

Rise, then Descend

by Nick Stokes

Copyright 2014 Nick Stokes
Smashwords Edition



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

Rise, then Descend was first published in Crab Orchard Review, Vol. 18 #1.

Table of Contents

[Rise, then Descend](#)

[About Nick Stokes](#)

[Other Titles by Nick Stokes](#)

[Connect with Nick Stokes](#)

Rise, then Descend

HE WALKS INTO the sky. He carries a basket of earth on his back. He follows the basket on the back before him. Second trip of the day and they don't speak. Heat rises with them. Time for ten trips today. Up and down the ramp. Back and forth across the plaza, from borrow pit to Sun's mound, rising. At least the engineer didn't say today was a day to carry the red clay. Or the flagstone. It's too early to wish he were a digger in the pit filling baskets instead of bloodying his feet. Shredding his shoulders. For now before the hotter heat and the higher sun, he is strong. He is chosen, along with those before and behind and those lighter and empty, descending. They are chosen to raise earth to sky and their people to the Sun by doing what cannot be done and rising and rising and rising. He stands atop the mound where he could not stand without a basket of earth. He stands where the holiest stand and sees what the holiest see – the day expanding westward across the mighty river, the hunters hunting in the flat woods, the hot eye of morning rising over half-day bluff, and past the old low southern burial mounds and the borrow pit sinking and the ever-buzzing marsh to where he can't see. He empties his basket of black earth on top of the black earth of other emptied baskets and his earth makes no difference in the height of the earthen mound and yet day-by-day basket-by-basket the mound grows higher. The mound they build is the highest and they build it higher. A home for the Sun to bless them from. The heat is good. As he turns he tries to pick out his hut among the huts or his wife among the corn but he can't because he is too high and not holy enough and sweat is in his eyes and he is not yet a grandfather dead in the sky. He climbs down basket-empty to climb up earth-full and do it again, more tired than before.

He climbs up the steps. Fifth time today. If he makes twenty, he'll've done 2000 feet. Or some-odd. Maybe he'll do twenty-five. If the mound were as tall as they say it was once, twenty times'd net him 3000 some-odd feet and he wouldn't have to think on twenty-five. Though then he might just do fourteen. All conjecture. Doctor told him to get some blessed exercise, and he figures that is about the one thing he can do in this swamp of not-knowing and being done-to and undone, so he is doing it, his own way.

First plateau again. Bit of flat before another up.

None of the tourists know he goes up-down up-down up-down all morning and afternoon if he feels like it everyday. Or they know the up-down, but then they go. He passes them while they climb, while they read signs, while they stand at the top looking for something to look at, while they descend. They smile and nod and go. When there is any they. This isn't the pyramids. Rangers know of him. Must, here daily, like it's their job. It's their job. So what if they know. So what if they have a job. He has exercise. He had a stroke.

Did the ancients use walking sticks when climbing the mound? He's not sure what kind of man needs a walking stick to walk. You just move your feet one front of the other. An old man might need a walking stick. But he is not old. He is old, compared to

how old people used to get. Maybe are designed to get. He wishes he were old.

Doctor said to use the hiking poles. That they'd give him a more thorough workout. Okay. That they'd save his knees on the way down that blessed mound however many times a day if that's the way he had to do it. Okay. He didn't need to pay for knee trouble too. That they'd ensure he doesn't fall. He doesn't believe in insurance and what kind of man falls climbing a hill? But okay. He does the hiking poles. Pansy, but that doesn't stop him.

His tremors don't stop him.

Thirty-five some-odd degree rain blowing horizontal in his face doesn't stop him. Climbing in a monumental refrigerator he built back when he built refrigerators doesn't stop him. Won't see nobody up here today, which the opposite of stops him. Can't see nothing from the top. Doesn't stop him.

He walks away from the eternal fire and his council chiefs always hanging on the word he has yet to say like dogs begging a bone so he can stand atop his mound and look to where the chieftom's sway ceases and be unable to see such a distance and hear the ancients if they happen to have anything to say. If they happen to speak what they happen to have to say. Which they might; it is windy. The sun setting behind him as he looks east. Cornfields. Last of the corn on the stalks. Women bent under sacks. Unable to carry more. Will it last? Many mouths for many months. Red corn, white corn, yellow corn, blue corn for private storage pits and public granaries. For him. For the Sun. Sun first and last. Squash in the fields yet. They must clear more fields this winter and plant more come spring. First chill of fall in the wind. Feels good. Except it blows his hair into his eyes. He turns into the wind, walks past the coyote-eyed council to the western edge of the mound, and faces the setting sun. The new bigger sky circle a mile away below him, new bigger posts in a new bigger circle blessed today by the new bigger sky reader. Equinox two days away and its celebration and the preparations consuming them. The wasting of food they'll wish they had come spring equinox. Let them eat too much and throw the refuse to the dogs, let the dogs get fat, let them forget themselves and remember Sun. Eat it before it rots. Not all the harvest will last the winter. They'll need their dogs' fat. Maybe it'll be a short winter. Maybe they'll smoke more than they eat. Later they will smoke until they are not hungry. Wind rushes in his ears pulsing like blood from a neck. Not steady like water in the river. Men and women carry firewood on their backs. Going farther and farther to get it. More people return at the end of the day than left in the morning and this is supposed to invigorate him. A day's trip to collect a load of firewood. Collecting firewood has become a trade, not a task. And so many. The men doing it. They dwell on winter. Or do they not have other to do? What to do with all of them. They come offering themselves to the Sun. How to keep them busy. Doing, harvesting, building, offering. A dozen work through sunset building the west council chief's new house. He knows they use the lumber of the simple homes raised to make space for the new house. He knows what needs knowing. The west council chief does not. The west council chief would not be happy. The west council chief is a fool with big ears and stunted children and ugly wives. But his grandfather. His home is built of better quality lumber by reusing the old than if they hauled in new. Children haul water from the creek in thick clay pots. The water keeps coming, always more water. People,

streaming, pooling, flooding. His eyes are orange from the sun and dry from the wind. He shuts them. Dig a channel to direct their flow. Drain the swamps for planting. Equinox comes. They will be busy enough living through winter. And then. The first star. Red. The first grandfather who stood on a hill in the sky. Almost close enough to touch. His grandfather's father completed Sun Mound. He will complete it again. They will build higher. Another level, on his mound. He will be higher. They will build themselves a mound and lift themselves higher and offer themselves. The land is flat; they will rise. He will rise. He is the Sun. He sees beyond his sway. He opens his eyes. The sun is set.

Can see plenty from the top. It's no mountain with its head in a cloud. Can see the same as atop a ten-some-odd-story silo. Better than if it was a ten-story office building planted in the middle of other office buildings. Can see about like if it was a ten-story hill carved in relief by some god or glacier from the surrounding land it plowed flat by yoking itself to an unthinkable plow and lowering its shoulder and rendering the tractor obsolete long before there were tractors, flattening all other relief in a hundred-and-fifty some-odd square mile swath to cultivate some holy crop like corn or soybeans.

Except this is a monument made by men in the American Bottoms and though he can't see the Arch today he can see a few miles to the outer bank of the dump, the largest modern earthenwork structure in the county embarrassing the largest prehistoric earthenwork structure in the two American continents. Or maybe just one. Maybe just the one he's on. Maybe it's not called a bank. A levee. A shoulder. He knows nothing. He's supposed to be walking. They don't let you walk up the landfill, even though it's filled, even though it's where he belongs. So he walks up Monk's Mound at Cahokia Mounds State Historic and World Heritage Site. He walks east along the northern lip of the topmost terrace to where there was once another terrace and a temple and perhaps a bit of the sun's eternal fire long extinguished. Or so they say. He turns west and walks over his steps, which walked over his previous steps. He parallels the interstate below roaring in his ears louder than the wind blowing cold rain in his face so he sees nothing, he wishes as he walks, the cold wind and rain blinding him to the thousands of harnessed explosions a second hurtling and the muddy river of freight lumbering and the toy tires screaming on pavement. The rain blinding him he wishes leaving silence.

But still what lies to the west is not silence but the dump. The new monument. Full, overflowing, no space for another plastic bag. Shredded tires and dead automobiles and plastic blister tomato packaging buried and raised toward the sun. Full fill but in the rain in his eyes they build it taller to exemplify their commitment, so someone else gets laid off; they are more inspired and faithful, so someone else gets laid off; they add to the monument, piling more and more spent goods, above all refrigerators and freezers and air conditioners, appliances that make cold, so someone else gets laid off. Appliances he used to make tower into the sky and fall and crash and pile in the bottoms along their angle of repose at the foot of the landfill tower. And so many of those appliances still work or could be fixed – he would gut and sacrifice a fifth for salvageable parts – if someone asked him and perhaps paid him or just asked his hands to hold still, that they make the air colder. The appliances of refrigeration rise, millions of rectangular mostly white or off-white or cream or occasionally night black or shit-yourself brown or catheter yellow or seashell green boxes stacked and rising and sometimes falling and still rising.

The dump's summit is now in cloud. The crests of its foothills climb the steps of his mound and lap metallicity at his terrace, sheet metal clanking, power cords twining, sparks flying, compressors chugging, air chilling. He shivers warmly.

He could climb higher than the highest terrace, but he is cold and he's supposed to be walking and he should be working and it's warmer down among the refrigerators and this is such an honor, to be offered the chance to be holy, to become a refrigerator or air conditioner or freezer, to make of himself a salable convenience unavailable to people a hundred years ago when everything was hot all the time and spoiled like lightning and life was miserable but dreaming of betterment was a life skill, a technological convenience now discarded like pottery shards. Now it is hotter but cold can be bought, if you have a job, or at least money like any privileged minor god or CEO. He better seize the bull by the horns and finally make something of himself: an offering of refrigeration. It's what he worked his whole life for, to be a relief to the masses and eternal cold storage for the sun. A stroke of luck: the opportunity to be a refrigerator. He will be such a small warm part compressed into this large cold monument that he descends the steps, leaning on his poles to save his knees, and enters the cold sea of appliances.

The water carrier carries a jar of water up the ramp before and behind other carriers of water, behind the carriers of the daily corn offering, white for north, yellow for east, red for west, blue for south, before the carriers of goods for the Sun: fine tri-notched arrowheads, shell beads, fertility figurines, delicate pottery, and gifts from faraway chiefdoms, and before the bearers of wood for the eternal fire. Everytime her brother returns home he asks, Is the eternal fire still burning? and everytime she says, It's the eternal fire. He says, It's the eternal fire because they feed it wood hauled by me from clear up on the bluff and offered from all four directions to the end of this world. She doesn't see the difference. She says, Yes, if we didn't offer the Sun wood, we would live forever or not forever but as long as we live in cold black darkness. He says, We'd be dead. She says, Yes, we'd be in the Land of the Dead. He says, The mound is growing shorter. Is not, she says. Perhaps the Earth is rising, he says. You have more breath than on most days, she says, you should've hauled more wood today. She thinks he is tired from the two-night trips to haul back wood and not used to working and disappointed he himself is not already hauling wood up Sun Mound for the Sun's offering. He hasn't worked a full season yet, but he wants to work closer to the Sun and bring home a more prestigious portion of goods, which is what he should want. He is hungry. But he has to do his time. She has hauled water and hauled water and hauled water, first for their house then for their Raven clan then for their Eastern Chief and she never tripped or spilled and they saw the reverence and humility with which she carried water and she moved up into vacated water carrier positions until she carried water for the Sun.

A pot drops in front of her, shatters, splashes. The offering line pauses. A young woman steps out of line, faces her last sunrise, waits, and the line continues past her. The water carrier steps over the shards of a bird man in a puddle as she passes the ex-water carrier, who does not shiver in her wet feet. She stands with head up, with dignity, with empty hands, not shedding tears for this life or the spilt water or the pot that was worth more than she. She will be sent to the sky and serve the Sun well. There will be a new water carrier for the Sun on the mound tomorrow.

Anyone ever skied down Monk's Mound? Maybe the monks. Oh fuck it, he doesn't say because his mouth doesn't work as well as once upon a time and he doesn't want to be the guy who talks to himself with a half-limp mouth, them monks were deader than dust back when kids used to sled down it. Aloud, he'd've said those monks, but in his head he has a dialect. He sledded down it, hundred some-odd feet of hurtle and scream, back when there was a subdivision just across Collinsville Road, when they were building the interstate, when the porno drive-in flickered with lightning bugs on hot nights. Maybe that was later. He doesn't remember. All in the past. He doesn't remember anybody skiing down. Nobody he knew would've had skis. Let alone poles. They weren't upper middle class and they lived in the god-blessed American Bottoms of Illinois. People then didn't need fiberglass poles to walk. He could be the first to ski down this mound. If he had skis. If he had money to buy skis. If he believed he could be the first to do anything on this mound. Summer sex among the mosquitoes: nothing. Thousands of people'd had sex on this mound, himself included, he thinks, and his wife isn't one for sex. Anymore.

All a long time ago.

Anyone killed themselves on top? Course they had. Best place for miles. Next best option's jumping into the river from maybe Eads Bridge or Chain of Rocks. The Arch'd be nice, but he doesn't figure the windows open. This figuring your jonesing for a monumental structure, which you are, it's why they're there. He doesn't know why you'd be killing yourself if not from a monumental structure.

He laughs before he knows it.

There's the giant Amoco sign off Skinker by Forest Park.

Indians would've done it. Might not've called it suicide. Did the Indians who lived here commit suicides they considered suicides? Sacrifice on a monument's something else entire.

He's sacrificed enough. Declaring bankruptcy and giving up their home of twenty-five some-odd years to the bank for nothing, for the good of the country, and moving into a one-bedroom shitbox in the nice part of East St. Louis. For example. He can't tell if his mouth is smiling or not, damn thing. One side yes and the other no, he figures.

Sacrifice is a word used to acquire meaning. But lots of reasons for sacrifice don't have to do with meaning. Or they do, but in the opposite direction.

He's at the bottom of the mound. He turns around and goes back up because he doesn't have else to do. Sure as shit not going back to that apartment yet. And this is good for him. What he's supposed to be doing. For his cholesterol and blood pressure and his heart. Even though strokes are in your head.

They pack the plaza inside the palisade. The palisade logs gleam. Logs not long peeled. Not yet weathered gray. The thousands undulate, push, flow like the mighty river against the mound and eddy off. He incorporates their energy until he is not he but South.

North chants under his breath. East trembles like a child. West sways, eyes closed, a tree in the wind jostling East. He, South, floats.

Spring. Warm breeze. Time to plant. Air thick with pollen and the murmur of people below. Two baskets behind him, one with flint from the south, one with blue corn. A

raven painted on his face in blue and black. The mound to where they will be borne then buried gleams white across the plaza beyond the chief's burial mound and the southern palisade. They will lie in the southern mound between below and above, in the middle, holding the directions together.

Flames fly behind him and the people go silent. Redwing blackbirds swarm above. Four ravens perch on the ridge of the council house on the eastern mound.

A great cry from the crowd and a yell from the Sun and North kneels and lays his hands on the block and the Sun chops off the hands of North who still chants unchanging as the Sun cuts off his head. West collapses. He is lifted and held by medicine men. East tries to run away but to where and why – they are on the mound halfway to the sky, the sea of hungry people below and the Sun above and all need sated and all deserve honor. East is held by medicine men and his hands and head chopped off by the Sun and his screams cease. West's limp body is dragged to the block. His arms stretched out and his hands chopped off with the polished flint ax. His blood flows red and wet as the others' no matter that he already vacated his body. Three medicine men lay West's head on the chopping block. Two hold his torso so it doesn't drag the head to the ground and one pulls his hair to expose and stretch the neck for a clean cut. The latter holds the head up after it is chopped off. The head's neck drips but it looks not much different than before except dispossessed. The crowd's chant strengthens. West's other two medicine men lay the body on the litter for the procession to the burial mound.

He South steps forward with no assistance from the medicine men and lays his hands on the wet block. He flies in the sky. He is pure. He is chosen. To give his hands to the ground and his head to the sky and his blood to his people and his life to the Sun. The chanting swells and he looks at the Sun and he sees the sun in the Sun and the axe falls and his hands aren't his they won't move or tremble or twitch and there is his blood all over the block mixing with the others' running on the ground and the pain where his hands were, his arms in the air, his hands still on the block until a medicine man puts them on a platter to deliver to the southern border. South holds his right arm up to the sun and his left out to his people and connects them through his pain, all the pain flowing into him from the ends of his arms. Birds have no hands. He flies. The eastern sun fills his eyes and his peoples' cries fill his ears and his hands' blood fills his nose as he lays his head on the red puddled block and leaves it there.

He steps onto the top terrace breathing hard heart pounding sweating secret December secretions under his layers, and looks at the trees at his level and the fields at his level and the parking lot at his level. He is no higher than he began. He brought the land up with him. He's not so tired. He is strong and ingenious and unprecedented. He leveled the mound, flattened it, graded it, and without a plow, like those called Cahokians, like they leveled their land that appeared flat but was not truly until they leveled a grand plaza on which to build hills. True level is not natural. True level is an achievement. From where he stands, the mound never existed. Each of his steps pushed the mound a step underground. He'd been climbing an ancient step machine. With the pole things you move back and forth. He redecides that he pulled the land up with him, even if that doesn't rid him of the poles in his hands or their tremble. He buried Monk's Mound, all the Cahokia Mounds and whatever was buried in them, even the interstate overpass and

the abandoned Venture and the forgotten trailer park of the unemployed or unwanted or disposable and made a level place with nowhere higher to go. The land bears no relief. There is nowhere higher to go. He is no bird, no everpresent raven. No bald eagle wintering on the Mississippi. He descends from ground level to ground level and turns around to climb back up to ground level.

She descends the mound slowly in the pouring rain, the Sun's trash in a basket on her back and in other baskets on other backs before and behind her. She looks through the rain to what mounds she can see to the south: those in the plaza bordering the palisade and just barely the burial temples on the mound built by the Sun at the beginning of time when they were great and strong and the gods rewarded them with the knowledge of how to build mounds, when not just the Sun walked among them but all the ancestors, and then she takes another step. They descend slowly. Slowly not because of the heaviness of the Sun's trash – it is heavy: fine cracked pottery and broken shell bead jewelry and chipped flint arrow heads and barely worn deerskin shirts and foreign ceremonial totems that mean nothing to her and jars of mildewed offering corn and meat bones with bits of meat on them and still edible if soft squash and fertility figurines trashed because of the gift of new figurines that to her eye, admittedly a trash hauler's eye, are not as well made – she and the other trash girls will pick through their baskets before they dump them in the pit and trade their findings with each other if it is mutually beneficial and say nothing to each other or anyone else about it to not offend the Sun and get their hands chopped off, though everyone knows, it's why their role is so prized, the enriching of their families from the Sun's trash – even those coals, this ash, the bits of black they send down because the fire pit is ever filling, to clean the fire pit for wood sent in from distant settlements, will fill her fire pit and burn down yet further to cook whatever there is to cook and warm their hands even if it's not enough to sweat in the lodge – what they will talk about is the word that today's the day the cornfields along the creek began to flood, again, and how that doesn't mean the fields' productivity will go to the other fields, for yield is not something constant like sun or transferable like trash but something falling like rain. The trash is as heavy as she's used to. She descends slowly to kill time. They descend slowly to make their task last and be considered a full job's worth. Slowly to not finish early and be told to do something else to justify themselves. She shuffles slowly through the mud, pausing to look into the driving rain, the sun nowhere to be seen, to bring the end of the day faster.

The sun wherever it is descends. The clouds stop spitting. The cars and trucks on the interstate roar west into the wind and roar east with the wind, pulling their rising then falling roar with them. They leave nothing behind but the wind and a dull monotonous self-cancelling roar, like the wind. The sky is gray, the road gray, the grass gray, the wind gray and he has nothing to say but what the fuck but he doesn't say it. Not in this place. Not with his mouth. He turns to cross the terrace and descend the steps – maybe done for the day, or maybe the day done with him. Time to be dead to the world and rise again tomorrow, or not.

Over the top step bounds a red stocking hat and orange jacket and blue snow pants running. There is a boy in that fuck you of color somewhere. He stands with the poles, waiting, the boy approaching then blowing by him to the lip of the mound and asking no one in particular, the air maybe –

This is it?

In his head he answers without his thick tongue mangling –

Yes.

Sorry. You blend in.

I'm carrying poles.

Where's your skis?

How you hope to hold a job disrespectin' your elders?

My dad said there used to be a church up here. Lousy location for church. No handicap access. You made it though, huh?

Not a church.

The poles help?

A living to be made.

You okay mister?

A temple. The seat of government, the house of the chief, the home of the sun.

Least the sun's in the sky, huh?

We are in the sky.

Sun's not even in the sky today. But that's winter I guess.

He won't slur the boy or shame the dead or deform his thoughts with his mouth. He dumps words into the necrosis in his head, the lobe or whatever starved for blood –

I only know what's told me. One thousand some-odd years ago, one of the biggest cities in the world was here. Its peak was short and remarkable, like a hill in the middle of nothing. Like cursing the sky. Built this mound, biggest in the Americas, for the sun –

Cold up here, huh?

Words are clay and loam and topsoil and sand and gravel and stone and refrigerators and garbage in his head. Words rise without his slack jaw. Words pile basket-by-basket, mounding –

Platform mounds had buildings on top, government or homes of the rich and powerful. Cones and ridge mounds were for burying. Mounds were covered in white clay to shed rain. A plaza at center for play and work and ceremony. Suburbs in every direction. To the north across the interstate and creek was an industrial center – made fine pottery and arrowheads and shell beads. Skilled labor jobs. Good jobs. Made hoes using flint for the blade, big technological advancement. Flint came from the south somewhere, near the river. Lots of trade, lots of offerings to the sun, lots of economy. The city and the sun grew till they shrank.

You don't have to not talk. Your words aren't any harder than the museum's.

His words are cement. They clog his mouth. The boy wants to build with them. They squirm out of his head, hot cicadas crawling out of his skin, abandoning their shell and buzzing prehistorically –

Grew corn.

Like now.

Except more colorful, like you. Red, white, blue, whatever. Smaller. A color for each direction maybe. City and houses and lives were mapped on north south east west and

sky above and earth below. Sun holding it together. Built a circle of poles four hundred feet across out west there to track sun's passing and keep time. Built it and rebuilt it and rebuilt it. With precision. Was a feat of engineering, like this mound. Don't make a mound this big by just piling dirt. Ain't a sand castle. Been here a thousand years.

And then what?

The boy thinks him slow. The boy hasn't broken down a drop of his spewed toxic refrigerant. The boy repeats himself but slower –

And then what?

Nothing.

What happened?

Nothing happened. They died or they lived and died or they moved away and died. Probably didn't have enough to eat. If they had more, more people'd've come and then they wouldn't've had enough. Cut down all the timber. Soil eroded. Sun eroded. People gave up on the religion or the religion gave up on them. Could've been weather got colder or could've been they had too much. Built a palisade. Whites showed up a hundred years later and it was all gone but mounds.

Who was the last Cahokian standing up here, looking out?

There's your parents. You run on back. Don't want them seeing you talking like some archeology of youth to a trembly stroke museum with a limp lip.

Who was the last sun?

Same sun's still around somewhere, gone to set. Cahokia's just some name somebody gave 'em. Go on. There were no Cahokians. You're not here and I'm not talking.

He stands alone among the stars. Is this the night the sun won't rise? There is no corn. They move away by all four directions and without them he is weaker. He will not be able to hold the sky and ground apart, to keep the spirits separate from the rotten bodies, to create the space for his people to live and plant and eat and dance. The sky is heavy and the ground swells up and he is cold and the fire is low because he doesn't have wood to build it up and inspire. The Sun is cold and hungry. He has taken all there is to offer. There are those who want his head, who think that will change anything, who think he is a false Sun, that he no longer has the faculties to perform his function, that he is diseased, his brain worm-holed, his hand unsteady, his words slurred, that he needs to be relieved of his duties, that he needs to be the one who sacrifices, that he needs to be laid off in a bog unburied. His head, he imagines, they will have. His duties and his head. Perhaps tonight is the night the Sun will not rise. He stirs the coals until he finds a bit of orange. He is in the sky with the stars, but he is not. He is on a swollen bit of dirt, lifted up, made an example of. Nothing but a mosquito bite, an irritation on the land. There are stars, but he is not sure what it matters. The problem is there is not enough, and if there were, they'd want more.

He lets the boy and his parents go down before him because he's decided to go down and come up one last time and he doesn't need the awkwardness of saying hello and goodbye

to them again, and them staring at him, wondering if he works here, but no, not with those poles, not with that lip, afraid to ask anyway, who he is, this soaked man who appears to have been here all day and who has nothing better to do than limp around this mound and talk to little boys as if they were adults working together building refrigerators and assorted appliances and drinking coffee and who doesn't go home to the house he doesn't have and who watches them for what he knows is too long until they reach the parking lot and turn on their headlights and drive off.

He leans on his poles as he descends step-by-step. He got his exercise today, too blessed much, always too much or too little, that's the way. Legs ache. Good steps though. Not slippery, well constructed by someone. The park or the state or researchers. People. He reaches the bottom and it's gray and he shouldn't be here but there isn't anywhere he should be and this monument's stood the test of time so far and he's never been good at tests and so he goes up one last time step-by-step a hundred some-odd feet, air chilling as he ascends and he wondering if he can go till the sun rises again. Then wondering nothing. Feeling no cold. Climbing, with poles. An occupation, doing, building a mound under his feet, rising by refrigerator by freezer by cold box under his feet, no no, no history and the mound is already here someone else built it it's someone else's life. He just steps, climbs, rises. He gets to the top. He doesn't stop. There is no more mound only dim sky and clouds underlit by headlights and street lamps and the cold electric glow of industry and commerce and sprawl but he doesn't stop. He keeps going up. One foot front of the other he rises.

END

About Nick Stokes

Nick Stokes writes fictions, plays, novels, nothings, arrangements, pieces of prose, and other undefinables. He lives mostly or mostly lives in Washington; he packs mules in the backcountry of Montana; he's been elsewhere. Among other explorations, circa 2014, he's working on an immersive (anti)-choose-your-own-adventure novel. His novel AFFAIR was recently serialized and released as an ebook by The Seattle Star. He's been a finalist for many awards; he's received a few. His other writings can be found in dark crannies, in magazines sometimes known as journals, and around the web for dirt cheap or less. For dissemination, refer to <http://www.nickstokes.net>.

Other Titles by Nick Stokes

Novels:

Affair

You Choose ... (forthcoming)

Novelette:

1 Day

Stories:

An End

Rise, then Descend

What Never Happened, an Observation
(others forthcoming)

Short, Flash, or Nothing Prose:

(numerous but for the moment you must search the web and on occasion read paper)

Connect with Nick Stokes

Author Website:

<http://www.nickstokes.net/>

Author Profile at Smashwords:

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/nstokes>

Please leave a review at your retailer of choice.

Rise, then Descend was first published by Crab Orchard Review
(craborchardreview.siu.edu).