

## Crash

by Jed de Sousa

My feet made a squishing noise as I trod on leaves washed with jet fuel and firefighting foam. Bright lights added an eerie luminescence to objects hanging from trees and bushes and long shadows trailed behind shards of metal partially embedded in the soil. It felt as though at any moment the earth would rise up from being knocked unconscious and a great roar of collective pain emanate from its depths. This had, of course, been a large injury done it, and everywhere my eyes could focus, life gasped for air in a choking effulgence of still-burning wreckage, bodies, and bits.

Bits of everything: Half a tray table; a seat cushion shredded like confetti. I stepped gently, then jerked back and held my mouth and closed my eyes. Nothing and no one could have prepared me for this. As I regained what little composure I had, I skirted around the arm of... somebody... keeping it in full view as I backed away in my original direction. Under my foot was the hardness of something: the knob of some sort of handle as I raised my shoe carefully. The light hitting my heel revealed the color of once brown leather now married with the redness of blood, and I heaved uncontrollably into a pool of some other mire beside me.

I could not go on, but I knew that I must. Behind me I could make out the shadowy faces of other workers, equally dazed and wandering through the visage of twentieth century death. They did not care about me or what I had just done. It was all they could do to keep their composure as well. Like robots we marched, tracking signs of life and finding none, revulsion occasionally and briefly overcoming our vacant stares.

I thought I saw a face. I did catch what I thought was someone halfway buried in the swampy muck. And I raced to him, overjoyed at finding someone to cling to, wanting him to help me as much as I wanted to help him. I pushed away some nearby debris and wiped the mud from around his face. There was no breathing and no pulse. I spied his shoulders, still wearing his suit, and pulled backwards trying to unearth him. As I pulled, I quickly fell to the ground, there coming a premature end to the resistance. The man was dead, cut in two at mid-torso, the lower half of him not to be seen anywhere. I felt ice white and screamed in horror for what seemed minutes. Around me, faces turned toward me, acknowledged my

presence, and then automatically turned away to keep searching. I felt small and stupid, cowardly and childlike.

The hulk of an engine pod rose in the blackness. I was momentarily lost in its shadow. Above me, stars shone and silhouetted the shape before me. I felt a warmth as I sensed the mechanical life bleeding from this object too. It sputtered in places where the metal was still a reddish glow. I walked quickly in another direction, fearing that the beast would come alive. A foot appeared in the light on the other side of the engine, buried beneath its steel carcass.

Calling out for signs of life, I craned my neck to listen for anything above the grumble of diesel engines in the distance. I shielded my eyes from the flash of emergency vehicle lights. I was not sure what it was I searched for, but my gaze drew to a brightly colored bag hanging from an arm of metal about 3 feet from the ground. It seemed almost out of place: something intact in an area totally in pieces. I clambered over some fuselage ribbing and paused when I felt a sharp pain dig into my foot, stopping to find a fork in my sole and carefully pulling it out and throwing it away. This event only hastened me toward my goal, because I had to see what was in that bag. I still could not hear anything; there was too much noise from trucks and choppers.

In the distance, men cried out that they had someone! Lights panned around to the site and I felt drawn to it as well, but I could not stop to leave the bag. A few more feet, and I was on a mound of springy leaves and bramble, looking at the bag and wondering what force of God or nature seemed to have placed it here so delicately. I crawled, carefully, and finally placed my hands on the bag. A Velcro binding tore away under my shaking hands and I yelled with the full force of my lungs as if to wake the sleeping world below.

“I’ve got someone!”

And I cried and laughed and screamed to see the baby that had been placed here, safe, for only me to find.