FLASH NONFICTION

A High Encounter, or: The Eyes from Above

by Arno Bohlmeijer



"From the camara" by Suresh Babu Maddilety

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Each motion is a touch of body and soul. He's alone, roving and hoping — not for company, unless it would be special indeed? — in a quiet corner of the Swiss Alps, where modern facilities are combined with traditions that have not changed for hundreds of years: religion and leisure, folklore and farming. His classy hotel is next to old stables, to which the cows return after a superb day in the mountain fields.

The colorful slopes run to heaven. There, where the air is pure, fresh and fragrant, he hikes and climbs, letting every muscle flex and relax.

An early ramble has led him far off the paths to spend a lazy hour or two in this ideal spot in the secluded, fine-view sunshine. As it's not on any map, what a strange coincidence it would be if a fellow solitary human stumbled upon him.

This lush and sheltered flower field has only one flaw: the presence of a modest ski-lift. That's to say, there are two support structures at some distance, with the cables and a few seats overhead. But evidently it's not running in June; the sole sign of humankind here is silent as the grave.

He spreads his towel and undresses to lie down, close his eyes and be held by the summer sun, miles above the trials of life.

It's growing rather hot and he's pleased with the private breeze that seems to make time unreal. He must have dozed off, when a vague yet steady sound breaks his drowsiness. Opening his eyes, he grows aware of a mechanical humming above him. Trying to locate the source, he looks up: at some twenty feet, the ski-lift is moving eerily softly in the soundless world.

In stoic pairs the empty seats are gliding by evenly, one cable up, one row down, as if space and time are an anomaly, a cosmic mistake. It's not very disruptive in itself — he assumes it's a technical test-run — but will he be at ease lying naked on his back, facing the means of transport? What if the mayor or vicar or hotel director are on their way, riding along in a special party of solemn officials, discussing grand plans?

And reality is back: He's gaping at two men in the lift seats gliding up, one sitting, the other trying and failing to stand, both gawking his way. Thirty seconds feel like eternity and never. The tough men are not sniggering awkwardly or socially, let alone waving like kids at a parade. What planet are these beings in overalls from? In the loaded silence, the man in a try-to-rise position would topple out if the bar weren't down.

Floating on, they're breaking their helpless necks to look over their shoulders as long as possible.

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To save his dignity, he gracefully raises a have-a-nice-day hand, most likely too late, and picks up his book: Where was he?

No doubt they're valuable maintenance men with toolkits, making for the top station. They'll apply themselves and guarantee the safety of future passengers: a highly respectable and responsible job, requiring their full attention. They've moved on and won't be back until hours from now, will they?

To prove to himself and the world how unperturbed he is, he lies back, nibbles a biscuit and closes his eyes again.

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