

Break Up Music

"I want to take a nine iron to his car, like in that Carrie Underwood song," Alexander said in a voice a little too loud.

"That won't really solve anything," Will cut in with an alarmed shake of his head, "Plus, I had a friend once who told me screwing with someone's car was like killing a child."

Alexander did not enjoy being interrupted, least of all to have Will defend his cheating ex-boyfriend. Besides, whoever said 'solving' was the goal here? "He doesn't even have a car! I always drove us everywhere. Why are you defending him?" He turned his eyes and the ill intent they held, upon Will.

"Whoa! I don't care about him, at all. Be angry, but that anger just means you aren't moving past this--" he said. Alexander turned away facing back out towards the ocean. From where they sat, atop a lifeguard tower, he could see deep into the dark. The faint lights of a ship rested somewhere out on the horizon-line. He couldn't see the ship, but the light smeared idea of it passing in the night lingered.

"I still have his laptop..." Alexander pauses on this word, letting possible implications of this hang in the crisp air, while he considered the havoc he could wreak with that computer. He could: mail it back, piece by piece; toss it into the ocean and be done with it; let his dog chew on it, or pee on it – too gross; send emails to everyone in his address book telling them what he did; post the same information to his Facebook – too melodramatic; download terabytes of illegal music, to get him arrested; place a death threat against the president, then return the computer before the Secret Service came to investigate – alright that might be crossing the line.

"You should just give it back. The sooner you let it all go the better you'll feel," Will cut in again, interrupting Alexander's vengeful thoughts. Will had a knack for ruining his lust for payback, an expert of taking the fun away from the moment, like the embodiment of looming depression to counteract his manic rage. Alexander regretted having called Will.

He just doesn't get it. I can do whatever I want, Alexander thought, I have a free pass. Besides the presidential death threats, no one will even blame him for it!

Alexander let the conversation lapse, silently staring into the night. He watched the lighthouse out on the isthmus, as it circled around just like in the movies, casting light in intermittent waves out to sea, each spin offering a ray of sunshine against the abyss. Turning back to the ship's distant lights, Alexander hoped to see the lighthouse illuminating its mysteries, even if just for a second, but the ship was too far out. Instead the light flashed ineptly across the moving water.

He imagined the gradations of the water to be like crenulations on a distant castle, illuminated by a solitary sentry along the ramparts; he a wandering nomad in a desert, starving, searching for a warm spot by the fire, a meal, and a night's rest. This aquatic castle, out there at the tip of light, was his utopian mirage, his hope for salvation.

"I should throw it into the ocean," Alexander finally said picking up the dropped threads of conversation.

"Alex that's..."

"Or throw myself in," he added matter-of-factly cutting Will off. In his figurative mind, the words sounded rhetorically simple, like a nomad coming before the gates of a city. The actual act of ending his life had never crossed his mind. He lacked the certainty for such a final act, but knew his words would bite, would make Will finally shut up about moving on and just listen to his fantasies. He needed that, someone to hear how he felt, to get it.

"Maybe you should," Will responded. His tone shifted.

Alexander turned to his friend. Their eyes met. Will's face was cold. "I don't mean it," Alexander said.

"Then don't say it," Will turned back to the ocean. "Listen, I get it. You're feeling like all this has no point. That what meaning you found, what happiness you felt, has vanished. But the first step involves moving past all of that. Reclaiming what matters to you. If you can't do that, then sure, walk into the ocean." He proclaimed this last sentence with a gesture of his arm out toward the choppy water. Alexander paused, sensing Will had more to say.

"A girl in my sophomore Introduction to literature class walked into the ocean, Susan. She seemed normal enough. Had been dating this guy since high school. They went away to college together, rented a place in the Woodcreek apartments, half a mile from campus. They both seemed nice enough.

"We used to all study together: Susan, the boyfriend Chancey, this dude Andrew, and I. She was smart. Stuff like Derrida and Butler, she got on the first read, while the rest of us were stuck grasping at pieces that made sense here and there, trying to form them into a coherent whole.

"Then a rumor started to go around about a girl who had walked to the beach, taken off all her clothes, and walked out into the sea. I didn't think too much of it. No one seemed to know if it actually happened; it was all speculation, the type of speculation that has the flavor of a legend, almost a cautionary tale.

"Then I showed up to the next Intro. to Lit. class. Andrew sat down next to me. He said the girl who'd walked into the ocean was Susan. There had never been any reason for me to think she might just bring it all to an end. No one really knew why. I never heard from Chancey again. He stopped coming to school.

"The class had this grim shadow over it, like going to a wake twice a week for the rest of semester. I changed my major to psych. after that. Couldn't stand always having that memory hanging over me." Will paused with a deep inhale.

“I can still remember the way her hair, short brown and spikey, would shine in the sun. Might have been oil or gel, never really knew. It could blind you if it hit you at the right angle...” the final words hung at the end, still indicating no clear end, no blunt moral.

Alexander didn't turn his gaze back toward his friend. His eyes were closed; he could picture it all, Will's pain and Susan's hair shining in a past summer sun, like the bittersweet aftertaste of a perfect meal. Still Will did not speak. Alexander counted to ten then said, “Well that was depressing,” and immediately regretted having spoken.

“My point is: do it or get over it. Don't make threats. If you do it there will be another scar on my memory where you once were,” Will rose to his feet and began to walk to the ladder to get down from the tower, “when you're ready to move on call me.” His feet led his body down the hollow stairs of the tower. Before his head ducked out of Alexander's point of view he paused, meeting his gaze.

“Oh, and don't walk into the ocean,” he finally said before he disappeared.

Alexander smiled. Looking back out at the ocean he saw his lost ship making its way to port, the lighthouse guiding it safely to shore.