

## Death and Love

It wasn't so much the pain that drove me to it. I think it was the lingering hope. The hope that things would in fact become different than they were right then, but knowing in my heart that that wasn't true. Maybe it was. I suppose I'll never know now.

October 14th, that's the day it happened. I just couldn't take it, and so all the feelings that I had been holding started to pour out of me. A flood of emotion enveloping you until you were drowning in it. Then I heard you give me the standard lines. The "it's not you's," the "I don't think I'm ready's," and the "can't we still be friends'?" I wish to God that we could have, but I knew then that I couldn't. I couldn't continue living in that infernal twilight, where either hope or bitter sorrow is hiding in every shadow, and I'm too scared to find out which is really there. So I said that I was going to say the hardest words I had ever said, "I don't think we should hang out anymore." I was killing you off, I know. I was writing the final adolescent words in our book. Our book that I realized I had been writing myself, independent of your help. I thought you were my coauthor, but I realize now that you were a character that I had breathed too much life into, that I had superimposed an image on you that masked who you really were. How you really felt.

You asked what that meant.

I stayed quiet because I could feel the tears just waiting to break.

"Does that mean that you just don't want to hang out anymore? Or are we not texting too?"

My voice broke as I said, "I just can't keep holding on to hope. I can't stay friends now that I know there's no chance. It's just causing me too much pain."

I could hear her crying too. But she tried to stay brave.

"Did I do anything to lead you on?"

"No, no, I just guess that I had was hoping, just hoping that there was something there. It's my fault."

"It's my fault?" I can't believe I actually said that. "It's my fault," "it's *my* fault" how could I say, "it's my fault." I guess it is my fault though. I guess that I should have known that no one could love this face atop this body. That nobody could look past my insecurities, no one could look past my frank insanities. That love is just something that other people live in, and that I'll just have to be content seeing them living in the clean air while I drown underneath the water. She paused while she choked back a sob "I can't believe this is happening, we're such good buddies."

I remained in silence.

"I can't believe I started this conversation," she said that because *she had* started this. She knew that our friendship was branded with an expiration date. She knew that once she found a husband, or when I found a wife, that our friendship would more or less end. That we would move on. That we would forget each other. She knew that it was coming quickly, so she just had

to know how I felt. Had to know what would happen in the future. So she had asked me point blank “do you still like me.”

“I know, I can’t believe this is happening either. But I just can’t do this anymore. It’s causing me too much pain.” Again with the pain.

“Well, I mean, we’ll still see each other around. We’re at the same college.”

“Ya...” I trailed off as I felt my eyes burn.

“Are you saying that we won’t even say hi if we see each other? It’s not like I’m being shunned?”

I was weeping now, “I don’t know, I just don’t know.”

“We still have to see each other for Will’s homecoming.”

“Ya.”

“It just can’t end like this. It can’t end over the phone. I feel like we have to do something. One last thing before...” she didn’t finish the sentence. I don’t think she could find the right word. I can’t even find the right word now.

“Maybe,” that’s all I could say, “Maybe.”

“Well, you don’t have to decide now. We still have time.”

“Ya.”

“And you’ll still have to tell me things.”

“Maybe.”

“Like if you become like the head writer for the paper,” stop it.

“when you find a girl,” stop it.

“when you’re getting married ” Stop it.

”I just can’t believe this is happening, ” Please, please just stop it!

Didn’t you know that with every word you were killing me? Didn’t you know that every word was another twist of the knife? That every word felt like my soul was being torn apart, and that I was going to be left in tatters? I couldn’t take it! I couldn’t take it! I couldn’t take the pain. I couldn’t take the screaming in my head. I couldn’t take the colors fading. I couldn’t take the music dying. I couldn’t take the crushing weight of the world as it collapsed in on me. I just couldn’t take it. I felt like screaming, felt like breaking the window into a thousand pieces and jumping out and just ending it all.

But I didn’t, I just sat there quietly.

“Well, you don’t have to decide now.” She was crying.

I knew I had to say it, that if I didn’t, I would never be able to forgive myself.

“Before I go, I just have to say something that I’ve always wanted to say.”

“Ok.”

“Megan, I love you.” I paused, the silence that answered me for, one, two, three seconds was like all-encompassing darkness, like a lead apron pressing down on my chest. I knew you weren’t going to say it back to me before I even said it. But I didn’t know that it would be so quiet. I didn’t know that the silence would be so heavy. I didn’t know that I would feel so much

mind-numbing, excruciating pain as I was encompassed by that silence. I didn't know that when I heard the silence the last spark of hope would be extinguished. That my heart, that my soul would die.

But it did.

“And now I'm going to go.”

I hung up the phone.

Those were the last words I said to you.

I suppose that those were as good as any.

They were true.

I had to go.

I had to get out of there.

I had to.

Don't you see?

I had to go.

I had to move.

I had to.

I had to.

I took the stairs down the building. I would have gone to my room, but my roommate was there, and I didn't want him to see me weeping. I didn't want him to know how badly I was hurting. I was reaching for a lifeline. I called my mom. My mom would know what to say.

“Mom, oh mom...” I could barely get that out. I could barely hold the phone.

“What is it?” I could hear panic in her voice, “are you ok? Are you hurt?”

“Oh, mom,” that's all I could get out.

“Scott, Scott!” She yelled for my dad.

“Mom, I just talked to Megan,” I still could feel the hot tears streaming down my face, “I couldn't take it anymore.”

“Goose, what happened?”

“I just had to tell her, and she doesn't feel the same way.”

My dad came into the call, and asked: “what's going on?”

My mom got him up to speed with what little I told her, and filling in some gaps with what she somehow knew.

“We can't be friends anymore. I just couldn't take it,” I told them what little of the conversation I could talk about without sobbing. When I had finished, they still didn't really know that it was me who had broken it off. That I was the one that had written her out of my story. That I was the one who had killed her.

“Well, good riddance,” I heard my dad say, “there are plenty of fish in the sea.” I heard him say a few more platitudes. Heard my mom say a few comforting words, and ask if I needed to come home.

I did.

I was still sobbing. I put on sunglasses, despite the sun already being gone, so that I could walk back up to my apartment without having to explain to passers-by why I looked as though my world had just ended.

I began packing.

“I know this is going to seem odd,” I said to my roommate, “but I’m going home. I just lost a really good friend.” I knew that the ambiguity of that statement could mean so many things, and he took it as though I was coping with death. I didn’t correct him. I couldn’t correct him.

Because I was. I was trying to cope with the death of my hope and my love, and I couldn’t put that into words. It was just easier to let him think what he did. Easier to let him fill in the blanks so that I wouldn’t have to relive the whole thing again. Easier just to let silence reign.

I drove home. I cried all the way, but when I walked into my house, I had no more tears. I no longer had the ability to express my agony. Express how my world was in pieces. Express how I no longer wanted to live in a world as cruel and painful as this one.

So we watched TV. We sat and watched the infernal television as the world burned around me.

I wept as I tried to sleep that night, though. I felt the agony of what I had lost. Felt no desire for life. Felt completely and utterly alone.

I still do. I still feel it. I know it will never go away. I know that that pain can only be numbed, not dissipated, only felt and not destroyed.

Maybe I’m wrong. Maybe I’ll get over it. Maybe time does heal all wounds. But this wound feels too big to heal. I just can’t take the pain anymore. I just can’t take the pain. The aching in my heart. The knowledge that I’ll never be able to see her again. That I’ll never be able to talk to her again. I don’t know how I can move on. How I can possibly live like this. Death seems better.

Death seems better...

But I know I can’t do that. I know I can’t; because that would destroy her, and despite all the pain that I’m in, despite all the agony, I still love her. She is more important than me. I love her. Through all the pain, I still love her.