

# Excelsior Bay

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Mr. Renquist, my lawyer, insists that I write down what happened so it might be used as evidence for the jury to read. He doesn't believe a word, but he thinks he can use my words in his schemes. Perhaps he expects the psychologists to declare me insane – as if it could possibly be insane to deny stripping naked to wrestle a porpoise in Lake Minnetonka's Excelsior Bay with a newborn infant in wrapped my arms. The film channel seven shot from the helicopter was blurred and the angle was poor, but there was no porpoise. That should be clear to anyone willing open their eyes. And the people on the beach saw what they saw, even if they deny it to themselves. Mr. Renquist still believes he will save me, even though I've explained what my daughter said as the fishermen pried her from my arms, "She is with you, even if you can't see her." So I told Mr. Renquist I do not need to be saved, I already am. But Renquist is a good man, even if he can not listen properly. He needs to save me to save himself and for that reason I write.

I was returning from my lunch break, about to turn the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> street when an encapsulated picture of my life erupted in my mind. My next forty steps: around the corner, past the three fenced gardens, the three concrete paths, the three closed doors, past my own receptionist's desk and through the empty hallway leading to my office door; those forty steps held all my failures primed inside me waiting to be triggered to repeat endlessly the moment my foot touched the path. I felt no hope, but I had to do something, so I resolved to drown myself in Lake Minnetonka.

This resolution filled me with enthusiasm. It was the first plan I ever had to break out of the prison of my own decisions. I sprinted through the streets, suit jacket flying out behind me like a cape. By the time I reached the sand my lungs were fire and my shirt was soaked with sweat but the breeze blew in over the water and the light shimmered from the rippling surface of Excelsior Bay.

I removed my shoes, then socks. I tossed my jacket away. I cast off all my clothes to stand naked on the sand.

Although the beach was packed, I wasn't aware until the old lady's purse slammed into my back. It was the force of her personality that drove me forward as much as the impact of her heavy bag. "What do you think you are doing?" she snarled, "Put your clothes on!" The purse swung at me from every direction at once pushed by her words. "You can't walk away from me naked, pervert," she continued. I staggered forward. The purse kept hitting me, but finally I gathered myself together enough to turn and catch it. I drew it in, but her frail arms gripped the thick leather strap so tightly her momentum pitched her into me. I caught her in my arms, but then she started screaming, "Help! Rape! Help me!" and began flailing her arms in futile punches against my body. I stepped away as fast as I could, threw her purse aside and allowed her to collapse onto the ground where she cried, "Stop him. Stop him," again and again.

It happened so quickly that every face on the beach was frozen on me, but as I backed away the sound of the crowd melted. I was suddenly aware of just how many people were staring. As I retreated, their attention turned to open-mouthed fear. At first, I didn't understand the fear but sharing it, I continued to back away. But soon I realized I was thirty feet from the shore, and yet I was not wet. The water felt soft and glassy on

the soles of my feet. I stood on its surface. Ripples spread in circles on the water where my feet stepped, and they jumbled with the waves blown in off the wind. But my feet merely skidded on the slippery surface as I struggled to hold my balance.

I wanted to die. That's why I was here, but the fear projecting from the beach was more immediate. It terrified me. It embarrassed me. I kicked down hard as I could to break through the surface, but it was no good, I couldn't break through, so instead I ran as fast as I could along the undulating surface of the bay. My mother did this to me, I thought. She was the one that told me to respect my elders, to behave, to believe in god and the goodness of faith, and now, when I so desperately wanted to get out, now finally God was there paying attention to me, blocking my way.

But these thoughts were interrupted by a swirl of foam spinning up out of the water to coalesce into the shape of a beautiful shining woman.

"Come to me," she said, "You don't hate me, you love me."

"Yes," I said, reaching for her, "But everyone will see."

"I want them to see. They have been blind for too long."

The helicopter was above us by then, filming, but I never heard it. I'm sure you saw the blurry images Renquist submitted as evidence: wrestling a porpoise indeed. We made love. I felt the water, the land and life everywhere. I was hers, and she was everything in the world. After, she kissed the brow of my forehead and spun back into foam on the water.

As soon as she was gone, my forehead swelled. Soon it hung heavily over my eyes. It didn't stop until the outline of her kiss on my brow opened and a girl was born.

The baby spoke, "Daddy, don't be afraid." But I was afraid sitting naked on the surface of the water. Now, finally, I became aware of the helicopters hovering above. The rotors drove a hurricane down upon us, kicking the water into a tumultuous spray, pelting against our bodies. I wrapped my girl inside my arms to protect her but the glassy surface of the water disintegrated and we were pulled under. I flailed my arms and legs to stay afloat, struggling to stay close enough to the surface to keep the girls head above the water.

Somehow, we were both alive when the fishing boat arrived. The fishermen lifted us from the water and pried her out of my arms, wrapping us both in identical grey blankets. They transferred her to another boat. I watched it speed away, but for me the shore was waiting - and the police and the reporters.

They took my girl, and accused me of violating 12 beach rules including littering, nudity, and swimming beyond the buoys. They accused me of crimes: purse snatching, porpoise snatching, assault, attempted rape, kidnapping, endangerment of a minor and even attempted murder, but my true violation was nothing but being present during a sort of earthquake. My sin was witnessing the image we have of our world shaking beneath our feet. So don't worry so much on my guilt or innocence. Our minds are only rasps that scrape away at the truth until nothing is left but sawdust. What the jury decides means nothing to me. My daughter will remind the whole world to hope one day, as she has done for me. For myself, I have all that I need here in my cell: the image burned into my mind of the sun setting over Lake Minnetonka - and the knowledge that, whether I can see it or not, the fading light shimmers from the wind blown ripples dancing forever on the surface of Excelsior Bay.