

The Angle

Volume 1958 | Issue 1

Article 9

1958

Episode

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Recommended Citation

Porter, John (1958) "Episode," *The Angle*: Vol. 1958: Iss. 1, Article 9.

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Episode

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"It began and ended with a flash. His hands moved swiftly, grabbing at the drunken levers, and all at once he was out. Tearing, smashing through the solid air, the noise resounding in his ears, he sped earthward. His body moved quickly, the flashing clouds and dancing sun weaving a kaleidoscopic pattern on his aching eyes. Even now the fear was in his throat, and the wind ripped away his scream. With a jarring shock the parachute opened. His bouncing, spinning body came to rest. Down was restored and he felt suddenly calmed, even relieved to be here with nothing under his boots but the haze-shrouded emptiness of air. The earth was a recognizable map, tilting back and forth, teetering, but very solid. He looked up at the red-white canopy above him; he became dizzy and afraid again. The earth below moved closer to him. As it rushed up his senses cleared. He could see where he would land. The ice and snow rammed up and up and he hit-rolling, scrambling, legs, arms, head all mingling in one pain-and it was over. He lay quiet. He listened to the cold wind and the shaking of his body and he was peaceful."

Cover Page Footnote

Appeared in the issue: Volume 3, 1958.

EPIISODE

JOHN PORTER

It began and ended with a flash. His hands moved swiftly, grabbing at the drunken levers, and all at once he was out. Tearing, smashing through the solid air, the noise resounding in his ears, he sped earthward. His body moved quickly, the flashing clouds and dancing sun weaving a kaleidoscopic pattern on his aching eyes. Even now the fear was in his throat, and the wind ripped away his scream. With a jarring shock the parachute opened. His bouncing, spinning body came to rest. Down was restored and he felt suddenly calmed, even relieved to be here with nothing under his boots but the haze-shrouded emptiness of air. The earth was a recognizable map, tilting back and forth, teetering, but very solid. He looked up at the red-white canopy above him; he became dizzy and afraid again. The earth below moved closer to him. As it rushed up his senses cleared. He could see where he would land. The ice and snow rammed up and up and he hit—rolling, scrambling, legs, arms, head all mingling in one pain—and it was over. He lay quiet. He listened to the cold wind and the shaking of his body and he was peaceful.

You must get up. You must come back to life again. You know you must yet you don't. Get up, get up. Remember Mary and the comfortable home, the embracing womb of civilization. The cold is here and it will overpower you and what comes after that? This is resignation and you are worse than a coward. You are through. . . . This is almost pleasant. Is this the peace, the ease you have been seeking all your life? No one to impress, no one to talk with, no duties. There is just you and your own body.

The toes of his feet were now coated with the shifting snow. Little drifts peaked against his body like warm brown sand. He hadn't moved, he was just a dark blotch against the glaring whiteness. The sun beat down, but there was no heat. Just the clear, impenetrable cold.

So this is how it happens. You didn't kill yourself with fear. You were close to it but it didn't happen. It's cold, very cold, here. You must get to your feet. Start moving around. This cold is dangerous. Remember the survival manual. Oh God you're afraid again. It's bare here. There's nothing to see. Think of home then. Mary and the kids. She's fixing supper now. It's warm there—just think how warm it is and you're here where it's so icy cold and you're going to die. Not even time for a position report. Ha! that's funny. It'll be two hours before they miss you. It will be dark by then and they won't be able to find you. Two thousand square miles to search and you know that this cold will kill you before morning.

And this is how it ended. The man is no longer a man. This is the finish of him and he is worthless to the world. There will be ten thousand dollars worth of icy flesh here in a few hours, and that will be all. Whether he is a coward is important to no one except himself. When will he begin to be a dead man?

CLARENCE AMANN:

MUSINGS ON A GOLF COURSE

O green Elysian Field
Where I do ply my summer's play;
O soft and sun-lit sward,
Would I might forever stay
Upon this green where I am lord,
Or gaze away from yonder tee,
Hand shielding eye when sun is toward;
To view with frown or boundless glee
Where lights my swiftly flighted ball,
A glowing pearl in emerald sea;
To line a putt and see it fall
From cushioned green beneath my feet
And draw my partner's woeful call;
To hear an iron's humming sweet
And feel it thud against the sphere
When full and forceful they do meet . . .
No joy on earth I count more dear
Than this that makes an Eden here!