

## 21. THE SHEER FACE

Before she met Lenny she would often go on climbing expeditions. Even when she was married, she would still take weekends for herself and head on up to the mountains. The cliff was not that far from Cordelia. She drove her white Lexis SUV and parked it at the base. From the tree line, the sheer face jutted out. It would be a formidable climb. The morning sun reflected off the rock. It was challenging her. It was refusing her.

“I am the impossible.”

The difficulty only made her want to attempt it more. Her strategy would be every bit the key. She needed to find that place in herself. To absorb that mountain into mind. She would be playing a game of chess. Like an adept player she would have it all in her head. She would be hundreds of moves ahead. She would find that flow from heart. And she would fly through the air.

She opened the back of her car, and prepared her gear. She usually worked as part of a team. But for this mission, she would have to master it on her own. The weather was perfect. She was ready to let go.

She prepared her pack, and her belt. She put on her gloves. She started to extend her rope. The first part of the climb would simply be on foot without any use of the gear. It would take her to the point of real difficulty. She next progressed to a gradual movement upwards. Here she used her hands to help her up the steeper inclines. It was still primarily a hike. But as she reached the edge of the tree line, she would face the truly ominous part of the journey.

She was well-prepared for the ascent. Since she claimed that much of the struggle was mental, she had plotted out her path well in advance. She would still have to improvise in the situation. She had not memorized every crack in the rock. But she knew the direction that she was going to follow. She recognized the twists and turns as the cliff made its form known. She had spent a great deal of time inspecting the rock.

Here was the character of the sheer face. As she looked more closely the surface gave way to the contours. What had seemed smooth was shown to be all inundated. It could easily accept her incursions. It welcomed her into its form. So she became part of its face.

Once she engaged the difficult part of the journey, she was surprised at its ease. She had known other challenges that sapped her. She simply accepted what was thrown her way. And she made it up so easily. She feared overconfidence. But she would not yield to the least fear.

The heights had once been a source of dizziness. She had accepted the fear. She could sense herself plunging to the rocks below.

That was a former self. She would not yield to a vertigo. She had cast off her former trepidation.

Her carabiner broke from the spot where she had set it in the rock. She could feel rope give way. It was a tense moment. She knew that she was going to fall. She had learned to deal with this eventuality. There was always the fear of an endless drop to the rocks below. She had to give in, accept the inevitable. By bracing herself for a ten foot drop, she could recover and prevent a worse disaster. She held on and held her breath. The rope gave in and she could feel herself slip down. Then the rope pulled again to take her weight and support her against a further drop. She could now breathe easier. She paused a moment. Then she again engaged the ascent.

She briefly looked down. It didn't phase her. An inexperienced climber might take that glance as a sign of weakness. It only told her that she was meant to soar this high. She was starting to transcend the rock. It was part of her discipline. She was earning her wings. In her imagination, she was taking flight. This was the essence of her art. It was not simply a psychological transformation. She was changing her nature. This was how a bird came to life. The gentle metamorphosis was this unity between wing and the air. Her climb was all part of a smooth upwards motion. She could feel the elevation as her attempt to touch the sky. She sculpted the rock to meet her desire to move ever higher in the air. The rope held her in place. But in a sense, it projected upwards and outwards. She was not dragged down by gravity. She was propelled by it. She could balance herself against its downward pull and use it to send her up into the sky.

She could feel the surge move through her muscles. Her abdominal muscles created the center of this power. Her whole body reflected the same concentration. And the power radiated to her extremities. This gave her certainty in climbing. She could lock her hand onto the rock as she shaped the flesh around stone. She became wedded to the form. Both she and the rock formed this single structure. In this movement she contemplated her creation. She came to life from the stone. The molten form had cooled and had her extending herself out of the solid. The energies of the molten state were now transferred to her mind. She could harness these energies as she snaked her way up the cliff face.

The hot sun was making her sweat mercilessly. The sweat was dripping down her forehead. She wanted to wipe the sweat away. But if she did, she would be unable to keep her balance. She needed to persevere. It reminded her of the time that a bee had landed on her while she was climbing. She couldn't let go to shoo it away. She knew the bee was going to sting her. She wanted to resist its venom. She wanted to avoid its prick. She let it pierce her skin. She came to relish the pain. She let the stinger work its way inside her. She let the extreme pain spread all over her body so that it could diminish its intensity. She now felt the burn of the sweat in her eyes. Momentarily, she closed her eyes and continued the climb blind.

As she came to control the event, failure only meant her last mounting. The cumulative affect was all ascending. Small detours only encouraged her progress. She marked her path. But she felt her movement without any of those breaks. She was weaving her way up the cliff. Again, she could take flight.

As she reached the particularly grueling part of the climb, she recognized that she would have to change directions. She had been moving to the west. She had taken advantage of a series of cracks in the rock. Now that stream abruptly stopped. In order to reach the other vein, she needed to make a horizontal detour. A smile opened up in the rock now facing her. It threatened to engulf her in its mouth. She felt that she was simply hanging upside down to make this passage. She scrunched her body up and managed to make the most of this overhang. She used it as a passageway to the other path that headed east.

She was moving closer and closer to the summit. This gave her a sense of accomplishment. But the successive steps would prove more defying than ever. The rock was not yielding to her placements. Her gear couldn't find its hold on first try. She was worried that the series might give way. But she was very careful as she continued to make her way upwards. This was one place that she could not afford to make a mistake.

It had been a difficult climb. She had made her way along this precipice without any prejudice to her ability. She thanked her experience for the fruits that it had yielded. Once she reached the top, she didn't look down with a sense of pride. She simply accepted what she needed to do. She had found her rightful place.

She surveyed the area at the top of the face. There was a road that ran close enough to this point. A car could make its way up. This would be a perfect meeting place. She could make it up here by climbing. Her associate could be waiting at this point.

She considered another scenario. Since she had not driven up here, it would be a total surprise that she had arrived at this destination. Someone else might be waiting for a car. Her announced meeting would end up being a startling event. She could use this to her advantage. She might even be able to overpower a waiting party.

What good would it be to control the summit in a surprise fashion? There would be no other vehicle up here. No tire tracks to trace. Her victim would appear to have been caught by some accident. The plunge down the cliff would be enough to kill. It wasn't her intention. It was the necessary end to a startling encounter.

She recognized how the driver might first express a sense of confidence that he had driven to this point. He could look down at the wonderful view and marvel at even being up here. On the other hand, she had literally conquered the same distance with her body. That alone would give her the needed edge. It would take little for her then to overcome her opponent. The cliff came to symbolize her triumph.

She would now need to descend on her own. This would be the same maneuver that would complete her scenario. She would have arrived by stealth. And she was leaving with the same style. It was certainly as if she had never been there.

She arranged the rope for rappelling. She was ready. There was nothing to the initial few feet. But then her rope became stuck in a crack. She was momentarily twisting in the air. She needed to loosen. She tugged. Nothing. She could sense the pressure. She took a deep breath. She would have to better prepare for this eventuality.

Her setback was only temporary. If she had not freed herself, she realized how she might have slammed into the rock in front of her. But she again gave herself to the air without impediment. She could manipulate the descent for her benefit.

As she came down, she noticed that she was now level with the tops of the trees. The pines surrounded her as she descended further. She could look up and see the extent of her journey. This was a new manner to experience the magnificence of the cliff. She had kissed the face. She had been welcomed into its inner sanctum. She had touched its soul. Now she could return to earth.

After she was finished, she sat on the ground and contemplated her feat. It gave her such a rush. Losing Lenny had been a serious setback for her. But he had been like one of the impediments in the rock. It only slowed her progress. But she would not give in. She needed to make this climb today. She wish that she had someone else to help her. But her plans would have to be solitary.

She broke down crying. They were tears of joy, tears of relief, tears of sadness. Something was lost. Something was gained. She needed to live for her triumph.