

I woke up early this morning, at about 4:45 am. My eyes were still caked with mascara as I opened them to the hotel room I shared with my sleeping boyfriend on our three-day weekend getaway. This hotel was one I'd been to twice before, once with another boyfriend and again by myself. None of the rooms were the same, each was uniquely decorated in retro desert decor and each had a full kitchen. I liked coming here, pretending I'd moved into a modern eclectic studio and away from my life. Though this wasn't usually a time I'd wake up for, I was glad I did. The desert in the morning is a common daydream escape for me. Still, peaceful, and yet loud in color.

Through the sheer white curtains, I could see the sun was already coming up, warming a cool 75 degrees this Palm Desert morning. Gently, I removed myself from the full-sized bed we'd been given instead of the king-sized we'd requested. Just one of the many mistakes we'd encountered on our getaway. Grabbing my clothing from the floor, a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, I clothed myself quietly. I stopped by the refrigerator to grab my water bottle and made my way to the balcony, picking up a book on the way. Outside, the sky was imitating a motel painting, a mixture of orange and pink, the surrounding mountains still opaque in presence. Below, the teal blue kidney-shaped pool, shaded and calm.

I sat on a lounge chair on the balcony and read a story about a real-life hermit. This hermit had been found after 20-something years of living in a forest in Maine. Reading about his torturous winters in a tent made me suddenly remember my own climate. It felt good. Closing my eyes, I began to feel the calm heat begin to surround me as I listened to my breath, trying to ignore my boyfriend's snores inside the hotel room. Then, I heard something that sounded like moaning. My eyes sprung open.

It was faint moaning at first, I couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman. After an

uneventful night with my own boyfriend, I was happy at least someone was enjoying themselves, however early it was. Then what started off softly began growing in length and volume, the moans got louder and louder. Eventually, they became guttural groans and now clear sobbing and I was sure it was a man and that he was not enjoying himself at all.

I studied the sliding glass doors of the three balconies across the pool from me. The one directly in front of me had a light on inside but I couldn't see anyone in there moving around. The one farthest away from me seemed quiet, so I was pretty sure the balcony in the middle was producing the sobbing. Then, through the sheer white curtain, a figure appeared and began abruptly pounding its head against the sliding glass door.

This person threw open the curtains and yanked on the handle of the slider to walk out onto the balcony. I could see it was a badly aged thin white woman. She was probably in her 60's but dressed like an outdated teenager in an aggressively embellished tank top and flared jeans. Her hair was brown, shoulder-length, somewhat curly and definitely messy. She stopped wailing as she walked onto the balcony, but she was clearly still sobbing.

She stood still, eyes closed and holding onto the balcony railing as if her life depended on it. In this moment of stillness, I believe it did. I could see her knuckles were white and that she had a tattoo of something on her arm. One of her hands briefly let go of the railing, long enough to make the sign of the cross over her chest, before she clung onto it again, eyes shut tightly and head tilted to the sky. At this time, I closed my book and quietly snuck back in through my own sliding glass door to tell my boyfriend what was going on even though I clearly had no idea.

My mind became rampant with possibilities. Maybe she got some bad news very early this morning and it's ruined her vacation. Maybe she woke up next to a dead body. Maybe she

ran out of money and couldn't buy any drugs. My mind went on with many imaginary voyages, most were morbid. I stared at her anyhow through my own white sheer curtains until she finally turned around and went back into her room where she resumed sobbing softly, though still audibly, through her open sliding glass door.

And now, almost twenty minutes later, silence.

The sky is a boastful blue, the mountains a terra cotta, prominent rocks sprinkled amongst them, and the white hotel building is now a relentless orange reflecting the sun, a background for the cool teal pool in its peaceful stillness as if nothing had just happened this entire hot blue morning.