

## Two Poems by John Grey

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### Copperhead

It lies outstretched on a log  
in the middle of a pond,  
sun shimmering copper skin,  
thawing its winter blood.

Surrounding water  
is free of frog or turtle.  
One predator in the midst  
and everything feels like prey,  
moves prudently away,

except for I,  
watching from the bank,  
flesh rising  
like it's being yanked by wire,  
each hair singling itself out  
until never more alone,  
thrust out from my skull,  
my arms, my legs,  
vulnerable and quivering.

The snake's sated for now.  
A day old rat carcass  
is muscled down its intestine.  
But a copperhead  
is all its hungers to come.  
And my fear is a meal  
worth savoring.

## **Fall Off A Cliff**

Good grip until a tuft of plant root  
pulls away from cliff face,  
you fall, like a plane descending,

you climbed the outside of the world,  
so close to the top, body sweating,  
muscles tired but no fear of falling

until that fateful cheat, forgoing  
piton for a helping hand from nature,  
looked strong enough to take your weight  
but took it down instead —

above unfettered sky,  
below desert rock, cactus,  
a rattler, juniper tree,  
ruts from rare rainfall erosion,  
maybe the dross of an ancient sea

just before you hit, you're thinking  
what if I hadn't grabbed that bush  
or even climbed today

or climbed any day  
and what if I weren't married  
with two kids and a job

at the ski shop, or went  
to college, or high school,  
or was born to my parents or  
to any parents, if before  
I ever existed I...

splatter, kaboom,  
boundary line broken

they scrape you off the desert

it's as if what if  
never even existed

**John Grey** is an Australian born poet, works as financial systems analyst. Recently published in *International Poetry Review*, *Chrysalis* and the science fiction anthology, “*Futuredaze*” with work upcoming in *Potomac Review*, *Sanskrit* and *Osiris*.