

## A VANISHING

*Paddy Hugh Considine Mulholland*

A person that Neill had never seen before was stood on the wooden pier. It was odd for Neill to see anybody he didn't recognise. Neill and his parents lived in a small village on the coast, far away from any main roads. He went to a local school and was well-acquainted with everyone who lived in the area. There was something else that grabbed Neill's attention though: They were stood right at the end of the pier. The pier was known by the village people as being extremely unsafe, as it had sat there for over 30 years without having been repaired in any way. A wave of shock crashed over Neill: That person didn't know! They were stood out there, unknowing of the danger they were in! Neill's heart leapt into his throat. He needed to warn them!

But before any words could leave his mouth, there was a sickening crunch, and the mysterious figure fell from view, as if they had been nothing but a trick of the light. A moment passed, as Neill was too stunned to move. "Help, Help!" he cried suddenly, "somebody's fallen into the sea!" But no reply came. Nobody lived near the pier, all that remained in its vicinity were old cottages that had been abandoned long before his time. If he ran for help, that person would drown before help ever came. He didn't have a choice. Neill cast off his shirt and dashed across the pier, its planks creaking and groaning under his weight, but refusing to break. With a grunt, Neill leapt off the end of the pier, plunging straight into the icy water below.

Neill willed his eyes open, exposing them to the excruciating pain brought by the salt water around them. He surveyed his surroundings. Down here, the sand traded its usual golden-white appearance for a dull grey, as if something had drained it of its life. The rest of the scenery was taken up with the deep blue of the open ocean. At last, Neill found what he had been looking for: that person, drifting down into the sea. Neil took off after them.

Neill had always prided himself on his swimming ability. His parents had always loved taking him down to the beach on Sundays. He would race with his father, and when they were done, they would eat whatever his mum had prepared for them as they gazed out at the setting sun. He was in reach of that person now. With a last burst of speed, he reached out and grabbed – nothing. Right as he went to grab the person, they were ripped away from him, as if an invisible force had grabbed them and dragged them away. And then it came for him too.

It felt like a thousand hands clawing at him, as if some giant creature had caught him and was dragging him into its maw. As much as he struggled, Neill couldn't escape the force dragging him towards the jutting rocks lodged into the coastline – and the abyssal darkness that sat nestled between them. He crashed into a jutting rock, slamming all the air in his lungs out into the sea. Neill cried out, begging for help, but no sooner had he opened his mouth than he was silenced by the water filling his lungs. He couldn't keep his eyes open any longer. His eyelids grew heavier and heavier, as he lost his strength in each of his limbs. With this, Neill was swallowed by the void.

A coughing rang out in the darkness. Neill stirred. He stayed like this for a while, clearing the water from his lungs and rubbing the pain out of his bloodshot eyes, without much success in either endeavour. At last, he stood. He was cut all over, slashed by rocks and barnacles that lived under the sea. His trousers had been torn to shreds; His skin had been left pale by the cold. All of this had taken a severe toll on his body. Delirious, he hobbled forward. His eyes burned like hot coals in his head, and he could only manage to squint into the unending darkness. "Hello?" he croaked into the void. The void did not answer. Neill fell to his knees as a sharp pain jabbed his chest. He cried out again "Please, is anyone there?" This time he received a reply: his own voice, echoing around him again and again. He couldn't find the strength to stand again, so he began to crawl. Eventually, he couldn't manage that either. His voice, echoing around the walls of – wherever he was – began permeating his own mind. It rattled around his own head, growing louder and louder. He couldn't move anymore. One last cry for help, and Neill fell quiet yet again, the darkness around him swallowing him whole.