

FALLING INTO PLACE
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Ivan

Morison

Chapter I

Lewis opened his eyes and stared at the glowing embers. He had not been asleep long. Sitting up, he pulled the old grey blanket around his shoulders like a cape and swung his legs down, onto the floor. He reached over to the log pile and placed a piece of dry sessile oak under the kettle. Feeling for the ledge in the wall of the cave, he found his glasses and carefully placed them on his nose. He rose and once outside stood to his full height and stretched. Muscle and bone popped, and air escaped in a fart that echoed across the estuary. Then it was completely still and silent again. The full moon hung in the night sky, making the gorge, and the slow-moving river snaking through it, monochrome. As he pissed against the nearby plum tree, he picked an early fruit and took a sour bite.

It wasn't a long walk to the escape vehicle. In fact, apart from the caretaker who lived there most of the time, of all the visitors he had the shortest distance to come. Some would have been walking by night for several days. And for those who were old or young the journey across the craggy terrain could be arduous. Still, every full moon they gathered, and Lewis thought that the company was probably good for him, although he knew that he wouldn't be able to wait to get away when they were done. Even before everything happened he hadn't liked being in a group.

Pulling the blanket round his right shoulder he wrapped himself up, but his old knitted hat poked out of his back pocket, and his feet remained bare. The hat was a gift from his past lover, carded, spun and knitted on bamboo needles, gently and painstakingly. It was falling apart now, and Lewis had patched it up again and again. Had he been a sentimental man, he might have slept with it against his cheek, and whispered her name, Anna, in the silent night, but he wasn't, not any more.

The air was fresh but would warm with the sunrise in a couple of hours. The track of the old railway line was still visible, even though it had shut down many years ago, before he had arrived. Lewis thought it must have been a marvellous journey: through the gorge, following the river down from the mountains to the sea, criss-crossing the bridges that no longer stood at various points. When the storms had begun, huge surges of water had crushed the beautiful old wooden crossings, cutting off either side. The river still swelled and occasionally huge flash floods pushed trees, dead animals, abandoned

boats, sometimes even some dead and drowning people past his cave. He once saw an old man fly past among all the detritus, clinging to a banister. Before, such a sight would have been a life-changing moment, and he would have dived in. He'd have spoken about it for years afterwards. But now, he left the man. He would have been swept out to sea, and trying to help would have been pointless. Even if he had saved the man, he would have had to look after him. Another needy person. That was all the world was made of now. 'Help me', the man had screamed. 'Help me', Lewis had felt like screaming back. He did wonder about what was going on up river for these violent surges of water to disturb his life. But he had no way of knowing, so he just coped with them.

Following a smaller river uphill, Lewis turned off the track. The trees covered the night sky and he could barely see. The river was extraordinarily loud and the noise reminded him of rushing traffic. Putting out his hands in front of him he felt for the blackberry bushes that lined the path and popped a couple into his mouth. They were almost ripe, and he should harvest as many as he could in the next few days. Stepping over the metal gate, posts long gone for firewood, he turned to cross the yard of an old farm. The farmhouse didn't look so bad from a distance. Lewis recalled the night he had walked this way and heard a horse stamping and whinnying. He had cautiously crept up towards the house, because although it was abandoned he still felt like he was trespassing. Behind it he found a mare on a long tether, standing in the courtyard. He could make out a pointy shape protruding from her rear in the darkness. As he had approached, the horse had kicked out at him, narrowly missing. He could see she was covered in beads of sweat, and foam lined her mouth and nose. He concluded that she was too dangerous to be helped with her problem birth and retreated. Later, on the way back, he had untethered the horse, but it hadn't noticed, too busy trying to encourage the dead foal to imprint.

Lewis crossed the tiny stone bridge that led him through the avenue of giant sequoia. The massive soft-trunked trees were untroubled by what went on in the world so far. They were gradually crowding each other, and would eventually jostle for life as they blocked out the light.

He could see the small shafts of candlelight from the escape vehicle in the nearby woodland. Climbing the steep mossy hill he zig-zagged the last bit in order to make the almost vertical ascent. Catching his breath he undid his blanket. He bent over as he opened the door into the light of the vehicle, where he was greeted warmly.

