

STEFAN PHILLIPS - 2007

## Dive

It was dark and delightfully rotten. The flashlight blinked on, flickered for an instant, and steered his gaze to the below. Over the remains of a can filled with an unnamable concoction of oily residues the beauty of reflected light brought about the joy of diving. To balance the act, decaying banana peels, bluened bagels and now putrid swamp sludge diapers rose from the bottom of the sea to greet him. He breathed through his mouth.

From his left, beyond the reddened walls of steel and muck came a rattling of old bones and bottles. He froze, ankle deep and nose closed. Flashlight held low, he listened like a rat catcher. The rattling moved away, and he was content that it had indeed been a rodent, and nothing more.

Undoubtedly this was the part he liked best. The darkness, the uncertainty, the absolute filth. The idea that anything could be here. The idea that anyone could show up. The idea he'd be seen one day, knee deep and mouth open, holding up some treasure only he could see.

Everything found was his. There was no need to share: he never brought anyone else along. This was his time alone, in squalid solidarity. The giant metal beast and the smell of soiled clothes fueled his imagination.

There. Among the spoils of convenience was the dirty brown ear of something wonderful. He squatted and pulled it out of the heap gently. The flashlight, trained through years of searching, scanned the prize swiftly for syringes. There were none. The man, trained through years of wanting, shone the light into each eye of the prize like a cop. Both eyes accounted for, the bear, some child's forgotten spoiling, left the grubby dumpster.

He climbed out of the bin like a diver emerging from the ocean. Breathing the fresher air of the city, he emptied both of his shoes before trudging home. The rats and their children scurried around his feet through the alleys, the cops and their cruisers snickered on the streets as he passed. It didn't concern him that they thought the bear was garbage. All that truly mattered now, all that ever mattered after a dive, was that he bring home the spoils for his own child to love.