

Eddie Strand forms a tribe centered around the Tantric transmission.

Break the Chain

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Break the Chain

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Break the Chain

Eli Galla

THE CHAINBREAKER

*There's stress all around,
heavy like an anvil.
It tries to weigh me down.
There's demons all around.
Some come on a touch.
Some come through a sound.*

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CHAPTER 25

It was almost our quitting time. The other shift took their lunch-break. I drove and Bucky sang one of his jive, soul songs while he tried to spot for me. Then all at once we smelled something and turned our heads in back to see waves of black smoke spouting from the freezer hold.

Some of the crew screamed. I felt a spasm of fear grabbing at my stomach, becoming a tight-fisted knot. I immediately took a deep breath and told myself this is the time to keep it together and anticipate what's going to happen next.

I see Dottie, the foreman, rushing from the sorting area to the packing area, by the flash freezers to Flavio's room, only he meets her right before the hatch. They talk furiously at each other. I'm still driving and Bucky looks over his shoulder, trying to see what's happening.

The fire alarm commences ringing, all hell breaks loose, and the mad scramble to exit the factory begins. The people from the candling line have a bit of a head start. Bucky and I look at each other for a split second. The look says a lot of things, but mostly that anything can happen from this point onward.

We turn everything off and jump over the drain and run up to the skinner, using the overhead bar to help pull our bodies over the belt. Smoke spews out of the hold. Its acrid smell makes me wince. We have to wait a second or two for the line up the stairs to thin out before we rush up them.

I have this eerie feeling I'm looking down on myself go through these hell bent motions. I hear shards of sound imploding my brain. I'm attuned to the inner voice, trusting it to guide me and keep the stillness of my center from allowing the poison of panic to spread like a wildfire throughout my nervous system.

It's a bright sunny day with hardly a cloud in the sky. My first thoughts are to locate Sherry and Heather. I quickly glance in all directions, before I see them pointing and waving at me. I've just come out of the dry room hatch. I step onto the deck; already I see people assembling in front of their life raft stations.

I'm seated on the rail in front of the dry room hatch. I hear a commotion; so I gaze in back to see three deck hands, one of them is wearing the silver Self Contained Breathing Apparatus suit, gingerly make their way down the stairs. The ugly job of fire fighting is theirs.

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Miguel calls the names of the crew members who are assigned to our life raft. My eyes are fixed on Heather and Sherry, who are assembled at their mustering station too. They smile at me, I try to smile back, but something really scares me about this fire. Sherry and Heather belong in the life raft in front of me. I'm uncertain how the fire will impact us; if the firefighters bring it under control there will be a lot of damage to contend with.

I'm resolved to the fact we may be out here in the sunshine for a long time before the fire is overpowered. Then a deafening sound, accompanied by a quaking, almost immediately makes the boat list toward the starboard side. I figure we must be taking on water at an alarming rate.

I feel the anxiety pounding through the threshold of panic throughout the crew. It's as if we're all being sucked into a vacuum. There are blank expressions on everyone's face; tension weighs heavy.

Flavio races from the other side of the deck, across the rail, and disappears into the hatch leading to the engine room. I can hear buzzing amongst the crew about what's going to happen next. Our questions are answered with the piercing din of seven short rings followed by the usual general alarm in a sequence that repeats continuously— the signal to abandon ship!

While we're waiting to race up the portside steps to our life rafts I happen to glance in back of me to see Danny Woods tumble out of the dry room and onto the deck. I remember seeing him in the factory earlier today. I figured they cut him loose from his room finally.

Once up on the third deck I see Dottie and a deck hand toss Sherry and Heather their survival suits. Our group follows the procession in front of us. We hustle to the other side where the orange bags, containing the polyurethane survival suits, are housed in large plastic chests.

We race downstairs to the trawl deck. The first space I find, that's big enough, is where I throw the bag down. The suit comes sprawling out. I'm vaguely conscious of others doing the same thing. I'm so inside of myself I'm past the point of fear. I'm rolling with the punches.

Sitting on top of the suit; I stick one leg in and then the other as fast as I can. In a split second I decide I should leave on my boots. I put my left arm through the arm of the suit, and then I make the all-important grab for the hood. It's difficult to get it over my head. I realize I need to discard my cap, and with a tug of my free arm, the hood slaps into place. Now I search for the right arm. I probe against my side feeling for the opening and after three or four tries I succeed in entering it. In one

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motion I slip my arm all the way in, fitting my fingers into the gloved part. I use both of my hands to locate the zipper, and I arch my back as I give a strong pull all of the way up so that I'm watertight.

Immediately I look for the girls. They're still together and about ten feet in front of me. I waddle as fast as the cumbersome suit will allow me. Sherry has trouble pulling the zipper all of the way up, so I tug on it for her and give her a heartfelt smile.

Heather finishes zippering up her suit. I look into both of their eyes seeing the tenderness and vulnerability. I say, "Listen, no matter what happens we'll always be together. Now let's go."

They're the first to trudge all the way up the steps to the life raft stations. I follow them, when I get to the upper deck I see their life raft being launched. Randy barks out orders to Bad Dog to help him reel in the painter, which is used as a lifeline to attach the canister to the railing until the crew can mount the life raft. The second canister floats through the air, plunging into the sea. It explodes open, after the painter runs out of its 150 or so feet of rope.

I look at John Sutter, and I sense something is wrong. Then I look down at the canister. It's popped open, but there's nothing in it. Mary Miles and Miguel Perez, the Baader Technician, are next to me. Miguel's face turns red, and he exclaims with his heavy accent, "Holy shit! What the fuck happened?"

I say in a loud voice of anguish, "Somebody fucked up. God damn it!"

Sutter is paralyzed; his hands cover his face. He's trying to sort out how such a terrible thing could happen? He's the one who's responsible. It's beginning to sink in on us: we have to plunge into the open sea without a raft. If it were wintertime it would be harder. As it is it's almost suicidal.

I say to Miguel, "We had better fucking jump now."

The boat dips a little further over to the starboard side as if in agreement with my assertion. Deck hands reel in Sherry and Heather's raft. They look over their shoulders and a look of horror spreads to both of their faces.

I automatically grab a flare from a combi and tuck it into the top of my survival suit. Somehow I finagle it into my sweatshirt. Others from my life raft, like Malik, have come to the same conclusion.

Miguel is trying to calm Mary Miles, but it's plain to see she's losing it. I grab Malik's hand and I say, "God sees, buddy. Here the fuck we go."

I hear Heather's voice, as Malik and I simultaneously swing our legs over the side and jump. My stomach feels like it's about to tear loose

right before it catches up to me as I land on my butt and go under briefly, then I bounce back up.

We're the first without rafts to jump, but soon Mary screams with the fear of death and splashes at an awkward angle. I'm about ten feet away from Malik. The tide of the sea rolls me, propelling me swiftly. I fight to position myself in view of the boat. It's clear to see the boat has taken on way too much water. It's not going to stay afloat for much longer. I drift with the current and soon I'm 150 feet from the boat.

The fit of the hood around my face is tight enough not to allow much water in. I'm doing my best not to panic. I'm far from being a good swimmer. I remember to breathe, and even though it's cold, I do my best to relax my muscles. What I definitely don't need is a big spasm of cramps to seal my fate. Fear penetrates every fiber of my being. Over and over, the death button gets tripped to the max. I let go with my breathing; then I feel the muscles in my stomach finally relaxing.

I don't see Malik anymore. I've lost sight of Miguel and Mary too. I see thumbnail figures scrambling off the boat. Although the waves aren't choppy their force pushes me askew, and I soon lose interest in monitoring the boat.

I'm all by myself, and I don't see anyone. I'm frantically running through a maze of thoughts across the circuits of my mind. Who would fuck up so bad as to have put an empty canister on the rack? Then it hits me like a ton of bricks. It must've hit John the same way too. He would've known if there was any logical reason for the life raft to be missing. It was a criminal act. I don't like condemning someone without any evidence, but Danny and Dave sure had strong enough motives to sabotage the raft. It's scary to think they could be so malevolent.

One quarter of the whole crew is in dire straits, because of this apparent sabotage. Danny would've been able to find out real easy what raft he was going to be on. I saw him get into raft number four. I can just imagine what's going through his mind: the sense of power he felt when I jumped into the sea without a raft.

The dude is a mind-fucker. It's almost too diabolical to think he would sabotage the boat to avenge Dave's drug bust. But drug fiends have never been too big on understanding or rational thought, much less any pursuit as trivial as compassion.

I'm too energized with the monster flow of adrenalin to be hungry right now, but when my strength starts to go, probably in a few hours, it'll get colder. Then I'll start to fantasize about warmth. I'm lucky the sun will stay out till pretty close to midnight.

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The waves slap me upside the head, and my eyes burn from the sting of the salt and the coldness. The throbbing pain in my body and mind overlap. The plight of the whole crew may rest solely on the shoulders of a drug-crazed madman who found a way to pay us back.

I have to wonder about the fire and the explosion. It wouldn't be the first time a fire had been set to throw the old monkey wrench into the works.

I have been unconscious for what may have been a few hours. The jarring rushes of cold snap me out of it. My predicament boomerangs back on me in rapid torrents. I totally become Sherry and Heather. I feel the both of their essences cascade into my psyche, absorbing me.

I sense they're surviving, and I'm not out of the ball game yet. I didn't come this close to realizing a lifelong fantasy only to be cruelly stymied by a murderously hateful psychopath.

I pray, "God have mercy on all of us." None of this had to happen. It's all so crazy. The senselessness of it brings me to tears. I won't give into the futility and the loss of hope. The demon looks down upon me and laughs with a gross malignant leer, trying to drain me of my resolve to be strong. It's all on me; I won't beat myself by giving in one inch to him.

The demon imposes his image upon me. His face changes, and he becomes the younger Danny from the reoccurring dream I've had since I came on the boat. He flaunts the gun he shot the black dealer/pimp with. The gun smokes and he sneers, "I've wasted your ass too, you piece of shit. You acted so righteous with your two hot pieces of ass. You thought you could bring Dave and me down without it exploding in your face. Well fuck you, asshole. How does it feel to be all alone licking the corners of your watery coffin. There's no hope. You don't have any fucking chance. You lose, momma's boy. Go to hell with that black stud of a pimp. Say, 'Hi,' to him for me."

I'm dazed, I must finally be losing my mind for this to seem so real. I feel the anger rise from the pit of my stomach. A fire burns at the base of my spine. "Hey, you moron. Only Satan himself would bring down a whole boat to settle such a pissant score. You could've settled it like a man, one on one."

He tries to ignore me, but I've got his attention. I laugh at him, and I snarl, "Enough of your bullshit. You didn't have any right to jeopardize the crew's welfare with your schizoid drug use in the first place. You're a weak son of a bitch. It always has to be you first. You have to have more than everyone else, because your mommy made you so special. You're still a baby crying for the poison tit. You can't get enough crank to

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escape from your pathetic life. Die you fucker. Die and go far away from those of us who care enough about ourselves to take responsibility for the reality we're making. Die! Get the fuck out of here!"

I pull myself together. If I want to be rescued it's going to take a whole hell of a lot of effort on my part. I only have one flare; I need to save it until I hear a boat or aircraft. This is such a big mess. Somewhere in this vast vicinity are about 15 other people bobbing in the sea, just as helpless, scared, and cold as I am. By now everyone is so scattered the odds must really be against us.

I remember the screaming as I was jumping with Malik over the side. I heard a couple of Mexicans praying, calling out to the Mother of God, asking her not to forsake them in their hour of need.

I must be in the water for the better part of six hours. Already the level of pain makes me wonder how long I can last. The thought I keep coming back to time and time again is: I won't give up. To give up means to let go of Sherry and Heather, and once I do they will be gone forever.

The motion of the waves rides me up and down, splashing my face, stinging my eyes, leaving every part of my being raw. I'm numb, there's a burning sensation playing havoc on my face. It's strange; because I'm so damned cold in my feet and my hands I'm on the verge of passing out again. I won't let it happen. I steady my thoughts. All I see are Heather and Sherry reclining in their life raft. Then I see them being rescued by the Coast Guard cutter. My heart soars; I know it's true.

Now they're in some kind of hospital room, and they embrace each other. Heather says to Sherry, "Wherever he is you have to believe there's still a chance. We were in the in the raft for barely five hours. You heard one of the medics say someone who's healthy could last for as long as 14 hours."

Sherry's face, tear stained, looks more haggard and drained than Heather's. She's wailing as she says, "A lot of people are going to die because of the life raft disappearing. I don't want him to die. We're so good together. I know he'd say the same things you've been saying, since the boat went down. I know: be strong and stay positive. Damn it, Heather. He's out there, all alone, getting ravaged by the sea. I'd like to take him in my arms one more time, tell him how much I love him and how much he means to us.

Sherry's sitting down, on the edge of the bed, and now Heather stands in front of her. Heather's hands cup her face. "Sherry, he's not alone. He's plugged into us psychically. Listen, we really haven't been trying to pull him in. The Coast Guard won't let us look for him, so all we

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can do is try to locate him with our minds. We have to scan the seas with our mind's eye. He's out there. We have to be him: his energy, his mind, and his body."

Sherry's eyes come alive, and I can see she's putting her whole heart and soul into it. "Okay, we still have a chance. We aren't going to give up on him. I can feel Eddie is still alive."

They jump on the bed, swinging their legs over into the middle, sitting cross-legged with their hands joined. They're both dressed in hospital garb, and they must've taken showers, because their hair is wet. Sparks are flying off their auras; their long hair glistens.

"Out and in, over and through, let the mother of life and love bring us back to you."

They keep on saying this mantra of hope. I feel myself flying out of my sorry waterlogged body. I see my thoughts being sucked up onto the swirling colors of a light spiral. A bolt of hot white heat flares through my mind. The sun shines brightly now. The distance shortens between them and me. I can't feel the hunger, and I can't feel the stinging of the salt water on my face. I'm ascending. Light is revolving all through my being. I'm levitated by the heat source of life and love. I won't let go.

Heather and Sherry are flying too. I'm at the interface where I'm trying to reach out and touch them. I'm calling their names with all of my strength, trying to bridge the gap in space and time by pulling them into my arms.

My heart is telling me all things are possible. My mind is saying no other moment is more real than right now. I hear the mantra again, "In and out, over and through. Let the mother of life and love bring us back to you." Their sound is fading like a feather being carried off by the wind. My sun is turning cooler, and someone is blowing out the candle's flames.

I open my eyes. They're stinging, and to my surprise the sun is still shining. I think back to what I was experiencing. It was a dream, but it was real. I know we're still in the ball game. I grit my teeth, and I vow I won't give up without my best fight.

It must be around five in the afternoon from the way the sun is sitting in the sky. I've made it so far. My spirits can't help but soar. The seas don't seem nearly as choppy as they were this morning. My stomach is grumbling, and it's tied tight in little knots. If I have a chance of being picked up by a helicopter or a boat, it's going to have to be during the day. If I had one of those sonar wands, it would be a different story. With

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only one flare, and no other type of signal, I have to see the craft first in order to use my lone flare.

I'm past the point of nausea. I've long since soiled myself. My body feels awful, but my mind keeps saying this isn't the end. The girls haven't given up on me, and I'm sure the Coast Guard hasn't either. I've got maybe a maximum of six hours before the rescue teams forsake me

One thing about being in the ocean is: you have to continually let go. My body is thrown about from one wave to the next, and my mind has to move from one thought to the next. It's hard to let go when I get stuck on that one thought of doom. I won't self-destruct in a pool of fear and confusion. I can't change the past, I don't even think I would've done anything different, except tell Sherry and Heather I love them, and kiss them one more time for the road.

The sameness lulls me into a numbing rhythm., repeatedly the waves rock me. The water slaps my face and seems to be saying to me, "Hey boy, life is short. Why have you wasted so much time? Why has it taken so long to find your lovers? Why have you been living on the edge of death for so long? Didn't you think you would die fast enough. Why have you been abusing your body for so long? Was it just for the large paycheck? Or was it because you thought you deserved to feel all that pain to remind you of your past failures?"

A bolt of warmth spreads all through me from deep within. "Okay, I admit it, I did hate myself. I thought I had to be punished and traverse barren fields alone, but that was before Sherry and Heather. Now I know I won't let them and myself down. I'm capable of living up to my dreams and making my vision of the new reality come true. I won't give up.

I'm at the crossroads once more. I almost wiped out when I first went to Asia all those years ago, and now I'm back on the balance beam. Which way will I go? Will I go fast, or will I go slow; only the father of time can tell. The Grim Reaper might cut me down to size in one fell swoop, or the angel of mercy might reach out her hand to me and walk me to her safety net on the clear light trail.

Only time will tell and until it does: I'll enjoy every moment of pain, every minute of constant up and down, falling through the hands of time, rocking with the motion. I'll enjoy every living memory of Heather and Sherry, and the true happiness I've enjoyed loving the both of them. No one owns dreams. They are gifts to us, just as a stimulating profound thought is a gift. It's a gift that carries the responsibility of implementing it.

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“Please Mother of God, Mother of all Creation, hear me. I won’t be a selfish idiot anymore. I’ll make myself worthy of life and the promise of giving life to the unborn. If you’ll give me another chance I’ll treat the other two souls with the greatest respect. I’ll intertwine my energy and talent to synergize with theirs. We’ll help our Mother the Earth to be reborn, so the coming age will resound with the divine energy to spark compassionate, creative theater.

Mother of the Earth, shine the light so those who are looking will see me. Don’t let them abandon me. I won’t let you down. Please give me another chance at my dreams.”

I’ll repeat this mantra many times over, for as long as the summer daylight endures. Not a trace of a boat in all this time. For some reason it doesn’t faze me at all. I figure there aren’t many boats out here anyway; it’s not the money season. I just pray I’ll see a helicopter soon. I hope someone, somewhere, sees fit to make the extra effort to find the sorry likes of all of us who jumped into the sea without rafts

I’m stunned, by numbing rushes of cold, pulling me harshly back to consciousness. I have to stay awake and keep my eyes open for any shape on the horizon. As soon as I see something that looks like a boat or an aircraft then I’ll ignite my flair and hope for the best.

It takes every bit of strength I have to control the movements of my body. The gumby suit itself is a struggle to move around in, but because I’ve been without food and water most of the day I’m depleted by the cold. I continually grit my teeth, scream, cursing my fate, and the demons, that put me in this position. I’m riding the fence between life and death. The clock still ticks, but the springs are winding down. I make myself yell, sing, and curse just to stay awake.

The object of most of my diatribe is Dave. “Yes, you morbid excuse for a human being. It was you who started this whole drama. I don’t know exactly why or how your boys brought the boat down. But I do know it was you who instigated it. You just couldn’t give up your selfish habit for the sake of the crew, could you? You’re a pissant Dave. You were in too deep and over the edge. You were determined to take as many people down with you as possible. You piece of shit, somehow I’m going to find out just what you did, and we’ll all sue your ass well into the next century. Never mind that you’ll probably grow to be an old impotent man in jail. I think it would suit you just fine, asshole!”

I get sick of seeing the psychotic grin etched on his face, and his image soon disintegrates into the clouds, which seem to be lifting. I’m reduced to the last few hours of daylight.

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I cling to the memories of Sherry and Heather. I see their faces, and I try to reach out and touch them. I holler out to them, "I know you both made it, and I'm going to get back to you. Alive! Alive! Do you hear me? I'm going to make it. I have at least a couple more hours left."

The struggle to maintain consciousness goes on and on. Every breath is a hard fought battle. The sun slides in and out of large cloud pockets. The waves are still small. While my adrenalin remains pumping, I need to psychically will some aircraft or boat to spot me. I pray to see a smudge of movement on the horizon, to hear the buzz of a motor overhead.

Even though my body is wore-down, my mind is lucid. I'm feeling a lot of pain; my muscles feel like one huge cramp. I can function as long as there's still hope for me. Way far on the horizon I see a solitary shape moving toward me. I study it for a few moments before it gets close enough for me to see it's a sea gull. I'm happy for this first sign of life.

I can feel the warmth of the sun on my face. There are tears in my eyes, because I'm seriously starting to wonder how much more I can possibly take of this mammoth test on the strength on my will. I pray, "Mother of God, send me a guardian angel that will shine on me with grace, returning me to my loved ones."

The timing and motion of the waves keep on melting away and blending into one another. The sun stays out. It's my beacon of hope. With it, I feel, I still have a chance. There can't be a whole lot more daylight left at this point.

I go all the way back to when I was 11 years old. I had a dream of a girl who was a few years older than myself. She was in a barn that could've been on the farm Grandma owned when I was young. I proceed closer to the girl. She's wearing a white shawl with her back toward me. Her movements are elegant and graceful. She has a white scarf lined with pale blue stripes on her head. I smell the flowers she has gathered. As I move closer I hear her singing a lullaby. I'm about to touch her, when she turns around and reaches out with a hand to ease my face toward hers. Her eyes are full of love and tenderness. Although she's much younger, it's Sherry.

Then I hear it. The loud sound of twin engines high above. All of this time I've had the flare wedged into the top of my sweatshirt. I dig into of my survival suit as rapidly as I can and grasp it. In one motion I tug it out just above the suit's zipper. My other hand pulls down the end of the flare. The tip of it ignites and shoots straight, up high into the firmament, gushing a fluorescent jet stream of pink smoke. I'm screaming with every

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