

Beginnings and Endings From the Last 40 Days

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Note: Some of these are a bit distressing. The paper as a whole is disappointing. I am not impressed with this work in the slightest. However, I hope that this inadequacy makes sense after you read what's gone on. I very much hope that after you read the final words you know why words are no longer coming to me. Thank you for reading each one of my papers so far. It means a lot to know people are still there.

Beginnings and Endings

It all began with the sun; something about the day that pulled midnight closer. I looked into his eyes from across the table and wondered. I couldn't have known what lay in the whispers of July, the sobs of late September. But I imagined a world where we knew. I imagined a reality in which the threads of time intertwined and mixed, and in that reality my dead grandfather sat smoking his cigar in a checkered shirt, leather shoes meeting a faded leather recliner across the room of Bongiorno. Maybe he would have winked at me, wrinkles creasing his eyes to slits under a head of thin white hair. He would have changed the music on the station; set the old record spinning 1965. The mist of earlier times would have blended with the sound on the radio and comforted me with the man who used to give me hope.

My eyes looking up to Vega in the sky of twinkling constellations, sobbing into the end of an infinite love that lasted and ended in forever. Would he have stood, grabbing his cane, and walked over, putting his hands on the boy's shoulder? Would he have known how it had ended? Would the lights have gone warm and dim; would all have disappeared and left me there beside him, allowing me to hear the future? So many things I wanted to know; so many things I wanted to know about both of them. My grandfather, though -- I wanted to hold his hand, fall into reassurance. He would have smiled at me, though, I think. Smiled as the lights rose and he disappeared into his thread of reality, lost in his own time. I reached out my hand to grab my coffee cup, the brilliance of this boy's crystal blue eyes shimmering like waves of sky bleeding into cotton drifting across the sky. We ran out of that coffee shop, letting the door slam behind us as thunder rolled along the June hills. We ran off to the adventure waiting just outside. I'm glad I didn't have my grandpa there to watch. Then again, he would have been proud. You have to fail for success to have any value. It's subjective. Our love was subjective. That was the first day.

The hands trembled as they gripped the receiver in a sweat, legs crossed in blue pajama pants under the soft grey comforter that wasn't comforting me from the churning sickness in my stomach. My mind didn't process the numbers the fingers pressed; I couldn't tell you whether it was the index or thumb that dialed 911. Everything at the edges of my eyes was faded and devoid of color. There was silence in my brain; nothing came out of my lips as the phone talked back to

me. I looked up at the lights strung yellow, radiating into the dark 2am bedroom. It had been so quiet, silent like the emptiness of Mass when the last key plays on the organ and you pretend to pray. "Ma'am?" Her voice bled into my ears like a river, pain aching from my chest *It's all my fault*. If I had called 20 minutes earlier... what if it had been 20 minutes earlier what if I had never broken up with him what if what if what if - "What's his address, ma'am?"

I paused. I knew it. I know it. It's in my head, somewhere. It starts with an 'R' and ends with an 'a...' or an 'o...' oh no I can't remember...

Seven minutes. That's how long it took. When she hung up I already knew. When he called 2 minutes later I shouted at him between sobs. Suicide. Always fears of suicide... but he was okay. He was alive. And that was good enough.

I smiled as I let the wind whip through my hair, a million threads of gold whipping around the interior of the car as he pressed down on the accelerator. My eyes burned from the cold air shouting midnight July into the Lexus, black exterior bending light along the soft edges, white towers patterned with yellow echoing off the surface on all sides as we flew through a road splitting the skyscrapers in half downtown Fort Worth. Green trees swayed and shivered in the breeze that blew in somewhere from the north, the sound of coffeeshops and hotel bars echoing warmth and laughter from somewhere close but not close enough. Music blasted from the radio, something soft but filled with electric melodies that washed over the cars beside us, painted them in yellow light under the twinkling hotel rooms and offices that stretched to the jet black sky before we entered the ramp and hit 95. To be honest, I was terrified. But the night hadn't felt this good in a long, long time.

This must all be very unsatisfying. This is unsatisfying to me. But the trauma isn't something I want to spell out anymore. It's not a story, chronologically altered, chronologically told. I didn't know these things were going to happen, and they're not designed to entertain you. I should have known I'd have to leave them. I should have known I'd lose them all.

They were my friends -- my new friends after losing my ex. But I should have known that it was wrong. I should have felt that it was wrong every time they mocked me for my virginity, every time they bashed my parents' religion relentlessly like stabbing a mangled corpse over and over again. I should have known it was too much to handle -- the weight of it all. I should have known their own depression was too much -- that even though they were my only friends, they were hurting me with their own pain.

Empathy -- emotional support -- these are valuable things. But there comes a time in which the problems of those around you begins to pull you in too deep. There comes a time in which those that claim to love you weigh you down with their issues that they know you cannot fix. Nightly. Hourly they'd cry over their pain. This was too much. What I did was not selfish.

What I did was an act of self-preservation. I worried every night with these friends that the next morning, one of them would be dead. Over one month. 40 days. 40 days I went to sleep wondering if when they died I could have done something about it. I loved them but they had each other. I had to go. I had to leave a group that made me think that because I didn't have violent and painful sexual desires, I was messed up -- I was wrong. I had to leave the group that bragged about their self harm and made me feel disgusting. They claimed to love me but they yanked me down into a hole with no light. They said they respected me but mocked me for not losing a valuable part of myself. I should have known. It's never good when your friends make you cry.

It's funny; I would never have thought Amy would have stood at my stairs inches from death. I would have never thought she'd do that. She was just sitting across the table, laughing from April at the dining room of Talkington Hall. We were bonding over the ways men had treated us; the crap we'd been through but made it out of.

I suppose a part of me wishes that I had known that she was bipolar or that she mistreated animals and went on midnight drives around the loop for hours at a time. I suppose I wanted to know that she was a compulsive liar and that at one point, she'd attempt to drive to Seattle in the middle of the night from Lubbock and would end up in a Psych hospital, screaming at me that it was my fault she'd been caught. But it doesn't matter. Because I didn't know. I just asked her one thing: "do you know where you're rooming next year?"

Australia is the only country in the world that spans the length of its entire continent. It's nearly 3 million miles long, with % of it's land uninhabitable. Winter temperatures average around 68 degrees, and summer 95. Over 25 million people live there. Who would have known that for a single month of my life I'd be able to call one of these people my best friend? Who would have known that a person on a continent, 8,000 miles away could bring me so much joy.

It's strange to imagine a world beyond the space you can comprehend; I didn't ever fathom the miles and miles of deep oceans and space that stood between him and I. It was a Friday afternoon when he called me for the first time, away from the others in the friend group we had met in. I remember that I was doing laundry. And I remember that I never wanted the call to end. His smile was radiant as he spoke in a soft accent almost British -- he was from Brisbane, as I'd come to know. He was beginning university, living alone in an apartment and always excited to talk. He was incredible, and I'll never regret all of the hours we called. I still don't.

I was falling asleep before I almost threw up. Curled up, hugging the phone as I closed my eyes and listened to her innocent voice on the other end of the line. 6 years. 6 years of friendship with the

sweetest and most innocent girl. I don't remember exactly how the conversation started -- no wait, I did -- but the only threads tying it to the moment were sex. We were talking about how much people were trying to pressure me into sex, and how my own resistance had made me feel weak, almost like I was a fragile child who hadn't yet passed the boundary into adulthood. As if I had majorly fucked up my life decisions and was living every day with the reminder that I wasn't loved enough to be screwed; that I'd never be on the same plane of existence as everyone else who knew so much more than I did. As if, in some cosmic way the stars had aligned and I'd been left behind so watch everyone experience the beauty of it all without me.

She was so sweet, so innocent -- she'd never been in a single relationship for her entire 19 years of life. But she opened her mouth. She opened her mouth and talked about a creep. A creep in her computer science class who had convinced her that it was worth it. Then again, she had a problem with never saying no.

"I did it." She said it with a short laugh, one of those laughs you use to cover up your shame. And I couldn't speak. I couldn't comprehend that I was living in a world in which I was the only one left. Where I was the only one who had failed to be attractive. Where I was the only one immature, stupid, and unlovable enough not to be romantically desired. Where I was the only one who was left behind.

I don't know where this belongs. Somewhere in between. And I know it's not an ending but it's not a beginning and it might not be a middle, either. It was ties to beginnings and endings -- ties to the night I drove out by the lake and shivered into the receiver under the same stars, crying that I couldn't date him anymore. It was reminders of the lights above the city, glistening as we got farther out to nowhere, driving with the music on high for the very first time. But this is in between. This is Australia. This is loneliness, isolation. And this is me, running out the front door at 2am on November 1st, eyes open as wide as they could be as I dialed an international number.

"Hey" he said from 6pm, November 2nd. "Hey" I whispered, finding Vega shining down on me from above the treeline, brighter even than polaris. "This is a stupid question, but can you see the stars?" He sounded mildly confused but still interested. "What?"

"I was wondering if you can see the stars from your house." He paused for a moment, shouting something back to his family that he was visiting with for the weekend in his old room. "Sorry, yeah, we can." I looked up at the constellations, so quiet in the ocean of black. "Can you see Vega?" I'd done some research and discovered it was visible in the southern hemisphere. There was a pause at the other end of the line. I don't know how well he knew astronomy. But he paused for a moment long enough for me to answer. "I just wanna know." The moment I said it I started to quietly sob. "I just wanna know that you're under the same star -- that maybe you're really there and not just in my head." His voice got quiet and he walked farther from the noise beyond his door. "Julia," he said softly, reassuringly. "I'm here. I promise. I'm here."

"There are winds that wrap and hold me, there are whispers in the trees/ I cannot hold all that is sacred, they are holding onto me/ Kiss the years that all are dying, kiss the face that makes you stay/ They are in your rhythms walking, they are showing you the way..." That song poured into my heart for one of the last times as we drove through the curved roads lining the mountains and hills surrounding Fountain Hills, Arizona, the place where my grandparents used to live. Fountain Hills is designed under ridges of higher rock, so that you can ride along the rim of road above it, on mountains dropping off to twinkling

houses below. It's almost like you're in a little plane, gazing down at the flickers of cars driving down the roads, the Christmas Lights painting out the edges of apartments and Spanish-style homes. Of all the songs I've listened to, nothing quite strikes me like the lyrics of *Like Lions* -- the strength it pours into the soul. I looked up to the ghosts of my grandparents through the darkness of the car, knowing they didn't have long to live. But listening to the lyrics -- it gave me a sort of strength to know that it would all be okay. I knew they'd stay somewhere within my heart for many years to come. The song was a kind of hope -- a reminder. A reminder that no matter what happens -- no matter the pains and the misery we experience -- that no matter how battered up we are or tired of living that there is a purpose and it is inside of us. That we cannot lose it because we carry it with us everywhere we go.

There are people in my life I can't talk to anymore. There are memories that will remain in closed books, never to be continued. But they are strong, and they are powerful, etched in and designed to last. They have made me resilient, they have made me proud, and they have changed the way I see the world and how the world sees me. Though I continue to make mistakes and feel the effects of pain beyond my control, I will continue to fight until I can no longer stand. Loss has at times given me the greatest strength, and I hope that this is it. I hope that everything I have lost these last few months has made me stronger, closer to the person I someday hope to become.

Summary of things lost

During this month, I've lost a lot, including additionally my best friend of many years, two therapy cats I adored deeply, and a sense of comfort and ease. I often couldn't sleep this month, wondering if my friends would be dead the next day (which was a very serious possibility), or that my roommate, driving around the loop endlessly, would finally crash. Over 40 days straight I had these fears. Over 40 consecutive nights. My ex, a friend group of 6, a sweet Australian, and many others lay among the souls I have lost this month. I don't know how I'm still alive; quite honestly the depression of it all makes it hard to breathe. But for now, I carry onward. I hope someday something better comes along.