

# Beyond The Horizon (the sample)

## Yosemite National Park, California

I spin the spoon on the ground, disturbing the dirt, dust, and kindling. It's still dark, although the sky is beginning to brighten. The air is cool. Crisp. Fresh. A new day on the brink of beginning, not yet tainted with any of life's unforeseen chaos. I've been awaiting this day for some time, excited about it but nervous. Now it's here, my chest is tight as each breath struggles through the fear.

Eyes adjusting more and more each second, the detail that surrounds me takes form, though an artist transforms their sketch into a picture. I sit, crossed-legged, just a few meters from our tent. It sits alongside another, the pair housing our small party of adventurers. I'm the first one to wake up, although I haven't slept much throughout the night.

We arrived at Yosemite yesterday morning, our larger group splitting into two to begin our long hike to the base of Half Dome. My legs still ache from the experience, especially my right calf. I've been so focused on training for the climb that I forgot to consider the long hike beforehand. Still, I feel relaxed and rejuvenated from the trek, despite the aches and pains. It reminds me of the Amazon, a completely contrasting and different type of nature, yet so similar in so many ways: the sounds, the scents, the taste that lingers on my tongue, the strange feeling of being surrounded by green layered upon green. It's so dense it is almost suffocating, but more like a hug than a strangle.

We arrived here before evening set in, set up our camp and lit the fire. We talked. We ate. We drank a little, but not a lot. Wil shared one story after another, laughter following most of them. We left the fire and entered our tents early, although I just lay there in my sleeping bag for most of the night, a mixture of nerves and excitement dancing inside my mind.

I pick up the spoon, the one I used last night to eat beans straight from the pot. The fire to my right has since died its death, but its grey-ash reminder remains. I should start a new one, be the person who steps up and prepares breakfast for the party. Yet I cannot. I have never lit a fire in my life. I watched Jake do it last night, the head of our group and the one that will soon lead us up Half Dome. He just did it, so effortless and without a thought in the world. He made it look easy. I sense it is not.

I look up to the gigantic slab of rock, the top of it a light grey as the rest of it remains in darkness. Silhouetted trees rest below, thin and long like a giant's toothpick sticking up from the ground. I marveled at them as we hiked here yesterday surrounded by these long and almost endless trees. They've been here for so long, growing bit by bit, year after year. Just growing. Just reaching higher and higher up toward the sky. That's its journey. So simple. Yet so beautiful.

I couldn't help but compare it to my own journey and how non-simple it's been. How I, as I sense all humans do to some degree, has complicated life. Even these last few months with all the changes I've made, I seem to over-complicate each step. Like an artist unable to leave their stretch incomplete, always tempted to add a little more detail.

"You beat me, m'boy," Wil says, his head peeking from out of our tent; a simultaneous smile and yawn. "I thought I would be the first to rise," he continues, stepping out and sitting beside me.

"I didn't sleep much."

"Excitement or nerves?"

"Both."

He smiles, lets out another yawn, and picks up a stick. "Today will be one to remember, m'boy. Our main man Jake will keep us on the right path. And soon, well..." he trails off, pointing the stick toward the top of Half Dome. "What do you think we will see up there?"

"Everything, I imagine."

He stabs the stick into the ground. "Indeed," he says, twisting his stance to face me. "I do understand your nerves, though. Your dream, your vision, the mountain. It has a hold over you."

"I don't know," I say. "That's a part of it. But I've also never done anything like this. We've only been training for it for what..."

"Eight weeks." He interrupts.

“Exactly.”

“And that is why we’re taking this route and not with the other group.”

“I know, but still...”

“What if we stumble and fall and slip into the vast void below?”

“Thanks. That does wonders for my nerves.”

He laughs, slapping my thigh. “M’boy, that is part of the fun. It wouldn’t be an adventure if there wasn’t a risk, however tiny it may be. We’re here to live life and see what too few do. I, for one, am gutted that this is the first time I’ve seen this,” he says, motioning his arms up and around. “Look at it, m’boy. Look at it,” he continues, pointing back toward the summit. “How has nature created something so spectacular and elegant? Can you imagine how badly man would butcher such a creation? But Mother Nature, she just seems to know how to create perfection. This forest. That mountain. All the others around us that we will soon look down on and catch a glimpse of. A few months ago, I hadn’t ever considered doing anything like this. But now, I am angry at myself for not having done so years ago.”

“I have to agree with you there,” I say, twirling my spoon on the ground once more. “And after the last few months...” I trail off. “Well, all this very much needed.”

“Indeed it is. Indeed it is.”

I look toward Half Dome’s peak, a small slither of light now illuminating its top.

“So, where is the other group’s site, anyway?” I ask.

He twists his neck to the left. “Over there somewhere, I think. In fact,” he says, looking at his watch, “they should be getting ready to start right around now. Our route looks like a cakewalk compared to theirs.”

“Tell me that in a few hours when we’re halfway up and our entire body is numb.”

“We will be fine, Mr. Foy. Jakey-boy will look after us.”

“I know. I’m just a little...”

“Scared?”

I scrunch my nose. “Yeah. Something like that.”

“Well, do not worry because I’ll be with you each step of the way.”

“That’s supposed to soothe my fears? You? You will help me climb a mountain? You, the person who has as much experience doing this as me? You, Wilbur Day, the man that cannot sit still for more than five minutes? You’re my savior?”

He nods. “Absolutely. The perfect man for the job, if you ask me.” He smiles and grips my thigh, and only then do I notice how cold my skin is. I’ve been sat out here for a while now, at the mercy of this early morn’s chill. Yet despite its numbing touch, it feels therapeutic. Not the sort of cold that will make me sick, but rather the kind that will heal me.

“Plus, and I wasn’t going to tell you this, but what can I say, I struggle to keep a secret...” He trails off, seems to lose his thought. “Ah, yes, there’s a surprise that awaits you at the end of our trek today.”

“What do you mean, a surprise?”

“That I cannot say. All I can tell you is you’ll be delighted to see them.”

“Them?”

He slides his finger and thumb across his lips.

“Who will be up there? What are you talking about?”

“I cannot say. I will not say. You, m’boy, will just have to wait and see. But trust me, you will want to see. So, keep your eye on what’s in front of you. Soon, we’ll be at the top looking out toward the heavens by the side of someone heavenly.”

“Wil, are you kidding me? Who is up there?”

He smiles, wide and wild, pushing up to his feet until he looks down on me. “I’m going for a walk, my friend. I need to indulge in some lonesome thoughts before we start this shindig. No offense, old chap.”

“Wil.”

“See you soon, m’boy.”

“Wil, come on. Who are you talking about?” He waves as he walks away, almost skipping as he disappears behind a tree. There’s movement in the other tent, the one Jake is in along with a few other strangers I did not know until yesterday, but will soon climb alongside, higher and higher than any of us have before. Soon, the subtle nature of dawn will be disturbed by people, a fire, the cooking of food, and brewing of coffee; one party of I assume several that will soon depart up that slab of rock.

More light shines on it now, the rock’s face lightening from black to grey with swirls of brown; cracks appearing, and dark shadows, and so many imperfections that make the whole sight so perfect. I stare at it, try to block out everything else both around me and inside me. To just enjoy the moment and be present.

I close my eyes and take in a deep breath of cold air, keep it in my lungs, it reminding me of mornings on the beach. I focus on the sounds: a chorus of birds speaking to each other, the whip of wind working its way between trees and up toward the rock, distant voices from way out somewhere, my own breath as it takes in air and releases it again.

I’ve been waiting for this day. I’ve trained for it. I’ve trained for so much over this last year. Changed so much. Still in search for something, that one thing.

More movement coming from the tend now, the rest of our party waking up. Soon, we’ll begin. Soon, we will be up there. Soon, I will step out of my comfort zone once more and venture beyond.

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Thank you for reading this short sample from **Beyond The Horizon**, the second book in this series. Please note that this is an early draft, still raw and rough around the edges. I’m already at work on the second book in this trilogy, and I am excited to bring it to life. You’ve already followed Ferdinand on his adventure so far. Much more awaits him, as this sample suggests. A few twists. Many turns. An entire new journey that brings him to the foot of this mountain.

I hope you will join us for the ride. I’ll keep you posted with regular emails. Open them. Read them. Reply to them.

I would love to involve you along the way... have this become our book, rather than just mine.

That begins now if you like. Please, send me an email and let me know what you think of this short sample.

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Thank you again for reading, my friend.  
I look forward to getting to know you.

**Matthew Turner**

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