

DWAYNE MOSER

## Below the Line

**I felt** a sense of brotherhood with the Hollywood Sign. Its gleaming facade hiding a corrugated metal support, the Sign looked great from a distance. In fact it was only meant to be seen from a distance. From up close you couldn't help but be surprised by its shabby functionality.

Its myth-making powers should have been diminished, and yet I was pulled further in. I could identify with this fragile monument to the glory of illusion. I'd always kept a bit of distance between myself and others as well, but recently had become convinced that my urbane movie-producer persona was crumbling to reveal the simple country boy underneath.

I wanted to be proud of the small-town values I'd retained, but couldn't locate them. They'd been tucked away during my hurried search for sophistication and now were hidden so well I couldn't find them myself. Maybe if I stood up here for long enough, looking out at the majestic city below, maybe I could find that part of me. One more searcher looking for his true self, but trying to locate it somewhere in the midst of the afternoon smog, trying to identify it before it was spotted by the traffic reporters in their helicopters.

I'd read enough Eastern philosophy to know I needed to look within, but was romantic enough to believe that I was the city and it was me. Its palm-lined streets covering an artificial water supply, servicing an industry of fantasy and duplicity, greed and fear—this was my roadmap, my personal topography.

If the Sign was a fake then so was I.

The empty beer cans littered at its base, the graffiti-scrawled backside proclaiming true love and adolescent fantasies, I was one with these as well. Their low-rent sincerity echoed my own. The dreams expressed there, dreams made public only under the influence of cheap alcohol and dizzying heights, these were my dreams too.

Some would call this naive, but only those who watched from a distance. All dreamers are aware of the backside of the Hollywood Sign, even if they never climb up that mountain. They know that the glamour its face represents is coupled with a seediness that its back reveals.

Yes, you can pack your belongings and drive out of those West Virginia hills. Your dreams will carry you to Los Angeles but never shield you from the knowledge that you'll experience a few nightmares before you wake. Some people only get the nightmares, most people in fact. For those whose dreams do come true, the nightmares are a necessary evil to be confronted and surmounted.

When I left my apartment in the Valley that morning, it was with the same thought that carried me out the door each day for the past two years. *Today is the day my scars become badges.* And, just as on past mornings, this was quickly amended to reflect the surface-centered concerns of my adopted hometown.

*If I remember to wear my scars like badges now, people will think I've already earned that right.*