

# THE BRIDGE

## By Daniel Krauze

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***DAVID sits next to LEON: THEY are 70 and 77 years old, respectively. DAVID's chair is closer to the audience than LEON's.***

DAVID: My brother Leon used to tell me about this dream.

LEON: (*looks at DAVID*) I was fourteen when I first had it. Seventeen when I told you about it.

DAVID: My mother had just left us-

LEON: Which hadn't been a surprise-

DAVID: My father had become impossible to live with-

LEON: And so she left. One day. Packed up and left. And David ... my little brother-

DAVID: I was seven at the time.

LEON: I dreamt-

DAVID: He said that he had dreamed about us two, brothers, side by side-

LEON: Standing on a bridge-

DAVID: Standing on a bridge. Nothing below us: an endless fall.

LEON: And, on the horizon, in my dream, I saw a big wave approaching-

DAVID: And, as the wave got nearer to us, it grew, immense, threatening-

LEON: A blue, insatiable, towering mouth, about to swallow us whole.

DAVID: -My brother hugged me, shielding me from the wave-

LEON: I remember feeling its pressure, the sheer force of it, like the whole weight of our world on my back-

DAVID: And he stayed there, my big brother, protecting me, until the wave passed.

LEON: And then I'd wake up, smiling.

DAVID: And he stayed true to that image in his head. All through my childhood, my adolescence, even my early twenties. He must've seen some rough times when he was younger, things that I don't remember 'cause I was just a small boy when they happened. But he never talked about them. I guess he wanted to protect me from ever having to experience such things.

LEON: I wanted you to be happy, that's all. I wanted you to have a normal childhood, devoid of those little scenes that I had seen so many times while I was growing up, practically alone, inside that house: my father, holed up in his room, the blinds closed, a piece of perpetual nighttime created just for him on the second floor; my mother crying in the shower, the bathroom door open: the walls, filled with water stains and cracks; the lonely routines: burying my small

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collection of lead soldiers in the backyard and then unearthing them days later, just to see if I could remember the place where I had buried them.

DAVID: He had wished for a brother-

LEON: I prayed for one. Prayed for you, to come-

DAVID: He must've felt pretty disappointed when I came out of the womb: weighing next to nothing, crying all the time, unfit for the world that welcomed me.

LEON: That's not true. I loved you from the first moment I saw you.

DAVID: He said I was his responsibility. He was coming back from school one day and there I was, a hapless baby, bawling my eyes out: I hadn't been fed in more than a day, my diaper hadn't been changed and mom was nowhere to be found-

LEON: Dad was oblivious to the whole thing. Nothing penetrated that dark cocoon of his: no rays of light, no sunshine, no air ... especially not the cries of his month-old son.

DAVID: We moved out of the house when I was 17 and he was 24.

LEON: I got a good job, despite my lack of education-

DAVID: I had learned how to live in the shadow of my older brother-

LEON: You always saw it that way: but you were wrong. Yeah, you were shorter-

DAVID: I wasn't as handsome-

LEON: And you were more like the quiet type-

DAVID: I wasn't as socially adept-

LEON: But we laughed, didn't we? We managed.

DAVID: I lived in his shadow: but it was a comfortable shadow: warm and caring, big enough for the two of us. And I could've stayed there my whole life. I had no personal dreams, but it didn't hurt to be without them. I had never had them, so I didn't know what I was missing.

LEON: I know where you're going with this.

DAVID: And one day he left. He had found a good job abroad, for this law firm, or something.

LEON: You hugged me, wished me good luck, gave me a pack of my favorite cigarettes, but refused to take me to the airport-

DAVID: I offered to take him to the airport, but he said he didn't want me to: he told me that he was on a quest: he was about to create himself, not find himself. And told me to do the same.

LEON: I was wrong, though-

DAVID: I didn't know how to do either.

LEON: I learned that you don't create or find yourself: you are what you are: a heap of emotions, hidden and overt, a fragile mountain, and life, well, life just tries to break you, erode you, taking away from you whatever she can take. You are what remains of that mountain after life is through with you.

DAVID: I got married at 23, driven more by my need of company than by love or visions of me and my wife together, sleeping on the same bed, while our kids bounced up and down the mattress.

LEON: I never met her.

DAVID: Leon never met her. *(Beat)* Years after that, while I was working in a factory downtown, I got a call from my long lost brother. He said that he was working in the United States, making good money, living the good life. And there I was, listening to all this, while my living consisted of cleaning and inspecting plastic bottles for shampoos and detergents.

LEON: I didn't know that at the time. You never wrote, never called.

DAVID: And he says-

LEON: *(looks at DAVID)* My wife is pregnant, Davey. The child will be born in August.

DAVID: I congratulated him, hung up, and got back to work, trying, with all my might, to be happy for him: the big shadow, living above me, about to give me a nephew. *(Beat)* I tried conceiving a child of my own, frantically, every night, my legs spent, tired, aching in the morning; while my wife tried to understand this sudden surge of love in our dwindling marriage.

LEON: I know, you never could-

DAVID: I was sterile. They told me months later. Months after I-

LEON: After you had tried and tried and tried.

DAVID: I never really wanted a kid in the first place. Sometimes, just sometimes, nature is smart: it gives us the bodies we deserve.

LEON: I, however, did not deserve what happened-

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