the air, spreading out my hands as I did when I was a child.

The wind blasts against my face, my body, as strongly as though it were my personal tornado. My eyes sting, but not once do I close them. Throughout it all, I stare defiantly into the heart of the rising sun, everything else races by in a blur. My ears hurt from the rapidly increasing air pressure, the loud beating of my heart, and the high-pitched whistling of the wind. In it, I hear a distant scream. My scream, I'm sure.

It is as though my gut is trying to propel itself out of my skin. I've lost all sense of time and space. Did my feet leave the ground a second ago, or a minute ago? Is the water getting closer at all?

A second beating joins the one of my heart. The sound is slower than my heartbeat, which races like the hooves of a galloping horse. Probably the nearing waves as they wait to swallow me.

Something cool splashes against my face, and saltwater stings my eyes. I must be getting close to the end.

The scream in the wind grows louder. I shriek, releasing all the pent-up emotion left in my heart, knowing that this will be my last chance to express it.

The sun is almost fully visible, and I dare to glance down at the waves. Only a palm-tree length between us.

It is a good thing I am not afraid of my death. For I know for certain that I will die now. The dyra of the death god, a raven, will grab hold of me any second now.

Falling.

Falling.

Almost there. Almost...

Then I feel it. Something smooth and cold grasps the back of my shirt, piercing the skin beneath it.

I fall for another arm-span, but the creature holds fast.

Everything appears to pass by in slow-motion. The whistling sound fades, and the warmth of the sun finally reaches my face as it rises the last couple of flower-lengths.

The pounding waves of the ocean, which had before sounded so dooming, seem to quiet, becoming almost peaceful. The ocean itself appears to be gaining distance, having gone from the length of a cattail away to an oak-length. The sunlight bounces off its surface, creating rainbows which dazzle the eye, only to fizzle away within seconds. I had never noticed the ocean's beauty before.

Is this what death feels like?

I blink, cleansing my eyes, and slowly, slowly, start to look up, sure to see the deep midnight shades of the raven dyra flying gracefully above me, carrying me to whatever lies beyond. I find myself smiling, thinking that this must have been what you felt after your jump.

But as my eyes find the creature whose claws grasp my shirt, I gasp.

Above me is no raven. There is no darkness, no shades of midnight or shadow in sight.

Instead, are the golden-brown feathers of another bird, with tufted ears and a long, spotted tail.

It is an eagle-owl, with majestic wings beating gracefully through the air, pulling itself upwards, me with it. Sensing my gaze, it dips its head towards me, not much, just enough for me to see its eyes.

A lightness fills my heart, and I grow dizzy. For they are not the usual amber colour of the owls I have seen in the past, but a deep silver, like moonlight reflecting off of snow on a starry night.

Suddenly, I am a child again, spinning around in your arms, my heart brimming with love and trust.

I know these eyes.

They are yours.