

Rope  
by Eric Cecil

I have a rope. First I'm pulling it from one of the many branches that fork above me. Then I'm wielding it like a weapon: its frayed end a whip, its taut length a garrote. The knots that gnarl its line are like perilous stones. I lash them at the rushing mob, but it's no use. They keep coming.

It's mostly men. But there are women, too, and children. They scream feral curses and hurl dirtclods the size of apples. An older man spits into my eyes. Another, much taller, stoops to spear a finger into my ribs. I whip at his forearms, aim a kick into his midsection. I miss, but his mouth widens anyway, and he falls.

He disappears under the scissoring shins of the crowd. Everything does. All but the rope, which is no longer a weapon. It's now a means of escape. Hand over hand, I pull myself to safety.

From up high, I see the expanse of a grand lake, but it's not a lake at all: it is, instead, a patchy tarp, its surface billowing in a violent wind I can't feel. These swells expose the hint of a massive hole beneath. It's a quarry, I think, or maybe an impossible well. Somehow I sense that this landmark is ruined, and I'm the one who's defiled it. And the crowd, now gone, has covered it in mock burial.

Swaying far above the souging tarp, I tense my grip on the rope.