

Writing The R In The Topo Of A Relationship

When the quiet is loud, the screaming comes as measured breaths. I mark time on a bed fit for two, lying in the dead calm eye of the swirling thoughts and actions outside. You would think this piece of writing is going down a depressing road, but Yosemite is a detour worth taking.

On the first pitches of Stonequest, I find my breathing has a similar pace. From the ground, we look at the topo stored in my phone, 4 bolts for 200', runout friction an arms length from an edge that feels 200' at least when 20' from your last bolt. In climbing, the "r" that follows the grade of a climb refers to your head. Lead head. The macho climber postures with sexual references to the term in order to avoid casting lots for such labeled pitches. "r" is the part of the grade that stands for "do you trust yourself?"

80' up the climb, I leave the crack and cast off into a rippling surface of granite, no longer able to jam, contort, and secure myself into a known quantity. Crack climbing is the honeymoon period of a relationship, where gravity and inevitability can be ignored. On the face, smeared bulges and dime-sized flakes of granite are ticking clocks, wired to the timebomb of your muscles, balancing and straining a focused game of "will I, or won't I?" This is where the relationship is tested, without security, without a promise of continuity.

I know not to stop. I know that the second time I back down from a sequence, the fear will overcome my own voice in my head. It speaks in whispers and incomplete words, your friends can yell "yer gonna die" from the ground, but the chorus in your head will find better ways to suggest your fated failure. So you don't stop, make your breath even and calm, like a heartbeat that takes the world in and pushes it back out. Blood is insular, personal, isolated. Breath is a communion with your surroundings. Count 5 breaths, repeat, attach fears to it in the depths of your lungs and release, only to bring an equal amount back in. You see, breathing is not a matter of getting rid of fear; it is a game to manage it, contain it, live with it.

With the rubber of my shoes grinding grains of sand on specks of granite that rise like blisters, I am alone. Head space. The "r" in the topo. There is a moment between moves, 10' that that each feel like miles away from the next bolt and at least 20 measured and counted breaths since the last bolt below me, where I am reminded of my bedroom. The silent cacophony of whispers and half spoken word in my head next to an island of space on the side of the bed I won't touch. The "r" in the topo of a relationship.

Clipping to the next bolt, the air rushes back into your seashell ears, you can see beyond the next few moves, you once again can feel the sun burning your neck on a bluebird winter day. In a silent bedroom, you are surrounded by a sea of granite slab, insecure footings and a lack of knowing what will happen. Count five breaths and repeat,

calm the voices in your head, cast off into the uncharted ocean. The silence is nothing more than the your feet leaving the safety of a crack behind, an unspoken managing of the world around you from inside your lungs and from outside your body. Beds made of crack systems shooting from the ground to the top of the buttress, sometimes you have to cast off into the void to connect different crack systems, to get to a new security and knowing of the future. You leave a cam behind at the end of the crack that held you secure.

This is important.

Metaphorically.

The steps away from that bed are not alone, are not without support. When you slip, when the rope begin to coil, slack and limp, at the feet of your belayer, you will not fall to the ground. The piece you placed in the crack you left behind will hold you. Stepping up, higher and higher, breath after breath away from your silent bed, you cannot reach this granite void separate from the rest of the climb. Remember the silence the manages you between bolts, miles above and miles below, is the silence that manages you as you no longer curse the pieces that remind you of the crack you left behind.