

## Excerpt from *Sun (When You Least Expect It)* by Michael Fleck

DANIEL:

I opened my eyes. There was a seagull right in front of me. He was just floating there, looking at me. He was so close, I thought, if I reached out, I might touch him. He was so close, I could see his individual feathers ruffled by the breeze. The light from the setting sun glowed around him like a halo and I had to blink and look again to believe he was real.

And then, he floated past me, heading north along the coastline. But then, there was another gull in front of me, and then, two more, three, and then five. I turned my head to look south down the coast. As far as I could see, there was this amazing procession of seagulls, snaking along the cliffs, floating and bobbing, riding the thermals, effortlessly following some mysterious path to some unknown destination.

I looked north and there were more gulls: hundreds, thousands maybe, too many to count, all on this same, strange trajectory, all the way up to Point Dume. Then, they turned east to follow the coastline, and floated away out of view.

I believe that was the first time I actually experienced awe. I didn't know what to make of it, didn't know how to deal with or translate it into something I could comprehend.

And still, they kept on coming, floating past me, looking right at me. Most didn't. I gave up trying to understand what was happening and I laid myself down on the edge of that cliff and I watched the gulls and the ocean and the setting sun until, finally, I fell asleep

(A moment.) I woke late the next morning, curled up in the same spot on the edge of that cliff, exactly where I'd fallen asleep. I remember feeling hot. Unbearably hot. I suppose that's what woke me. When I opened my eyes, there was the Sun, high in the sky, shot through with a kind of brightness I'd never known before. I remember the words from *Long Day's Journey Into Night*: "I became the Sun."

When I sat up and my head cleared, I remembered the night before. Not for a minute did I doubt it had happened, that it had been real. I could only wonder at the miracle of it. And, in that moment of wondering, I came to a kind of quiet epiphany: I cared. It wasn't a dream. It was real and it mattered that I was there. I had witnessed something so exquisitely, so unalterably beautiful I would remember it for the rest of my life.

And, here's the thing: When I had tried so hard not to care about anything ever again, I felt a deep gratitude for this gift. In the darkest, most hopeless time of my life, I could still recognize and appreciate beauty.

All these years, I've kept the images with me—the Sun, the sea and the gulls. I remember the appreciation and the gratitude. And, as dark and hopeless as the world again seems today, I can still find beauty. There's a tiny, stubborn speck in me, I don't know, some iota of grace that still shines and won't give up.