

Ghosts of Florence Pass

by

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For Alec and Isabelle

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Blink-182 for "Ghost on the Dance Floor" and "Stay Together for the Kids." They were more than ample inspiration for what follows.

When John Parker first came to after the crash it was dark and it was cold and outside there was the patter of rain on hollow steel. From somewhere in his shell the drip of water and the close echo of it measured against his keeping. He turned his head for perspective on the darkness but there was none and so he tried to rise but his right arm was a torment and his leg hurt and was held fast by an unseen burden so he lay still. His head hurt and his neck hurt and his insides hurt as well and they felt hot and bloated like those of a dead fish on a lake.

David, he said. Are you here?

David didn't say anything and by feel John Parker checked his arm and found it broken above the elbow and a jagged splinter of bone was pressed against his shirt sleeve. Then he screamed and blacked out.

John Parker was in the dumpster behind Ricks Tavern throwing cans out of it onto the ground where his brother was picking them up and putting them in a garbage bag tied by one corner to the handlebar of his bike. The dumpster stank of stale beer and rot and it was hot inside and there were flies but he didn't mind because he was going to buy a model of the battleship Bismarck with his share of the money. He stepped on a broken box to check the other side of the dumpster but there was something slippery underneath it and it slid from under his foot and he fell against the side of the dumpster. The back of his shirt and the seat of his pants smeared with filth.

Shit, he said.

You okay? David said.

Yeah. How about you do the next one.

How about not.

Why not?

Because I'm older and because this was my idea. You get em all?

No.

Well get goin.

John Parker got to his knees on the flat of cardboard and bent to his work.

Mom's gonna be mad about my clothes, he said.

Not my problem, David said. Stop bein a nancy and get movin. You want that stupid model or not?

Okay.

John Parker lifted the corner of the box he was on and found a paper grocery bag half full of cans. It was wet so he had to hold it by the bottom so it wouldn't rip and then he handed it carefully up and over the side where his brother took it and dumped it out into the garbage bag.

Jackpot, David said.

Yeah.

John Parker picked up the cans that had spilled from the bag onto the bottom of the dumpster and threw them over the side. His hands were sticky and cold with beer but he didn't mind.

Thanks for letting me help you, he said.

David laughed.

You're welcome nancy.

John Parker woke and it was still cold and there was still the dripping of water like a metronome but now light was coming through the windows of the plane and he could see what had happened. The floor under the seats in front of him where his mother and father were had buckled up and it had crushed them into the ceiling where they sat. His mother's seat back had broken and she lay reclined with her arms spread like a penitent's and her hair was wet with blood and it hung stiffly above John Parker's chest. His father was in the seat next to his mother and his neck had been broken and his head pushed askew by his body when it rose up during the crash.

John Parker screamed and struggled against the hold on his leg and as he did this he cried with the pain of it and with the pain of his broken arm and his head and neck still hurt and his insides were still afire.

Help, he said. David help me!

His brother had been in the seat next to him but instead of a seat there was only a tangle of metal braces and electrical wire where the seat had been and there was a hole in the side of the plane that was open to the rocks outside. In his panic John Parker grew lightheaded and he nearly swooned but then he collapsed with exhaustion as if his body had decided to quit him in preservation. As John Parker cried softly in the cold he looked down at his legs and saw that the left one was pinned under the frame of the seat his mother was in. The raw edges of metal cut into the flesh of his thigh and his pants were soaked with blood there but it looked like the bleeding had mostly stopped.

Oh shit, David.

He tried to lift the seat from his leg but he could only lift it a little bit and when he did the blood began to flow from his wound again and there was more pain, so much that he had to let it back down. He breathed through the pain and he was crying and reaching out to touch his mother's hair but then he thought differently about it and lowered his hand and pressed against his thigh with his fingers where the brace cut into it. There was a lot of blood on his leg and on the seat cushion and he felt thirsty which was something he remembered from scouts as a sign that he was in trouble of bleeding to death.

He looked at his mother and father and wanted to cry but he didn't know where David was and if he was still alive and needed help then crying wouldn't do any good so he just sat there and thought. After a while he wiped the condensation from his window and looked outside for the first time and saw that the plane was in high country with no trees and only boulders and snow as far as he could see through the fog. Then he looked out of the hole in David's side of the plane and saw more snow and boulders but on that side he could tell that the earth sloped down and away from the plane like on the side of a mountain. John Parker rose up as far as he could in the seat and tried to see his brother in the rocks and snow outside the plane but he couldn't.

Okay, he said. You have to get out.

He thought about the first aid badge he earned in scouts and went through in his head the steps of treating an injured person and figured how to apply these to himself. There was nothing he could do about his head and his neck and his insides until he was able to free himself and get to a first aid kit so these problems would have to wait. He was afraid to do it and it hurt a lot but he managed to roll up the sleeve on his broken arm and he saw that it was broken just in the one place and that it wasn't bleeding much anymore. The arm could wait along with his head and his insides that were burning. He figured he had to stop the bleeding in his leg before he tried again

to free it so he thought about that. It seemed like he was past the point of being able to use pressure to stop the blood from flowing and so he decided he would have to stop it with a tourniquet.

At the scout meeting where he learned how to make a tourniquet Mr. Frederickson had said that you can usually find a shirt or piece of fabric or rope or something like that on hand that you can use. It turned out that Mr. Frederickson was right because there was a bird's nest of electrical wire that had been pulled up through the floor of the plane when David's seat had been ripped out by the crash. So John Parker pulled some of these loose and after he had torn his pants leg away from the site of his injury he wrapped wire around his leg as close to the wound as he could. He tied it in a knot around a piece of metal he found on the floor to use as a handle and then he turned the handle until his leg throbbed with pain and then stopped. After he was done turning he wrapped another piece of wire around his leg to secure the piece of metal serving as a handle and to prevent it from spinning backwards and loosening the pressure. He looked at his work and decided that it looked pretty good. He looked outside through the hole in the plane.

David, he said.

David didn't answer and so John Parker tried again to push his mother's seat with his mother still in it up off his leg. It lifted a little and the pain came screaming back into his leg but he was able to back himself out a little bit from under the seat before it got too heavy and he had to set it back down. Now it was resting on his knees and this didn't hurt as much so he left it there for a time and rested and caught his breath. For the first time he thought about the pilot and how he couldn't see him in the cockpit because of the way his mother and father were pushed up and blocking his view and then he thought about how the pilot was probably dead as well.

After he had rested John Parker pushed against the back of his mother's seat and lifted it from his knees and then pulled himself out from underneath it in a wash of pain and he started to hyperventilate. He turned and swung his legs aside as he let go of the seat and the seat fell to a lower position because John Parker's leg wasn't there anymore to stop it and then his mother's arm swung down to the floor and glanced off John Parker's leg as it fell making him scream. The pain in his leg and arm and head and neck and insides in concert with the grief made him swoon and he fell to the floor and blacked out again.

John Parker and his brother were downstairs watching Zombieland on the computer and eating popcorn and drinking hot Dr. Pepper. Zombie movies had been David's favorite since their father had taken him to a zombie movie marathon at the point cinema earlier that summer but John Parker was still too young their father had said so he couldn't go. Now their parents were fighting upstairs and when they were fighting it usually went on all night so for now John Parker could watch all the zombie movies he wanted and they would probably never know and besides he wasn't too young. They're just movies.

You watching the stairs? David said.

Yeah.

You get me in trouble and I'm gonna kick your ass.

Like you could.

Try me nature boy.

Stop calling me that.

What're you gonna do about it nature boy?

Can we just watch the movie?

David didn't say anything and they watched the movie. From upstairs the muffled fighting of their mother and father came through the ceiling and David turned up the volume against it. For years this. Woody Harrelson shot a zombie through the brain and John Parker thought about the time that he and David and his parents went to Yellowstone in his tenth summer. The bears and moose and buffalo and wolves all living together in balance and having their young in accordance with the natural order of things. He thought about the people in their cars with their snack food and sodas and cameras and phones and their televisions in their winnebagos and pace arrows like in some enormous natural amusement park taking pictures of the animals and sending them to their friends and family through the ether. He thought that maybe that was the last time his mother and father were happy together but then he thought maybe not because you never know what's going on in people's heads. He thought about that for a little while and then asked his brother if he thought their mother and father were going to get a divorce.

Christ how would I know, David said.

I don't know because you're older. And you know more about that stuff.

Well I don't.

John Parker looked up at the ceiling and said I hope they don't.

David turned up the volume some more and looked at his brother for a moment and then he looked at the movie.

If they are, David said, I wish they'd hurry up.

What?

Nothing. Go make some more Dr. Pepper nature boy.

Stop calling me that.

John Parker woke up on the floor of the plane in a nest of electrical wire and he was coughing and retching in the cold. His insides hurt when he coughed and his head and leg were throbbing with the pain. He sat up and turned so that his feet were outside the plane through the hole torn in its side during the crash and then he tightened the tourniquet on his leg one turn and secured the handle with the extra wire.

David, he said.

The plane rocked and creaked on its moorings on the rocks as John Parker slid himself into the opening and hung his legs outside and looked about. It was cold and foggy outside the plane and he thought that they were probably in the clouds but it was bright and there were patches of blue suggested on the horizon. The rain had stopped and there was a fine mist that hung in the air that tingled on his skin when the breeze stirred it. Everywhere the plane's confused and tangled wreckage. A wing detached and shredded against the rocks. Scraps of sheet metal and engine parts scattered and broken glass sitting atop a boulder and one of the pontoons mangled and standing upright in a crease of snow. Their tent and camp chairs and clothes and personal effects. The blackened cookpot they used to make coffee and noodles and oatmeal on the fire sat upright on a flattened rock like it had been left there in fulfillment of some promise. The smell of oil and gasoline, the refined carcasses of long dead ocean beings brought up from the depths and deposited on the mountain.

Their canoe had come loose of the pontoon struts where the pilot had fastened it with wire before they left the lake and it lay upside down at the back of the plane bent up in the middle by the force of the crash. John Parker could see the back of David's seat in the shadow of the canoe and David's legs were spread out behind him and he was face down in the snow still strapped into the seat and not moving and he could tell it was David because on one foot was a black Chuck Taylor shoe that John Parker had given him for Christmas and it was untied and his other foot was bare.

David! Oh god David!

John Parker lowered himself out through the hole in the plane onto the rocks and his legs buckled underneath him and he fell onto his side howling with the pain in his arm that lay underneath him because he had fallen on it. He rolled onto his back and sat up and looked at his brother and screamed at him to say something or move or anything. David didn't say anything or move.

John Parker got to his knees and took deep breaths and counted them to keep his mind off the pain and also off the thought that maybe his brother David was dead. He rose to his feet and his leg with the tourniquet was cold and tingling with lack of circulation and he went limping to where his brother lay in the snow while sliding his hand along the side of the plane for balance. He sat next to his brother and leaned over and looked at his face. David's eyes were closed and the area around them was black and blue and he had a big bump and a long scrape on his forehead but it wasn't bleeding anymore. John Parker couldn't tell if David was breathing or not and then he began to cry and he was too afraid to check for breathing or a pulse but then he thought he should stop being a nancy and just do it.

His hand was shaking and he held the back of it in front of David's mouth and nose and he thought he felt something there but he wasn't sure if it was from David breathing or from the breeze blowing on the mountain. Then he moved his hand to David's neck to check for a pulse and his hand was still shaking and when he touched David's neck John Parker's crying turned to tears of joy because his brother was still warm and he knew for sure that if his brother had died in the crash he would be cold. He was a long time feeling for a pulse and when he found it he thought it was slow but he thought that even a slow pulse can push blood and oxygen through a body and he must be breathing too because if he wasn't he'd be dead. John Parker was very happy and he started to laugh even though he was still crying.

Thank you god, he said.

He leaned his back against the plane and looked up from where his brother lay and he looked around. The plane had crashed on their way home from their vacation at Florence Lake and the best John Parker could remember was that they had been flying for a while maybe a half hour and the pilot had been singing before his memory went blank. He thought about that but didn't really know what it meant. The place they had crashed was a low spot between two mountains and from the way the wreckage lay across it he thought that maybe if they had been flying a little bit higher they could have made it over. It looked like the plane had probably struck the side of the mountain straight on and then buckled up in the middle where his parents were and then slid and spun across the snow until it struck the rocks which could have been when the hole was torn in it and his brother thrown out.

He sat thinking about the crash and the mechanics of it and how the snow on the mountain softened the crash and saved his life and the life of his brother but then he thought that it was only by some kind of miracle or gift from god that they were both still alive. Then he

thought that it really didn't make any difference why they were alive they just were and he should get his brother out of his seat.

John Parker talked to his brother because he'd read something once or saw something on television about unconscious people or people in comas sometimes being aware of what's going on around them. He didn't know if this was true or not but if it was he wasn't taking any chances. He talked to his brother about his progress with unbuckling the seatbelt and pushing the seat off his back and he talked about how they were going to be rescued and how the rescuers were probably already on their way and that he would be all right and he said these things and all other manner of encouraging sentiments as he worked.

When John Parker had cleared the seat off his brother's back he thought about how he looked uncomfortable lying there on the snow on his stomach with the side of his face pressed against a rock. It looked like his collar bone was broken on one side or his shoulder dislocated or both and there were holes torn in his clothes and injuries underneath that had been bleeding but not anymore.

He thought that he wanted to make David more comfortable but then he remembered how Mr. Frederickson had said you should never move someone who's unconscious or someone who's been in an accident and David was both. Then he thought about how that rule probably only applies for regular circumstances where help is on the way and they can take over and do the right things. This wasn't a normal circumstance he thought and he didn't know when help might be coming and it was cold and he didn't think it would be good to leave his brother lying in the snow with his face on a cold rock on a mountain. He wondered if he could get him back into the plane and make him comfortable there but decided this was a bad idea first of all because he would never be able to get him up and inside and second of all because he probably shouldn't move him that much and third because their parents were still in there and he didn't want to go back there himself or have his brother wake up to see them dead like that.

So John Parker made another plan and he rose but his right leg was dead because of the tourniquet so he limped over the boulders and scree and snow on the mountainside with his hand guiding him along the plane and his leg and arm and insides and head and neck hurting and he searched among the camping gear littered there for something to make his brother comfortable. Their duffels and packs were torn and their contents scattered but after looking for a while he found his father's sleeping pad and David's sleeping bag which was mostly still in its waterproof stuff sack and dry except for a spot near the foot. He gathered up some clothes that were still reasonably dry and went to where his brother was and sat.

I'm back, he said. Got some stuff to make you comfy while we wait.

John Parker released the valve on the sleeping pad and set it aside to let it inflate while he unpacked the sleeping bag from the stuff sack. This he tucked under the canoe where it was still dry because of the shelter it provided from the weather. He took up the sleeping pad and finished inflating it by mouth and closed the valve and laid it in among the rocks and snow beside his brother.

I'm gonna roll you over okay David?

David didn't answer and then John Parker worked carefully to roll him over onto the pad. Working his way up and down his body and minding his head and his shoulder so that they didn't move too quickly or strike anything. When John Parker had finished rolling him over David was on his back on the pad with his hips down in a gap in the rocks and snow which elevated his feet and John Parker thought that this was probably a good thing.

How's that, he said.

He thought about working the sleeping bag over David's body to get him inside but then thought that it would be too difficult and it might not be a good idea to move him around too much more in case he had bones broken somewhere unseen because he would probably have to move David around a fair amount to get the sleeping bag around his hips. Instead he unzipped the bag completely and laid it over him like a blanket and tucked it in. Then he took the clothes he had found and balled them under his head for a pillow and sat.

There, he said. Need anything else?

He laughed at this and closed his eyes and leaned back against the plane which felt warm against his back because the sun had now and then been shining through the clouds and had heated it. Then he looked at his brother and remembered how thirsty he had been in the plane and how he had forgotten about his thirst but now it was back.

I could make us some Dr. Pepper, he said.

He laughed at this as well and then he took a handful of snow and put it in his mouth and chewed it. He swallowed and took another handful of snow and put it in his mouth and thought about how Mr. Frederickson had warned them about eating snow and how it could give you hypothermia and make you freeze to death but he didn't care. A third handful of snow he saved for David and he packed it into a ball and ran it over his brother's lips which were dry and cracked. Then he held it against the goose egg on David's head until it melted and ran down the side of his face and neck and John Parker smiled because David was still warm enough to melt snow.

He was tired from the effort of collecting the things to keep his brother warm and from rolling him over and covering him and from getting a drink and getting snow for his brother's head. He looked at David.

I'm so tired, he said. I'm gonna rest a little bit.

He closed his eyes and thought about the things he had to do. Find the first aid kit. Look for a phone or a radio something to use to call for help. He opened his eyes.

Holy shit David, he said. I forgot about the pilot.

Again he thought about the crash and how the plane had probably hit the mountain and he wondered about what condition the pilot must be in. He didn't know if he wanted to see that. Then he thought about his parents and what he had seen there and that he hadn't seen their faces or even tried to. The shame of it. He should have looked at them and given them the proper respect and not be ashamed of them in their final hour and he thought to himself maybe I'll still do it but deep down he knew he probably wouldn't.

Rest now, he said.

He closed his eyes against a shaft of sunlight that was coming through a gap in the clouds. Coming from its nuclear core millions of miles away but like Mrs. Ballweg his science teacher said taking only eight minutes to make the journey. The scale of it.

John Parker dozed against the plane and in a dream his brother came to him but the events in the dream hadn't really happened and David never really said the things he said in the dream. David was dressed in finery befitting a man of god and he was standing in the doorway of the cabin on Florence Lake looking out. John Parker sat watching and listening from the dock with his insides trembling and hot with anticipation of the good word. David spoke with a

flourish and gestured as if addressing an enormous congregation even though John Parker looked around and saw that there was no one else there.

Honor thy mother and father, David said. Though honor themselves they may not and indeed may speak ill and lash out at each other in anger. Be thee not judgmental, for this is the providence of god. Only he can judge us our heart and our deeds and so with our parents it must be. Though a mother may punish her child for anger she bears for her husband, let not this passive aggressive bullshit lead thee astray of the path of righteousness. Likewise if a father lies in adultery with thy aunt Maria, curse not their sinful ways or their bastard child but pray for their salvation in his name's sake. Praise be to god.

Praise god, John Parker said.

For these are weaknesses of the flesh, David said. And if thy soul is cleansed with forgiveness the kingdom of god will be thine for ever and ever. And if thou believe that thy mother and father will grow old together then thou art a nancy. Amen.

John Parker woke and the sun was high and the sky was clear and it had warmed but he was shivering and afraid from the gravity of his condition and from his dream. He looked at his brother and then checked for his heat and breathing and found they were still there and he was alive. The water from the snow he had pressed against David's head was still on his face and he wiped it away with the sleeve of a shirt he had put under his head for a pillow.

I'm here, he said. I'm going to check the pilot and see if I can call for help.

He thought about what he had said and then he told David that the rescuers were still coming for them and this was just for extra insurance. Because they would know where the plane was supposed to be and when it didn't arrive they would know where it was by GPS technology and come find them.

So he went to the cockpit of the plane and it was getting hard for him to move and he leaned heavily against the plane as he did and he watched where he placed his feet because he didn't want to fall and not be able to get up again because where would that leave them?

In general agreement with his imagining of it the front of the plane had collapsed against the rocks like an accordion during the crash and the pilot was indeed dead and had been flattened such that John Parker could recognize him as the pilot only by past reckoning. He felt sick to look at the pilot but he did and then he thought that whatever communication method there was in the cockpit would be crushed or fouled with blood and tissue or both and ill-suited for use. John Parker thought about looking at his parents through the mess of steel and plastic and fabric and foam pressed up behind the cockpit but then he thought he wouldn't and he looked down at the floor.

There was a steel bottle with a plastic cap with a carabineer clipped through it sitting there and it was dented and covered with dried blood. It was of the kind Mr. Frederickson used to transport white gas which was the fuel for the troop's camp stove but a lot of other people used them to contain water for drinking. John Parker remembered his thirst and he didn't know where his own water bottle was or where any other one was so he picked up the pilot's water bottle by the finger hole in the cap where there was none of the pilot's blood and took it to the snow where the pontoon was. It felt half full and he plunged it into the snow and moved it around to clear away the blood and he had to do this several times to get it cleaned to his satisfaction.

He took some snow and went back to where his brother David was lying down on his father's sleeping pad in the rocks and snow under his sleeping bag and ran it over his dried lips and pressed it against the bump on his head which was still big and purple and black. He wished he could give his brother some water from the snow or from the pilot's water bottle but he didn't think he should because David was unconscious and he might choke and so he sat against the plane.

The plane felt warm on his back and he looked down the mountain and saw the pattern of roads and manmade developments out near the horizon that indicated there was a town there. He wondered how far it was not because he thought he could walk there and get help but just because he wondered. The cap was jammed on the pilot's bottle from the crash but John Parker was able to unscrew it by inserting a scrap of metal tubing from the plane through the hole in the handle for leverage and then by turning the cap with that.

He set the cap on a rock beside him and sniffed the contents of the bottle and then lowered the bottle to his lap and thought. It smelled of alcohol and he wondered if the bottle wasn't meant for drinking at all but was intended for some purpose of the plane's operation but then he smelled it again and he knew it was the smell of whiskey which was what his father mixed with water sometimes and drank. He thought about this.

He was drunk David, he said. The pilot was drunk and flew us into a mountain and killed our mother and father the son of a bitch.

John Parker started to cry and he screamed and cursed the pilot and he held the bottle out from his body and his hand was shaking and he looked at the bottle like it was a bomb going to explode. He set the bottle down and crawled across the rocks and snow to where the pilot had been killed by being smashed inside the cockpit.

You killed them you killed them, he screamed at the tissue and blood and bone that used to be the pilot. You fucking drunk asshole.

He rose to his knees and picked up a stone from the mountain and threw it into the cockpit and it bounced off the crumpled metal there and fell to the floor. He threw another stone and it struck the place where the pilot's stomach had been but was now an empty cavity because the pilot's viscera had come out and hung uncoiled to the floor and so the stone was swallowed by the cavity and disappeared.

Fuck you you drunk piece of shit, John Parker screamed.

He threw stones at the pilot and screamed and cursed him until his strength failed and he fell crumpled onto the flattened surface of the boulder he was on. He lay there crying and his leg and arm and insides and head were all in pain from the exertion of throwing stones and cursing the dead pilot. John Parker pressed against his stomach with his hand and sat up and turned his back to the pilot that had been drunk and killed his mother and father and made his brother unconscious when he crashed the plane. He ate some snow and then he crawled to his brother and rubbed snow over his dried lips and he let some of it melt and run into his brother's mouth and then he pressed some more of it against his brother's head which was still warm.

John Parker sat against the plane and groaned with the effort because his insides hurt more than his leg or his arm or his neck or his head. He looked at his brother thinking.

You're lucky, he said. You get to sleep until they come.

He thought some more and then told his brother that he didn't think that he would be able to get the first aid kit from the wreckage and that even if he could there probably wouldn't be anything in it that would help much. He said he was sorry for using up his energy by throwing stones at the pilot and yelling at him and that when he got his strength back he would look for

their phones but he couldn't right now. He said the best thing to do now would probably be to stay calm and wait for the rescuers to come that would be able to fix what was wrong with them and then he said that they would surely be here before he could find their phones anyway.

John Parker closed his eyes and thought about the time his mother was yelling at his father for having sex with her sister and about how his father had been drunk during the fight and how he got so mad at his mother that he punched his fist through the plaster of the kitchen wall. He had broken some bones in his hand and the skin was torn away in spots but he didn't seem to notice and just kept on yelling.

Why are they still married, he said to his brother who was lying on the mountain before him with a bump on his head and black and blue eyes.

He thought about this question and about what his brother would say if he wasn't mute with unconsciousness and then figured he would say it was for them. So they wouldn't come from a broken home and have to live on regulated schedules in shitty apartments. Then John Parker thought about what he would say in response to that which would probably be something like it would be better to come from a broken home than to come from a home where people scream and cry and fight with each other all night and punch holes in walls and have sex with people they're not supposed to. He figured his brother would respond to this by saying that there was more to it than meets the eye and that it has to do with rumors and appearances and such and that they were probably going to wait until their kids were grown and out of the house before getting a divorce and that he should stop being a nancy and just suck it up because he only has to wait four more years. The thought of his brother saying that made John Parker angry with him and he wanted to say to him that none of this made any sense and that it was all stupid and nobody should have to live like that and that it sounded like he was giving up but he didn't say any of this because his brother hadn't actually said anything because he was unconscious.

He thought about all of this as he picked up the pilot's bottle of whiskey and smelled it. He took a sip because it wasn't the whiskey that was bad it was the pilot that was bad and he thought that maybe it could make his insides hurt less like it had made his father's hand not hurt when he punched the wall. It tasted terrible and burned on the way down and it made him cough but after a time he took a bigger drink and then set the bottle down.

They'll be here soon David, he said.

He looked at his leg and there was no blood coming from his wound anymore and he wondered what would happen if he took the tourniquet off because Mr. Frederickson had said that when you put tourniquets on you sometimes lose the part below them and he didn't want to lose a part of his leg. Then he thought about how the wound was still open and deep and wet and that if he took off the pressure he would be in trouble so he tightened the tourniquet by one turn instead which hurt so he took another drink of whiskey.

He rolled up his sleeve and looked at his arm and felt sick from the appearance of it. This didn't make much sense since he had seen the pilot's body turned inside out and that should be a lot worse but he thought that maybe since he was looking at himself it was different. This made sense he thought and he took another drink. He touched the bone where it had been forced through the flesh of his arm and thought about the novelty of that. Touching a part of your body that was never meant to be looked at let alone touched. He thought about that and laughed a little because it sounded like the time sister Helen told her Sunday school class at saint bernard's about the sins of playing with yourself and how you could be blinded and grow hair on your palms and how you shouldn't do it or even think about doing it unless you want to be cursed with eternal and burning damnation in hell. He laughed some more about that because he found

the memory of it quite funny and when he touched the bone in his arm again he found that funny as well but when he thought about it he couldn't figure why that would be funny but he didn't care so he took another drink of whiskey to which he said blood of christ and then he set the bottle between his thighs and held it there laughing.

The sun was behind the plane in its arc over the world and John Parker was in the shade where he sat drinking and laughing and he thought that he should be cold but he wasn't. What he was was tired and so he screwed the cap back onto the bottle with the scrap of tubing for leverage and then he put it in the rocks and rested his head against the plane and closed his eyes.

Getting late, he said. We better go David. We'll be late for supper.

He laughed at that because there was nothing else he could think of to do. He opened his eyes and looked at his brother lying there under his sleeping bag on the side of a mountain and his head was spinning and he was dizzy but that was okay because it didn't hurt anymore and neither did his arm or his leg and his insides only hurt a little and then he closed his eyes again.

Nighty night, he said. Then he fell asleep.

John Parker opened his eyes and it was dark and cold and his head and arm and leg hurt and his insides ached unbearably. He could see his brother lying there because the moon had risen in the night and was casting a glow on the green nylon fabric of his brother's sleeping bag and his face was visible as well and it was outlined and discernible. His mother and father stood by his brother one on each end of him and John Parker could make out their features as well and they were unbroken and free of any marks of injury from the crash and they smiled at him. He knew that they were ghosts and he knew that they were going away and he knew that they were going to take his brother David with them and so John Parker screamed at them.

No, he said. You can't take him! Please don't take him!

He cried and shook with grief in the cold and his breath showed in the moonlight as he pleaded with his mother and father.

You're a brave young man, his father said. He was lucky to have you.

No. Please.

You took care of him the best you could, his mother said. We're so proud of you.

No.

We love you.

No. Please leave him, John Parker said.

The sun was rising and it was clear and cold on the mountain and a helicopter was circling in the valley below. It followed a wandering and methodical course up the side of the mountain and then it crested the pass where the plane was and hovered there for a moment and then broke away. At a flat spot in the pass covered with crushed rock and moss the helicopter set down and the pilot cut the engine and two men stepped out carrying large plastic boxes that were their medical kits and they took a litter from the helicopter and carried it with them each man to an end. They stepped and hopped among the scree and boulders and snow on the pass transporting their burdens with caution to guard against a fall. When they reached the place on

the mountain where the plane had crashed they stood for a moment in the sun and the cold looking at the situation and thinking about what had happened and they looked at each other as if neither one of them could believe his eyes and then they put down the litter and set to their work.

I'll check these two, one of the men said. You take inside the plane.

Right.

The man that had been assigned to the plane went first to the cockpit and saw the pilot and his condition resulting from the crash and he saw that there were stones in the plane and in the remains of the pilot's body and he stepped back.

Jesus, he said.

What?

Pilot's DOA.

The man that had been assigned to the plane looked behind the pilot but he couldn't see into the cabin because of the tangle of metal and wires and debris that was piled up and because of how the floor had buckled up there and blocked his view. He went back to the hole in the side of the plane and he had been carrying his medical kit and so he set it on the floor inside and looked around before lifting himself in. The two passengers were dead in their seats with their seatbelts still attached and their bodies were frozen in the attitudes of their final passing. He checked them for signs in the manner of his profession though he knew what he would find and in doing so he looked at their faces and saw that their eyes were open as if in reaction to the ambush of some specter in the dark. He closed their eyes and shook his head at the tragedy of the situation and hoped for the best regarding the two outside whatever the best outcome in this situation was.

Parents are DOA, he said. What about the kids?

The man assigned to the plane stepped outside and the plane rocked and creaked on the rocks with his shifting weight and he took his kit from inside and went to where his partner was. The partner was bent over the one that was lying on a sleeping pad by the canoe and the partner had placed a mask over his nose and mouth that was attached to a canister of gas and the partner had pulled the sleeping bag away that had covered him and was putting a needle into his arm.

This one's still with us, the partner said. But his vitals are weak. We've gotta move. The other one's DOA.

The man assigned to the plane looked at the one that was DOA and sitting up against the side of the plane. He saw that he was holding a metal bottle that was open and that he had a tourniquet around his leg and that his arm was broken with a compound fracture and he thought about what had happened and tried to comprehend it. He went to where they had set the litter on the snow by the upright and broken pontoon and he picked it up and carried it over to his partner and by then the one assigned to the plane had worked out that the one that was DOA and sitting against the plane had saved the life of the one that was still alive.

Christ this is something isn't it, he said.

Hell of a thing, the partner said.

Is he responsive?

No, the partner said. The coma probably saved his life.

Among other things.

Among other things, the partner said.

The partner looked at the one that was DOA and sitting against the plane for a moment and then he looked at the one that was still alive and went back to work on him and spoke to the man he had assigned to the plane in a low voice.

You believe in ghosts?

What?

I asked if you believe in ghosts.

The man assigned to the plane thought about that and said I guess a man has to believe in something now and then.

The partner nodded and said that he concurred on the point.

While the partner attached a bag of intravenous fluid to the needle he had inserted the man assigned to the plane saw that there were tears coming from the corners of the eyes of the one that was still alive and they were running down the side of his face and then he sat back on his heels and said oh fuck.

The partner wiped away David's tears with the sleeve of a shirt that John Parker had put under his brother's head for use as a pillow. He was finished with his work of connecting the intravenous fluid and they were ready to put David on the litter and carry him to the helicopter but they didn't. Instead the partner looked at the man he had assigned to the plane and shook his head and the two rescuers looked in silence at each other for some time. As if in shock from thinking about what had happened on the mountain where John Parker and his mother and father and a pilot who was drunk had died.

About the Author

Brian J. Anderson lives in Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin with his wife Elizabeth. They have two children, Alec and Isabelle, and two inseparable canines, Truman and Winston. He is the author of the 2013 IPPY award winning novel *The Ascent of PJ Marshall*.

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