

The Canyon

My journey to my canyon began at the age of twelve, when my parents died in a car accident. We were the typical “poor but happy” family. We always had just enough, just enough food not to go hungry, just enough money to pay for whatever ghetto Philly suburb row home we could afford, just enough gas money to go camping and fishing once in a while. This all ended after they died, it seemed I never had enough of anything, but the two most important things I did not have was their love and their presence.

I was shuffled between Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents and family friends, my parents were not that close to anyone in their families. They did not want me raised the way they were, racist, alcoholic, abusive places that touted God as the answer to all problems, not a change in thought or behavior. They only took me in because the state paid money; those assholes would actually fight over who I was going to stay with. This was not because of what it would mean for me personally, but because of the money they “needed” for things like additions on their homes, boats, and other shit that we could never afford when my folks were alive.

I hated getting moving around, and I would get my ass kicked for trying to think like my parents had taught me. I was nothing more than extra income. That was my existence. I understood my parents more and developed a greater love for them after living like they had, in the same horrible conditions.

I got a job when I was a freshman in high school at the “Eight-ball Billiard Hall”. Bill Cleland owned the place and took a liking to me. Bill and I got along pretty well, probably because neither of us ever had much to say to each other. I talked Bill into being my legal guardian, promising the checks to escape my relatives. Bill would get the checks, but immediately gave *me* the cash, saying he was “all right” with money. There was a small room in

the back of the hall with a cot, shower, small fridge, and a hot plate. The mildew-stained walls, the noisiness of the pool hall, and the small tobacco-stained window became the best home I had experienced since my folks died. He didn't require much, just help with cleaning up and sometimes things like shoveling snow, working on broken cue sticks, and helping him re-cover the felt on the tables.

The days in the pool hall introduced me to many of the things that will destroy a young man who lost his folks, had no love, and was confused to what he ought to do with his life. Drugs were readily accessible, and with the money Bill gave me, led to me learning at that early age both the importance of a mental escape through chemicals, and the downfalls of addiction.

Even though I did a lot of cocaine, acid, mushrooms, and smoked a ton of pot, I did pretty well in school. My parents had life insurance, and receiving my inheritance at the age of eighteen depended on me graduating high school. If I didn't graduate, the money would not come until I was twenty-five.

My mom's sister, Hazel, and my step-uncle Bob were the ones who controlled my inheritance and my parents will. They lived in Arizona, and besides calling once or twice a year to make sure I was still alive, they never cared about my living conditions. When Graduation was just a couple of weeks away, I started calling them.

"Hey Aunt Hazel, it's Greg, you know I am graduating soon, how does this thing work with my parents money?" This would be the gist of the conversation, always leading to a talk with Bob.

"Well ya know Jeff, I gotta see that diploma before we can do anything legally" he would start,

"I am not sure if were going to make it out there, might be a bit before we can get out there to see it."

“I know Bob, but I could mail you a copy, I just want to get out of here, have a place to call my own...” I would try to explain my plans but he would interrupt

“Well you know I can’t really do anything about the legal clauses, I have to see that diploma with my own eyes...”

This conversation happened a few times, and then they just quit taking my calls. Two days after graduation I decided I had enough. By enough, I mean of everything, the drugs, the fight with my Aunt and Uncle over my money, even the pool hall had lost my adoration. I had a good amount of money saved, and decided to buy backpacking equipment. I had read a newspaper article about a guy that had hiked the Appalachian Trail; it seemed like a cool, cheap way to see the country.

I hiked that hike, all 2,100 miles of it, and then just didn’t stop. I wanted to get out west, and decided walking was the way to go. I figured a little time might encourage my relatives to finally be forthright with my parents’ money.

Three years later I finally found myself in Scottsdale, Arizona. I had hiked all over the place and would stop to work menial, labor-intensive jobs whenever I needed to. I met a lot of people during this time, even considered a few friends. I even had a few girlfriends, but I was too much of a traveler by then, couldn’t stop until I found my place, where that was I might never know. My relatives had heard about my drug use, that and my disappearance, was all they needed to take full legal possession of the inheritance my folks had left for me. Un-fucking believable, taking a kids dead-parents money, and yet they still proclaimed to be god-fearing Christians! Now I was really done, betrayed for the last time, I would just keep hiking, live on the fringe of society.

I found my Canyon a year or two later. I ended up in the Grand Canyon National Park because of my buddy Dave Alexander. He ran the backcountry permitting for the Forest Service. I met Dave hiking and building the Arizona Trail the year before. His new job allowed him to issue me the special “off-trail” permits usually reserved for Universities and biologists studying wildlife, anthropology, and archeology in the canyon. I helped him with odd trail maintenance jobs and reported on trail conditions. I didn’t get paid, but Dave issued me the permits, and that is all I wanted, to explore the canyon and go places most other people couldn’t or wouldn’t go. I had logged close to 600 miles of climbing into, then out of, the Grand Canyon.

I had been on the Boucher Trail too many times to count. This trail above all others captured the essence of the Canyon. The deep maroon and pinkish rock cliffs meet you at the top, and as your knee-killing journey takes you further down into the canyon, the rock changes. Yellow, gold, and green replaced the reddish hues, and finally, when the trail meets the Colorado River at the bottom, there black lava rock of ancient volcanoes. The color changes in these rocks interrupt the humdrum of trudging along the trails, forcing one to acknowledge the place he is in, and the geological ages that have passed before him.

There were not too many people there either, only experienced hikers dared to try Boucher. This loneliness added to the overall feeling of being out of place, caught between ages of time that are beyond simple numbers. I had stopped at one of the intermittent springs that lace the canyon, it was the 5th of July, and I remember because I had saved some whiskey for the 4th and met another hiker that had a full fifth of vodka. Meeting people here was always an anomaly, and I related to those so far down in the Canyon, much more so than the top. The droves of tourists up there looked at me like another natural attraction, not a human being. The hangover

was horrible, and being in the bottom of the canyon in July is hot and miserable. These small springs provided a much needed and necessary oasis.

This water was something to be cherished, and in older times, worshipped. I still smoked pot, and decided to stay there and chemically nurse the hangover. As I was sitting there watching the sun change the colors of my surroundings and entranced by the sound and the damp smell of the dripping spring, I noticed something on the huge red rock wall in front of me. At first I thought it was my foggy, drug induced mental state.

Small holes began appearing in the wall in front of me. After a double take, I realized that it was the shadows from the sun's movement playing tricks on me. I scrambled up the scree in front of the rock wall to get a closer look. These weren't holes, but indentations that ran across the entire face of the rock. The spacing was perfect for hand and foot holds, the bottom indentations were around nine or ten inches deep, the tops being less deep but these were perfect for a hand grip. The scree ended to my left with the rock face curving dramatically until it became a cliff. There was a drop of about one thousand feet on that side. To the right of where I was standing was a small trail that intercepted the indentations. This canyon had been inhabited for thousands of years before white man even knew this country existed. Could these indentations have been made by some ancient culture or was this nature's way of enticing a stoned, hung-over hiker over a cliff edge?

I packed up and clamored up to the "indentation" trail. I knew somehow that other humans at some point traveled this, but where the trail ended was my biggest concern. I started out slowly, one hand in an indentation followed by a step; I repeated the process until I met the curve in the rock face.

This is where the cliff face began, I was scared to death of heights and the one thousand foot drop below me instantly turned my knees to jelly. I was shaking almost uncontrollably, and was not sure if I could go around the bend. I stopped, closed my eyes and caught my breath. I figured out that the spacing of the holds was easy enough for me to close my eyes and still maintain control while slowly crossing the face. I crept across the face, and time stopped, which seemed impossible in this Canyon that showed its age so prevalently. I opened my eyes after what seemed to be an eternity and realized that this face was a lot longer than it first appeared. I had travelled close to a football field across this face but it continued on for double that amount of distance. Once again I closed my eyes, took deep breaths, got my breathing under control, and started to repeat my blind crawl over the rock face.

I noticed the breeze first, then the sound of running water. I opened my eyes to see that I was close to the end of the rock face. There was a creek that divided the wall I was on and another wall that led from my left and curved like a mirror image of the wall I was on. The creek ran into that mirrored wall and went through a small natural land bridge. At the end of the hand and foot holds there was a small ledge that led to a natural stone staircase that followed the stream. I closed my eyes and moved to the end, and when I finally reached the big rock ledge over the creek, I sprawled out and lit a cigarette.

I sat there for a while looking at what I had just crossed, slowly realizing that this viewpoint was definitely not on any of the post cards in any of the parks gift shops, or in any of the “complete” photographic books available about the Grand Canyon. This old trail showed it’s age by the pebbles and rocks that covered most of what used to be a smooth surface. The trail paralleled the stream and went under the land bridge. When I was fully rested, and summoned more courage, I pushed on.

When I went under that land bridge it felt as if I was crossing into another dimension of both time and place. I was sure no one had come this way in ages. The stream and trail ran across a small shelf that was just a gentle slope and headed to the west. This shelf ran for a mile, then two, and all the while it did not get wider than twenty or thirty feet. The horizon hidden, and the only way to see the sky was to look straight up. There were small sections of the trail where the stream would drop at a greater angle, and there were man-made stairs that followed. When these were made was the question. Was it miners in the eighteen hundreds, hermits in the thirties, or was this an old Native American trail? The Grand Canyon has always been a place for those that did not want to get found.

Intuition told me that I was the first living person to be here for a long, long time. That feeling was one that I had never really felt; there are not too many places, especially in the states, where that feeling can enter your thoughts. I guess this is how the explorers felt, a nervous tentative feeling that served as both a warning and an invitation.

The trail went on for four or five miles until I reached a spot where the stream completely dropped off into a big opening. The noise went from the gentle sound of a stream to the violent rush of a waterfall.

The stream veered to the left before making a sheer descent, the trail veered slightly to the right and seemed to end. The trail did end, but there were rock ledges that led down to the bigger open area, filled with another, bigger, stream on the far side lined with cottonwood trees and other smaller trees I thought to be mesquite or willows. There was a very large meadow filled with overgrown shrubs and grasses in the middle leading up to the rock wall where I stood. The ledges beneath me were tall, and led like a giant's staircase down to the meadow, each one

was about eight feet tall, and ran from the waterfall of the original stream I followed, to a point I couldn't see.

I had some nylon rope in my pack and I lowered my pack down off a ledge, scooted myself to the edge, lowered myself down as far as I could reach, then dropped the final few feet. This got my fear of heights going again, and for the second time that day I was rubber-legged and short of breath. There were six of these drops until I finally reached the bottom. My questions were answered; there in the rock cliff to the left of the rock ledges I just dropped from was a ruin. A partially open structure made of adobe brick, fitted with precision to the cliff's natural contours. I was pretty sure from visiting others like it that it was an Anasazi Ruin. The Anasazi's lived throughout the Southwest, an ancient civilization that many believe was the precursor to the modern tribes of the Navajo, Hopi, Apache and Pueblo. Their appearance and disappearance here, and in places like this, was a long debated topic of historians and archeologists.

The area was shaped like a teardrop. The ledges and waterfall from the stream I followed was on one side. The ruin was at the top and above it was a rock face close to three thousand feet and curved into a half circle. The opposite side of the ledges was the larger, deeper stream that ran against yet another tall cliff. At the bottom the two streams connected and dropped into what seemed to be an abyss. The total area was probably close to four or five acres. I noticed movement and stopped to watch six bighorn sheep clamor up a rock face and out of sight, if it were only so easy.

I walked up to the ruin, going slowly, half expecting either some bearded hermit or some ghostly apparition to come out of the structure and scare me away. There were a few pots sitting on the wall that enclosed the rock overhang, the pots being the ones I had seen in antique stores

and museums that showcased Native American antiquities. The walls on the outside of this shelter were only about waist high, rocks showing through the worn adobe plaster in very few places. The walls seemed to be there just to signify occupation more than protection from the elements.

The inside was amazing; there were six three-foot tall pots on my right side up against the wall. The “cave” opened further and deeper to my left, and there were two more of these huge pots, but these were decorated with symbols and patterns that I knew had some sort of higher meaning, whatever went into these pots was something to cherish. As I went in deeper, I saw a spring coming out of the rock with a pool that had been carved out of the rock at the base. The water channeled out of the cave and into the bigger stream. There were hieroglyphics everywhere, ancient paintings, which although simple, had a more complex meaning than I would ever comprehend. This spring in the ruin was something I had never seen before; I had been to a lot of ruins, but never one as strategic for survival as this one. Why had these people left?

As I continued to explore this place, the more I realized how perfect it was. The bigger stream was much more than I originally thought. The insane beauty of it, there is a phenomenon that occurs in red rock country due to the minerals in the water mixing with the minerals of the rock, then add a splash of sunshine and the water turns into the deep turquoise color seen at tropical beaches. This stream was deep enough in places to have a healthy population of golden Apache trout. The turquoise water, the different colors of rock in the bottom, the golden trout; the stream turned itself into a kaleidoscope of living color. The meadow was more than expected also. The trees I thought were mesquite were actually pistachio trees, and the meadow was filled with the chia plant, a tablespoon of this plants seeds held enough nutrition to maintain the

Apache Indians for days while on the warpath against the Calvary. There were cottonwoods, aloe cactus, prickly pears, and other plants I could not identify. The combinations of the plants I knew were enough to live on, their fruits and seeds ripening or maturing at different times to allow a yearlong harvest of food.

Food, water, shelter, and solitude- these were the only things I needed, the only things I thought I wanted. I had been searching for a place like this, somewhere I could disappear forever, just like my folks had done so many years ago. No one in the world would give two-shits if I were to ever come back into their lives.

I had been in this paradise for three weeks. Each day led to new discoveries, I had found the remnants of a ladder used to traverse the rock shelves I originally just dropped from. The Apache Trout would take almost anything attached to a hook. The large field had an ancient irrigation system that lead from the carved channel in the ruin.

Goddamn tobacco. Tobacco was my most persistent addiction, and I was almost out. I knew I was not prepared to find something like this. This place was what I had been looking for, making myself as absent from the world purposefully as my parents had done accidentally. I had been very conservative with my smoking, with exception to the first few days. A couple of weeks later and I was starting to feel the jitters, my jaw tightening, gritting my teeth, and blood pressure rising every few hours. I couldn't get any other thought into my head. I had supplemented the tobacco buzz with the entire stash of weed I had, but getting high just made the want of a cigarette that much worse. I rolled my own cigarettes, finding out at the very beginning of my hiking adventures that store-bought packaged cigarettes were too expensive and too bulky to carry. I was down to rolling smokes out of the tar-filled roaches from the butts of what I had already smoked.

I had been strong enough to beat other addictions, but tobacco was always the catalyst and the crutch to overcome the power of other substances. Here it was just me, if I couldn't beat this addiction it would prove I was not capable of living this way, as much as I hated society, I needed it, if for nothing else but to buy tobacco, get my next smoke.

Withdrawals do funny things to your mind, especially tobacco. Quitting other drugs was quitting a life. When you are heavy into things like coke, meth or heroin, you live your life *for* the drugs, not with the drugs in your life. Those drugs can wear on your soul, but tobacco is sneaky, it gets you through the roughest parts of both the physical addiction and the lifestyle change of other addictions, but all the while it is the worst addiction of all.

I hadn't really looked for a way out, other than the way I came. I knew that a trail lead down from where the two streams met but I did not want to explore any further. I didn't need to. I was giving up; I was leaving this canyon paradise for a shitty cigarette.

I had not eaten all of my "hiker" food, ramen noodles, rice and a couple of cliff bars still remained in my pack. I smoked some trout over an open fire, and gathered some chia seeds just in case the trip out would be longer than the way in. I did not want to traverse that rock face again, anything would be better than that, and I would only go back that way as a last recourse. I filled my water at the spring and while sitting there in that ruin, cried and cried at finally accepting the fact that I was a consumer, meant for the society that I so wanted to forget, and even more devastating for the first time in my life, I felt as if I was truly disappointing my dead folks.

The trail down was more precarious than the way in. The elevation dropped quickly, it was the same type of slot canyon I had entered through, but this was more closed in. There were places where I would have to carefully enter the stream, fighting the current to slip down further.

At these places I could see the remnants of what seemed to be ladders or bridges, but even the ones that were still fully intact were far too weak to hold my weight. The further away I got away from my canyon, the more I felt as if I was leaving a part of myself, the depression made the arduous journey that much harder. Each small step felt as if I was walking with concrete on my legs, each breath felt like I was sucking in dust not oxygen, each time I had to submerge myself in the water, it felt cold enough to be from the Arctic.

This trail had taken me a few miles, not as long as the way in, but much harder. I had slipped down into the water again to go around a steep bend in the stream. The sheer rock walls a thousand feet over my head and only three or four feet apart made it impossible to see anything. I let the current take me around the bend, and when I floated around the corner the slot canyon opened up and I could see the Colorado River. The stream dropped off into the Colorado and at that point there was a small beach. I knew approximately where I was at, and knew that there would be one of the many rafting outfitters I knew coming downriver in a day or two. I sat on that ledge above the beach, knowing as soon as my feet hit that beach something inside me would die.

There are not too many people that go into the Grand Canyon on a regular basis. There are the forest service people, the raft guides, and some Native Americans still visit the canyon often. I had gotten to know a few of the river guides and would “hitch” rides down the canyon, helping with the chores and telling people about my adventures in the canyon. It was fitting that the day after I gave up and went down to the beach one of the guides I had gotten to be friends with was the first raft to come by.

“Lil” did not fit the usual image of a rafting guide, except for the tan. Most guides are fit, tanned and young. She was older, heavy-set, a heavy smoker, and drank too much when not on

the river. I had hitched with her ten or fifteen times down the river and stayed with her in Page where she lived when not on the river. The river was calm out in front of my beach and she had seen me right away.

“You ok?” she asked.

I told her no and asked for a smoke.

She could tell that conversation would come later, she told me “Dave’s been worried sick ya know, you will have to call him on the sat phone when we stop.”

I told her I would, and we made room on the raft, the introductions of the rafters was usually a lighthearted affair, but not on that occasion, Lil knew my mood was not to impress tourists, so she told them “Greg here has been kinda lost for awhile.”

That last trip down the Colorado was not as it usually was. I always loved the roller coaster rapids, but this trip, I barely broke a grin. That evening at camp, I called Dave to reassure him I was still alive. He told me he would pick me up at the Diamond Creek Take Out.

That night, after most of the river- exhausted tourists had fallen asleep, Lil and me sat by the fire.

“You know, you aint the first one to get haunted by this place.” Lil said.

“I know Lil, I just can’t tell you how much I wanted to stay there, I feel like I am leaving something I will never get back.”

“You sure as hell won’t” Lil laughed, “ I have been down in this canyon for thirty years trying to find what I lost my first time down here, ” she said.

“ I know, but this is different, I could have stayed, I could have...” I trailed off, laughed, and took a drag of the cigarette I was smoking.

She said “Kid, you can’t shake solitude, I think Thoreau said it best “The only companion I find companionable is solitude.”

Lil always surprised me with things like this quote, she went on, “You need to get to town and dance with a pretty girl, or an old ugly fat one, just to prove ‘ol Thoreau wrong” and she laughed. “You gotta stop worrying about what ya left behind and start thinking about what your takin away.”

I didn’t have much more to say, and we went to bed quietly.

The next day we were at Diamond Creek takeout. The hustle and bustle of getting the tourists their gear, and the packing up of the rafts kept me busy enough to escape any other conversation with Lil. She gave me a hug and we made our goodbyes quickly, I knew then I would never see her again. The feeling of disappointing my folks made me realize I needed to get far, far away from this place, run away from the newfound truth of myself.

The start of the conversation with Dave was not that pleasant. I told him in short detail of what I had found.

“You know you have to tell me exactly how to find that place,” he said sternly.

“ I cant do that Dave, that place doesn’t want to be found.”

“Yeah but what if someone does find it? What if they take all those pots, they would be worth millions to the right collector, I get paid to protect that stuff.” He was pissed, and he knew that I would never tell him the exact location, I felt bad, like I was betraying my friend, compromising his position.

“Man, nobody is going to find that place, at least for a long, long, time. I just got lucky, sitting on my ass at the right place at the right time, what are the odds somebody else is going to look at that rock face the exact time on the exact day I was?” I thought about it for a minute, “If

anything, if I was to reveal that place I should tell the Havasupai's or Hopi's not the forest service, c'mon you know somebody will make money off what I found, if I wanted it to be a money thing *I* would have taken the damn pots."

Dave just shook his head and said, "I know, I know." He could tell that I was set in my position. For the first time in a few days I grinned and said

"Aww Dave were you worried about me?" This broke the uncomfortable air and he laughed

"Actually I was, all I needed was to report you missing, have to explain why I issued your hippie ass an off-trail permit, and don't forget I would probably get fired."

I felt Lil's words echo in my head as I described the ruin in more detail. I asked about the hieroglyphics, and as the conversation lengthened, I started to feel better.

I ran like I knew I would. I could have gone back, but the initial failure scared me. That feeling of failure is something I never wanted to feel again, and I knew even if I was to go resupply, bring a ton of tobacco, there would be something else that I would eventually "need".

I moved to Orcas Island in the San Juan Island chain in the very northwest of the U.S. From unbearable heat and no rain, to cold and rainy all the time, it was the kind of mental switch that I needed to throw.

I liked Orcas, there were enough people that came and went to remain distant. I made fiends, but Orcas was for those about to retire or for those that just wanted a cool place to live for a while. It took me a few years not to be a hiker. Even though I didn't travel or hike, the restlessness of who I used to be prevented me from doing certain things in my life. I had a job, a few actually, but I still lived in my tent, slept on the ground. That all changed when I met Marissa.

She had been on many of the same travels and trails I had been on, both physically and mentally. We were both raised poor, experienced in the back east ghettos that most white people either don't want to know, or refuse to acknowledge. We met working on an oyster farm. We didn't have the typical love at first sight instant attraction, but the more we were together in everyday situations, we became something more than just acquaintances, then more than friends. Don't get me wrong; she was a natural beauty, not needing to do anything artificial to improve her looks. Her smile was warm, and her laugh seemed to echo in the empty space my parent's deaths had left in me. We both lived in tents on different friends properties, not needing or wanting to let go of that hiker life. Marissa calmed the restlessness inside me, and I would sometimes catch a glimpse of some kind of future, her presence completed me.

Our love was built by being simply who we were, we never, not once, ever compromised in order to impress. It was the first time since my parents had died that I felt truly accepted.

"Marissa, I bought some property," I told her one evening sitting on the beach (which on Orcas is usually accompanied by cold and misty rain) "What would you think about building a cabin?"

She looked somewhat surprised, "Where is the property at? How did you afford it?"

I laughed and told her "I sold some crack"

In reality, one of my jobs was with the local phone company, I made really good money, and living in a tent for two years not paying rent, I had saved quite a bit.

She turned to me and said, "Oh shit, now we've done it, haven't we? I think that we could only do this with each other, nobody else would ever make me even think about settling down"

I started to interrupt, but she shook her head and put her fingers to my lips

“You know that’s what were doing, I want to, I want to sit next to a fireplace with you, not here on this cold beach, lets do it, lets build a cabin.”

Our life the next few years was more than I ever expected, we never seemed to mind the trials and tribulations that brought most couples to an end. I guess we knew hardship in a way most people didn’t. She worked at a bakery in the mornings and kept her job at the oyster farm. Eventually, I quit my job with the phone company and we took over the oyster farm where we had originally met. We would sell the oysters to upscale restaurants in Seattle, Vancouver and Portland. Whenever we could, we would make the deliveries ourselves, and enjoy what those cities had to offer.

The oyster farm was a weird occupation; some oysters were amazingly quick to grow to maturity, others would be months. The pace was either really slow, checking the oysters only took a few minutes, or we were working 16-hour days to keep up with the harvest. We would sometimes have to hire outside help and run different shifts just to keep up with the harvest. We had met enough people on the island to know who to ask for help, and the influx of outsiders that would come and go always provided us with a decent workforce.

I had almost forgotten my dislike of society, almost forgotten the life I lived in my hiking years, I had settled into a happy existence that I had only felt a long, long time ago when my parents were still living. It all added up to the cliché of being too good to be true.

I knew something was wrong when one of our employees Mikey pulled up in the drive. As I came out on the porch he turned away from me, crying.

“What’s wrong Mikey, where’s Marissa?”

He didn’t have to say anything, I knew from his face I was looking at someone who had just experienced the death of a friend.

Marissa was dead. I found out that she had fallen into the water and got tangled in the underwater fencing that held the oysters, and everyone else working that day was busy in the shed we used to process the oysters. Just like that, and my life was once again robbed by that familiar shadow in my life, Death.

I immediately thought about my canyon. Not the overwhelming sorrow, not of the familiar dread that Death gives us, not of losing such an incredible love, but that damn canyon. I had disappointed my dead folks by not being able to stay there; I sure as hell wouldn't disappoint Marissa. I would never find anything that compared to her, I wouldn't even try. The feeling of failure came back, but this time I would run back to a place I had already ran from.

I went through the motions of the memorial, people telling me it was going to be ok. I went through the motions of acting like I knew that it was "meant to be", that Marissa was "in a better place". All the while, inside myself, I cursed all of those well-wishers. I put my affairs in order, sold the business, the cabin, and dissolved any material things that I wouldn't be taking with me to the canyon.

I didn't take much more than what I had the first time I had gone down into the canyon. My backpack had more tobacco, and my old .44 magnum Ruger Blackhawk cowboy gun that Marissa had laughed at me for buying.

The trip to Arizona was a daze, the miles of forest, then desert, then further up to the high plains pinion forest all became one color blur. Greens and yellows, dark and light all blended to some twisted visual bleakness no matter how bright the bright or how dark the darks. The stops at gas stations with people milling about, and the mile after mile of blacktop all became one solemn strip of nothingness, no reminder of what I had, and no one reminded me of Marissa.

I paid the entrance fee to the park and my speed picked up for the trailhead, I needed to go down, down as far as I could get, crawl back into the hole that I had found. At one time it had taken something away but eventually gave me so much more. I did not bother to see if Dave still worked at the Backcountry office, I didn't even bother to get a permit. I parked at the trailhead, grabbed my pack and retraced my steps from all those years ago.

The fear of heights had left me, the traverse across the rock face was easy, I did not feel anything like I felt years before. There was no apprehension, no doubt as to what I would find. I dropped down into the canyon, and when I made it to the ruin, that was it, that was the end. I had come back to the place that I thought was perfect, the place that would have been perfect for my loneliness. I was weak the first time I was here, and left the idea of loneliness here in this canyon. I was tempted to test fate and allowing another to be close, truly close. I loved when I thought I would never have the chance. This canyon was the cause of me moving to Orcas, meeting Marissa. I thought I would come here and live, be lonely, not wanting to ever feel the loss of love and life again. I knew I could live here, everything I needed was here to eek out an existence, but I knew even only being back in this canyon for a few minutes, I came back here to die. This canyon, so full of life, would now feel death too; I would be the next ghost here.

I sat down, wondered for a minute why I had packed anything but the tobacco and gun. I lit my last smoke, and put the barrel of the .44 to my temple. One last look around, the beauty of this canyon was paled without Marissa, the colors and life giving qualities of the nature around me held no meaning. I cocked the hammer. I took a deep drag of my cigarette, cursing the damn tobacco once again, but for the final time. I closed my eyes and whispered an apology to Marissa and my folks. Then I pulled the trigger.