

## Fiddle Leaf Fig

John told me the name of the tree, the fiddle leaf fig, a long time ago. He taught me many things, things we'd hoped to teach the others. The tree was named so for the little fiddle shaped leaves born by its branches. It grew upon the beach on the bank of the Big River. Over the past two weeks, I spent many nights under the tree.

On this particular night, I sat under the fiddle leaf fig watching the shallow currents swirl on the surface of a million gallons moving on beneath. It was my third night in a row at the Big River and my friends had grown concerned. They all demanded that I stop coming back. I'd ceased going to classes and I was withdrawn and lethargic at work. They said I needed to move on and stop thinking so much. I knew they were right, but I had little control over my thoughts. When my friends and family tried to comfort me or give me advice, instead of appreciating their concern for me, I resented their lack of understanding. The uncontrollable reaction was always the same, "Move on? What do *you* know about moving on?" In truth, my anger was irrational. I should have pointed this energy towards myself. I desperately needed to move on, but I had no idea how. What was worse was the fact that I didn't know what moving on even really meant.

And so I sat. I marveled at the river. The fact that the momentous movement of water, the most erosive force in our world, could provoke such a serene scene seemed to me to be some

enigmatic paradox. If only I could channel my emphatic emotions, just as the Big River directs the water from the many tributaries, and directs them towards their shared goal: to flow towards the boundless sea. “We must unify our efforts! And unite as one towards our shared goal!” I heard John’s words in my mind, they sounded as clear as if he were sitting next to me. I smiled. He loved to dramatically interject some vague politically motivated or philosophically inspired argument, whenever some tangential opportunity presented itself. I had been finding it difficult to ponder the ideas John and I used to go on about. My mind recently seemed to be more turbulent than in the past.

Only on the gentle river bank could I secure my inner silence. It was pleasant to be at such a familiar place. As of late, my turbulent thoughts felt like strangers who were too much trouble to get to know; like wild animals I was too tired to tame. Meditative silence, on the other hand, was an old friend. As these thoughts gently faded, I gazed upon the river. I could hear the parliament of owls as they uttered, *whooo*, *whooooooo*, and I focused on the silvery glow of the full moon as it shined on the rippling waves of the restless river. I momentarily mused upon the massive amount of water, all moving on, beneath the surface.

“Hey Clare,” I jumped up from my meditative mind state and my heart dropped at what I had heard. I turned around and saw John standing before the rolling breakers on the river bank. He seemed sad and somewhat confused, looking as if he was holding back tears whilst he stood gazing upon the full moon. “It’s a beautiful night,” he said. Goosebumps grew on my arm when he spoke. “Mm yeah,” I managed to murmur. He seemed pale. The moon light was shining upon his skin in the same manner that it reflected upon the river.

He spoke again, as if thinking aloud, “It’s so weird, Clare, I’ve been here every night this week.” “Me too,” I recalled.

“I’m trying to remember, two weeks ago, when we were swimming with Katie and Cary, who won the race across the Big River?”

“It wasn’t a race!” I blurted out defiantly. Tears welled up in my eyes and I was surprised by my anger.

“I know,” he said, “I just can’t remember, like it was a dream.”

His words hit a chord and more uncontrollable thoughts flowed through my mind. I had been having peculiar dreams ever since that day we were at the Big River and John was in many of them. Could this be another one of those dreams? Then I backed up, could it be possible that he didn’t know? “John!” I cried, “You didn’t make it across! Cary tried to swim after you, but the current took you too quickly!” His eyes grew wide as I began weeping, but he didn’t speak. He turned and silently stared at the moon.

“John, don’t you see? You’re DEAD!”

He stayed silent and when he turned to look upon the tears flowing from my face, I saw the same flow down his own. Upon his glance, I found myself suddenly pleading, in an uncontrollable echo of others’ words, now my own, “John, you must move on!” And there we stood, weeping beneath the fiddle leaf fig.

The full moon descended upon the river and I knew that dawn would soon bring a less subtle light. We’d spent the entire night, silently sitting under the fiddle leaf fig and watching the moon lit waves. After seeing John in his new form, my mind turned turbulent again, jumping between old memories and the plans John and I had made to live our lives

together. Finally, as the moon set, the storm in my mind began to settle. As if he were listening to my thoughts, John broke the silence: “We spent so much time preparing for the life we had planned. I was so sure we were going to make a difference. We thought we would change the world.”

“You would have, you’re so smart,” I said.

He then went on, “How could I have prepared for this? I feel like instead of reading Tolstoy or *Das Kapital*, I’d have been better off spending my time studying Harry Potter, Fantasia, or... Casper!” I laughed, it pleased me to hear him joke as if we were sitting together like we had done a million times before. I poked back at him, “And I thought your political rants were insufferable, I can’t imagine having to endure your blabbering about the significance of Harry Potter’s resurrection!” We laughed and I thought about all he had taught me, and all he was *teaching* me.

“You taught me too, you know,” he suddenly said. I marveled at how he could hear my thoughts, were we *connected*? He continued, “You always knew how to go with the flow, where I was always trying to swim against the current, and got into trouble.” I could tell the sun was nearing the horizon, because the fiddle shaped leaves were starting to appear green, instead of the silvery sheen seen under the moon. As I looked at John, I saw his form was beginning to fade. “Clare, even when you cannot see me, wherever I am, I am always here and everywhere, ephemerally and eternally, in thought.”

The rays of sunlight had begun to hit the surface of the river, the orange and scarlet radiance pained my eyes. While squinting, I saw John’s image fade to the point that I could no longer see him but his voice was succinct in my mind, “Clare, I love you, thank you for helping

me move on.” Tears were flowing from my eyes but I smiled. I sat under the fiddle leaf fig watching the sun rise while the fish splashed sporadically on the river as they ate their breakfast. I rose to my feet and walked into the shallow water, digging my feet deep into the sand. I splashed some of the cold, clear water on my face and stood there. My mind was calm. On the still surface of the Big River, I saw the reflection of my face and of the gorgeous green leaves on the fiddle leaf fig high above me. *So this is moving on...*