

My Side Of The River

September 2019

All the color gets sucked away, inverted. Existence as it has always been ebbing in and out of perception, not bright enough to hurt your eyes but just enough to jostle you awake. Take it in, you are floating in an endless sea, your face just below the water. Your eyes are closed softly, your lids fluttering open only for them to sting against the salt. Pull your heavy body onto shore and take comfort in the sand, hot against your skin as it burns and scathes you. Feel every rock press into your skin and leave its mark when you pull away from it, your skin the only testament to its existence. Something cradles you in its arms, something bigger than you are, bigger than you have ever been. Cool against your skin, halting any pain caused by the sand. She is made of water and you are made of air, she is more solid, more concrete than you have ever been as her waves crash upon your burns and wash them away. The memory of the sand disappearing from your skin. Do not panic, there is no fear here. A strange calm overtakes your senses, and you feel at home. You stop thrashing against the current and just, breathe. Taking in the coolest air your lungs have ever felt. This is like leaving after a sleepover. You beg to stay in vain, holding hands with your friends and trying to persuade your mother as she smiles and laughs, but you know the answer to your pleas. She holds you as you walk away, comforting you as you feet drag on the concrete, you are so so tired. You fall asleep in the car, and she carries you to bed. You wake up enough to appreciate what she does for you for a moment.

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September 19th, 2019

The first thing I hear is the screaming. Wailing, coming from all directions. It feels like hell, what everyone has told me it would be. My vision clears and there's a girl, about 14, hunched by a fallen log, curled in on herself, arms wrapped around her ribs so tight I thought she would break. Her tear stained face contorted, almost unrecognizable. The grief was ripping her eyes from their sockets and her teeth from her mouth. Her knuckles whitened as she grabbed at her own skin, almost tearing it off- trying to. The world is caving in around her, trees bending down trying desperately to comfort her or to seclude her from the outside world. The shadows of the leaves seem to fall off her face as the light dulls around her. She takes a jagged breath in and the air seems to stand still, enough to hear the wind bristle through the leaves and the birds chirp and trill, before it is cut by agonizing screams again. I see a woman come up and try to comfort the girl. A gentle "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry" leaves her as she tries to wrap her arms around the child who flails against her grasp. Her hair gets caught on branches as she tries in vain to catch a breath that was never there.

"My daughter," I think, the words not able to leave my throat, as if grief had wedged itself there and rendered me unable. I try to go to her but something wont let me near, a force keeping me at bay, not letting me comfort her, my daughter. I push again and again and let out a muffled yell and I scream with her. She cannot hear or see me and I push with everything I am to reach her. Our voices carry through the wind like a tragic symphony that no one dares listen to. No one would know how to carry this kind of grief, neither of us could reach the other.

Years later she would write of it, saying, "there is a river between us, there has always been, and everyone I love is on this side, and that's still not enough to make me want to stay entirely."

How do you deal with the grief of someone you never knew? Of a daughter you are just now seeing, now that you can never tell her you love her. I push so much and even then I will never reach her. There is a river between us, and I will never cross it again.

January 10, 2005

I remember when she was born, the size of my forearm, wrapped in a light pink blanket and sleeping against my chest. I watched as her eyes moved behind her lavender lids, she was dreaming about whatever newborns dream about, I wondered if she was thinking about me the way I was thinking about her. She was 3 pounds 5 ounces, barely a dent on my skin. She babbled to me and grabbed at my finger, tight. This was perfection in my hands, God on Earth, proof of such a thing. We were perfect, in that moment we were whole and good and nothing could touch us. The world could fit in my arms and did so. The black that chased me dissipated in the background. I wouldn't drink for another month. I was whole and I would never love anything more.

July 2020

I see her now, delving herself into things. Theater, friends, and sex. She uses them to distract herself from my screaming. She can hear it some days, feel it others. Some days I get so close she breaks down and cannot think of anything else. I try to hold her, keep her above water. We become one most days, nothing can block out this kind of grief. Both of us have days of crying and screaming, anything to get this thick tar out of our lungs before it kills us. She smokes, I pray, we both get high off it. She will do anything to stop feeling and all I can do is watch, push, and pray. I will never love anything more.

September 15, 2015

I remember being younger than I am now, I remember driving to her house. The stench of alcohol filling my car and the air around me. The lights casting stars in my eyes and I swerved and sped, urging myself to go faster. I remember banging on her door and her mother opened. Her mothers words faded into the background as I begged to see them, my children. The cold fall air tore at my skin as I begged like a child. She was 9 and ran up to me and hugged me so tight I thought she would never let go, wished she wouldn't. I became sober. I was crying and sober and drunk and fragile and my girl was hugging me and I wanted nothing more than to see her. Her mother yelled at me for driving here, for letting them see me drunk, for driving at all. I begged to see them still and her mother ripped her from me, my shirt ripped with the grip to which she clung to me and the stench of alcohol stuck to her. She cried and I cried and we were an orchestra of grief. We were mourning each other as we were feet away and I wanted nothing more for the world to come back to me. I would never love anything more.

December 2020

She is 15 and chasing love to fill the gap I have left. There are boys and girls and teachers and Gods. She prays to all of them, hoping something will work. I see her wake from nightmares of me, she screams and sobs herself back to sleep. On this side of the river, no one comes when you scream at night, it is too late to care. I want to tell her to stop, but the words come out muffled-raw. She finds mirrors of me everywhere. My girl chases me on the other side of the river hoping something will mirror me. Something so distant and drunk and bad for her, like I was. She finds it and obsesses over it, over him. I turn away and hope she digs her way out of it, but he smells like alcohol and it has stuck to her. I watch as he burns cigarettes out on her neck and she kisses him. I push so hard these days, I tell her that I still love her, that that love hasn't gone anywhere.

It comes out an incoherent mess and she turns away, into him. They are a mess of lust and misplaced love. She is obsessed with the idea of being loveable and he is obsessed with the idea of being loved. She cannot decide if he is evil or human. She cannot decide if she is human at all. I hold the love in my hands on these days. It is a mustard seed. I will never love anything more.
September 2019

I remember feeling lonely, the fear of dying alone due to my own self, the ego, and thus the ego death. I remember finding God in rest-stop bathrooms with words carved in the door. Words of affirmation written next to words of despair. Two lonely people looking for help, either way you look at it. I smoke and shoot up and hurt and hurt and hurt. The doctors give me words and pills to fix me but nothing seems to work. The air is thick around me, a heavy cloud of pungent death sticks to everything I touch. My daughter isn't here anymore. The days are blurred, all I do is think about her and try to forget everything else. I stumble into a motel room and look up. To the thick beams above my bed and to God, a silent prayer escapes my lips. I find rope in my hands, I find a letter in which she has one sentence. I have nothing else to say to her. The housekeeper will find my body in the morning, and her mother will have to tell her. That I crossed the river and will never see her again. That I was sick. And she will scream. I will pass the mustard seed to her. All my love is still there, I will whisper, I will never love anything more.