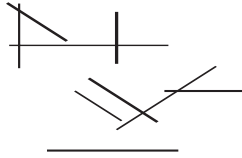


PART I



1



LIFE has many rough edges: edges that draw us close like the precipice over a beckoning canyon, edges that push us away like the jagged lid of an opened metal can. There is a tension between wanting to see the edge, feel it, run our hands across it, and the desire to retreat toward safety and comfort. We can be indecisive and hesitant. We can sit and ponder our next action. We can look away from the edge and act as though it is not there. But we can only be this way for a short time; eventually a choice must be made.

I once knew a young girl who discovered a disemboweled skunk near a pond. At the sight of it, she immediately ran away in disgust and fear. But after retreating a short distance, she slowed her pace, stopped, and turned. She looked back, picked up a stick from the ground, drew close to the lifeless body and poked at it. She noticed the texture of the intestines, the deep bluish-red color of the

bloated stomach, the border between alive and dead. She grimaced, dropped the stick, and ran away.

We always look back. Don't we? The edge is never monotonous or uninteresting. It may make us excited and fidgety, anxious and uncomfortable, perhaps sad and horrified. Whatever we feel, however much we may proclaim our disinterest, we need to take a quick glance. We are curious about things like this.

I was more than curious. I tried to understand the edge with diagrams, measurements, and careful observations. But I became frustrated and impatient. I threw away my tools. I succumbed to the tedium of precision, and became dishonest and inauthentic. Instead of trying to understand, I started watching to see if the edge would erode through time, hoping it would simply disappear and no longer confront me. Occasionally, I would attempt to blunt its sharpness by pounding it against a hardened tree root or a granite stone.

I failed of course. I am too small and the world too big. But my efforts were not completely futile. With time, and a modicum of wisdom, I can now look back at the edges of my world and see how the lines and boundaries of other people and other things shape me. It is not the borders of my body that determine who I am, what I can do, and where I can go. The edges of everyone and everything else carve out my possibilities.

I'm talking like a poet, because ... well ... because

Part I

I'm trying to avoid telling you about the rough edge in my life—but I do want to tell you. I won't belabor what I'm going to say. I won't dwell endlessly on the periphery. I won't linger on and on, vaguely, as poets always do. I will just tell you, straightaway.

I won't make you guess. I won't use trickery. No delaying, no procrastinating. I won't pretend it is so difficult to explain that I must prepare myself with research and note-taking. I will just say it, without hesitation. No long introduction, no tears, no leaving and coming back.

I must warn you though, this may not be pleasant. What I am about to say may be difficult to hear. You may think it horrible and grotesque. If you do, you can look away, or run away—I will understand. Sometimes, we aren't ready to confront things like this.

So, I'm ready.

... wait a minute. You look like you're about to leave. Please don't run too fast. It's not as awful as you might think.

Now I have given you too many warnings. Don't be concerned that your life will change forever, because it won't—at least I don't think so.

Maybe I don't need to tell you. I can hide the problem rather well. I'll cover up the edge. I've done this before. We can act as though nothing is different. What do you think? Do you still want me to tell you?

You do? Of course you do. We always want to poke around at the edge—don't we?

Okay, I will just say it. I will just blurt it out. Are you ready?

Maybe it's not important. You can find out some other way, or figure it out on your own.

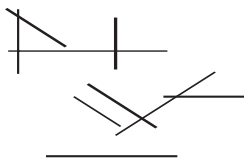
Now you seem to be getting angry. Don't get frustrated.

Okay, okay, I will tell you ... It is only five words that I have to say ... just five small words. Short words, not long, easy to understand, nothing that will require careful reflection. Very simple words. You will understand exactly what they mean.

Ready. Are you sure? I'm going to say them and then look away ... because I don't want to see you run. I don't want to see you run away from me and not even turn around. I do hope, that when I stop hiding my eyes and my shame, you will still be here. I will now say it.

I have only two feet.

2



YOU'RE still here! I'm glad you did not run away. You don't think having two feet is odd? Maybe not if you're a person, but I'm a frog, and frogs are supposed to have four feet—two in front and two in back.

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