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PHAETHON

by George Salis

His father didn't fall asleep, but simply fell from the sky, right foot over left foot, arms outstretched with palms exposed, head touching his shoulder. He opened his eyes and saw the world inverted. If anything, he was a light beam, photon-struck and magnet-pulled. Perhaps possessing a wave function, perhaps not. But really, he was human, a truth hard to remember twenty thousand feet above the earth. Up here, everything was covered in an orange haze, as though he was re-entering the atmosphere. The world burning. Up here, while his skin heated to extreme temperatures, his entire body scintillated. He didn't fall asleep, even though this, his last skydive, would be remembered as a secret metamorphosis. Up here, he was the Atom among atoms. When you see how the universe is constructed, you can cease fighting it. But he now knew how futile such a notion was as he passed through them, their structure compromised. Protons, neutrons, and electrons scattering. He tried to mold his being to this broken layer of existence, but he could not. As sparks radiated from his body in spirals, he was both solar entity and subatomic particle. The hydrogen and helium of his eyes, held together by their own gravity, churned with nuclear fusion. His legs and arms, his heart and brain, all these would break into clumps of matter and be swept up by his eyes as fuel. The left eye blue-shifted, the right red-shifted. This time it wasn't safe to say that he didn't fall asleep, not necessarily, because what happened or didn't happen next might have been simultaneously something and nothing, yet wholly different than anything he had experienced: He blacked out, hidden within the clouds, as his own sun....