

03.06.21

*“There are five stages of drowning.”*

5 The clouds broke open and rain began to fall.

*“The first stage: Struggling for breath.”*

It was no heavy rain, more as if the sky was crying, silently. The ceremony processed forwards.

*“The second stage: Water enters the system.”*

10 Such a cliché. Rain on the day of the funeral. She would have loved it. She had been a lover of clichés. She had been a lover of many things.

*“The third stage: The drowning itself. The body realizes it has no way of breathing and panics.”*

We sat down around the casket as the priest began speaking. He spoke of God and the way of things. I didn't even try to listen. I wasn't naïve enough to think there was someone in heaven to blame.

*“Unconsciousness. The person loses his-“*

15 Her mother grabbed my hand and pressed it tight. I looked over to her. Her face was red with tears. I turned back but clung to her hand.

*“He loses his ability to swim. He loses his ability to to-“*

20 I had to get out. Out of this forsaken church, into the open air. She hadn't liked the funeral one bit. She would have leaned towards me and would have whispered: “Let's get out of this boring place” and I would have said yes.

No one followed me.

*“Swim. Swim. Swim. Up. Go Up. Swim. Come on. Not far.”*

I pressed my eyes together. It hadn't been dark in the church, but I wished it had been. It would have been right. It would have been natural.

25 *“The last stage, Death. The person can't be revived.”*

I sat down on a bench and stared into the street. Cars were racing by. Someone noticed my black clothes, I believe, and turned quickly away. Then I closed my eyes.

The sun was burning on my face. It smelled of pines and berries. And then there was the scent of apples, something I was used to like my own skin.

30 “Felicity? Let's get back to the party. Come on.”

Juliet was standing a few meters away from me.

I gave her a huffed grin. “It's so much nicer out here.”

“You're such a mood killer. Lucas and the others are waiting for us.”

I laughed. “Don't you mean, he is waiting for you?”

35 A faint pink crawled onto her face and I smiled, but my smile quickly faded. "You should tell Marc."

"Why? Nothing has happened between Lucas and me." She winked. "Yet."

Then she grabbed my arm and pulled me back on the small dirt path that I had walked away from the club house. I told her that she was crazy wanting to be with two people and she told me that she didn't know what I was talking about. Then we laughed and entered the house full of people and music and alcohol.

40 What I didn't tell her- what I never told her- was that Marc had been in love with her since the fifth grade. I didn't tell her about our drunk kiss months ago because it didn't mean anything. Not to me, not to him. I didn't tell her that I had broken up with my partner the day before because she had been so happy that I was finally in a healthy relationship. I didn't tell her that I was the one who broke up, and that the reason was Juliet's boyfriend. I just smiled at Juliet, and she had smiled back, oblivious, maybe a little bit drunk, young,  
45 and beautiful.

Lucas came towards us, gave us a big hug, and then took Juliet by the arm and guided her away. I grabbed myself a drink, sat down on the couch and laid back. The room was full of friends, talking their souls away, dancing, drinking. The clock hit ten. Looking back, I believe it was a countdown. For everyone else, this was just some night. For me, it would soon be this night and every night after.

50 While I was talking to some girl who claimed was in my Algebra class at college, I noticed how someone was pulling Juliet away from the party to the stairs. I don't know what had gotten into me at that time- maybe it was care. I am desperate to believe that it was care for her and not something else. Not some ugly sentiment that had been stirred up by the alcohol and the jealousy boiling in my blood. I got up and followed Juliet.

Maybe if I had talked more instead of listening, I wouldn't have been that drunk. Maybe I would have determined the situation before I had come to conclusion. But I was drunk, fairly drunk, and I yelled after Juliet, as I saw her ascending the stairs with that man, "Seriously? That's where we are going now, just cheating with Lucas? Come on, Juliet, don't be a bitch."

But the person with her on the stairs wasn't Lucas. It was Marc, who now looked at Juliet, his eyes lighting up with realisation.

60 It happened fast, as if it was a scene in a movie that had been sped up. Marc broke up with Juliet right on the stairs. Juliet walked past me without even looking at me and over to the kitchen. I followed her, just on time to witness Lucas pressing a senior against the refrigerator and kissing her. I'm sure that I sobered up. At that moment, when Juliet's face grew as pale as the kitchen floor and I was convinced she would tear Lucas away from the woman. But of course, she wouldn't. Not because Juliet wasn't hot-headed, but there was no sense  
65 in it. Lucas had another number one, and it wasn't Juliet, and Juliet wouldn't spend another second looking at him.

I pulled Juliet out of the kitchen. "Come on Juliet. Let's get out of here."

We left the party. She was hugging herself and crying all the way we walked down the path towards the forest. I don't know why she was crying. But it wasn't for Marc. It was for her.

70 I opened my mouth to say something, maybe apologize, I don't know. The truth is, at that moment, I didn't feel guilty. Okay, maybe guilty. But not remorseful.

You have to know about Juliet, you love her. You have no choice but to love her. She was beautiful, inside and outside. On the day we met, I think I died a little bit. Knowing that one day, she would fall in a love with somebody, knowing that at the end of the day, I would never be enough for her. Some would say that maybe  
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a relationship like that would never work out, but it did. And if she hadn't died, I would have spent the rest of my days with her. You call it foolish; I call it love.

80 We sat down at the little picnic bench facing towards the lake. I held her in my arms as she cried, and I cried a little with her. She was shaking, and I was desperate to hold her tight and stable, shielding her from the outside as best as I could. There had been a night where it seemed like the end was near, and there was no reason for fighting. And still, Juliet had held me through it. She had always done so.

85 Although it was the height of summer, darkness fell. The club house behind us was like a beacon, flaming through the night, but all that we faced was the deep dark lake, who seemed to swallow the light of the stars that started to blossom above us.

"Let's go for a swim."

90 I looked at her. I had expected her to be angry, to scream at me that I had basically broken up her and her boyfriend. But there was this silent understanding between us, the silent knowing that Marc and she had been over long before she had fallen in love with Lucas. But that's the thing with Juliet, again. She wanted to be the number one. That made us such good friends because I had always wanted to be number one, too. I want the best, and I get it. But in the moment that she didn't get Marc, in the moment Marc had broken up with *her*, something in her had built up and was nagging inside of her.

It was just like when you enter a competition. You play to win. And Juliet had lost in the game of love.

95 That's how she thought. That's how I used to think, before I learned to keep ambition out of my social life. I should have said something to tell her it's okay, that stuff like that happens to everything. But all that left my lips that night was: "That's stupid, Juliet."

There was silence for a second, then she said: "Come on, don't be a mood killer."

"I aint killing nobodies' mood. It's stupid, Juliet. You are completely wasted. You are... I don't know." I couldn't help but get angry at her. How could she be so mindless?

100 Juliet stood up and walked towards the water. I followed her. "Juliet", I said, warningly, but she laughed it off. It was an ugly laugh. There was no joy in it. "Come on, what's got a little water on me?"

She walked backwards into the lake.

105 "Do you have a light?"

I looked up. "What?"

"A light. For my cigarette."

The man held up his hand. He held a pack of Marlboros.

"Want one?"

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“You can swim, don’t you?” She was mocking me now.

I was walking faster. “Don’t, Juliet. I dare you. “

“You dare me? It’s a bet now, is it?”

115 “This is not a stupid f..... game.” I entered the lake and gasped as my shirt got soaked with the cold water. But Juliet was now taking steps back, deeper into the lake. “There are tides.”

“Tides in the lake?” She laughed and dipped her head underwater. “Oh, my goodness, it is so cold! It is going to give you brain freeze!” She was slurring the words now, drunk with alcohol and anger and sadness. I think, a mix like that is one of the most lethal poisons to exist.

120 The lake had washed away her tears and glistened on her cheeks.

“Stop it.”

She dipped her head underwater again. This time, for a few seconds.

“Juliet.”

She laughed at me and made further steps back.

125 Then she was gone.

“No thanks.”

“So, do you have a light?”

130 I looked at him for several seconds. “No.” I quietly said.

Then I turned away, pushed my hands into my pockets and walked away.

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The light has vanished from my life.

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