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I SHOULD'VE KILLED MYSELF A YEAR AGO ON PURPOSE

Asma Masude

The last morning of 19, I woke up choking in a pool of dried tears. Dripping from my ears, my nose, caked inside my mouth and still bubbling in the pores of my chest. Ripe guilt.

No one else noticed.

But Dolly has an inkling.

It is 7pm, late June, and my living room is pulsating with bass and laughter and bare feet dancing on cold wood floors. She follows me into my bedroom. I don't notice for a second. And then I don't care because for most of 19 years it was hers too. I think nothing of her shadow mirroring me and fall into a trance brushing my hair in front of the smudged mirror until Dolly's voice crawls through the silence. Lulls me out of my head and I hear her whispering softly. Is this the kind of person you want to be for the rest of your life? she asks me. I feign ignorance and ask her what she means.

"You know what I mean. And you know that I know that you know that I know ..." she trails off into a singsong.

1. (Have you ever mutated a paper clip and then bathed her in warm water? We are evolving back into our spiral of comfort. Have been.)

"What's wrong with the person I am now?" I do a good job of keeping my voice even, I hope.

"Nothing. Just a question." The world is my oyster now, is what she means.

Wind blows sparse ash in through the slit in the window. Forest fire season came early this year.

"I think we're the same," Dolly says. She has let herself onto my bed. Absentmindedly tracing shapes and letters on the window with her purple fingernail.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." Several beats. She is breathing deeply. She can feel each breath building to something dangerous in her gut. "You make me a worse version of myself."

2. (She was the cold one. Dolly was cold and I was warm.) "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I let you." She says.

An involuntary snort escapes me. "Please, like you hold all the power."

"I never said that."

"You *let* me?" (I know that she knows that I know...) "That's not what I meant."

"Then say what you fucking mean." I turn back to the mirror. Dolly is rolling her eyes at me. Her heart is rolling too, in its cavity. Jealousy is turbulent. Dangerous. Life-threatening.

3. A boy had killed himself last week. In the email they wouldn't tell us how he had done it. Just that he did and it was tragic and too soon and over.

I meet her eyes in the mirror and they are bloodshot. I'm not sure since when. Raspberry strings pulling along the length of her irises. She doesn't mind. I do. They're not just her eyes.

4. On the first day of December (not this last one, but before that) our dad left for Pakistan. He didn't want to miss his father's death (Dolly couldn't say it out loud, but she wasn't all too sure who exactly he was really going for). His father recovered on the 10th and died on the 16th. Our's came home on the 28th. And died six months later.

She catches me looking at her.

"I bet it was pills." Her pupils are pulsing.

"What?"

"I think he used pills. Dead boy. He seems like the type."

I make my way to the bed and sit across from her, so that Dolly is my mirror now. "Jesus, Dolly you're morbid."

But she would know better than me. She knew him some. They went to a formal together their freshman year. He had asked me first but it didn't bother her, and he had spent the whole night making direct eye contact with her tits. Dolly had smiled at me when she told me, probably more than she meant to.

(In a school of forty six thousand he must've been a real star of a man for every student to be notified. I'm sure he was lovely.

5. I'm sure people say they are sure our father was lovely (and that his was too). What a lovely lovely cycle of surety.)

The party outside is humming still, harmonizing with the buzz of the sun dipping lower and lower in the sky. It is golden snaking through the window. Dolly makes a shadow-puppet wolf and bites my head off. She is thinking about paper clips in warm water and regression to the mean and unbecoming. The oyster of the world and the kinds of girls allowed to allow.

I break the silence: "What about you?"

"What about me?"

"Is this the kind of person," I say, slowly, letting the words marinate on my tongue, "that you want to be?"

"And what kind is that?"

"Pathological?"

She swings her legs over my mattress so they dangle. "Well, what the fuck else," she says smiling, "am I supposed to be?"

6. What else could we have been?

Dolly and I have a secret. In the years leading up to our father's death, she would spend hours before bed rehearsing for his funeral. Right in front of this mirror. Twisting her eyebrows, elongating her neck, drooping and hunching in all the right places. We would be the perfect picture of grief. Mouths frozen in some sort of great cathartic wail. We hadn't decided yet which of us would be crying or laughing. Either way we were to be hysterical. Glorious manifestations.

"Pills are risky."

"Hmm."

But here is what she didn't know back then, what they didn't tell us in every movie about beautiful orphans: there is a secret stage of grief. A secret number six that no psychiatrist will tell you about because this piece in our cycle is beyond the scope of what your run-of-the-mill doctor signed up for. The result of two overlapping spheres of blue blue grief of how it hurt when he was here and it hurts that he's gone, and shouldn't one of those ease the ache of the other?

7. Our father loved me more because I would let him. Dolly didn't have the strength to give in the way I did to placate, to please (or maybe she was too strong, and I am too mud-like) for my own good. Malicious. There's something there.

Either way. He loved me more. We both knew this was for the best. The boy probably would've too, the dead one. If I had cared enough to give him the chance.

"If I was going to kill myself, I would do it now too. Late June." There is something romantic in Dolly's eyes as she says this and it unsettles me. But she's right. The wet sun bleeding through maggot-bitten leaves perpetually waving their bye in the wind. Kissing winds. Sweaty pavement.

"You can't die before me," I remind her. "If you try I swear I'm going to take up necromancing and fix you right up."

"Oh?"

"And then we're going to hit the town."

"Of course. How blasphemous."

"Not blasphemy, I'm talking about a whole ass miracle, jaano." I lean in so our foreheads are touching and pinch her cheeks. Another gust of wind blows through the trees outside and for a second, Dolly loses herself in the heat of late fucking June. For a second. It was like this last year too, the choking air. When he called me his moon and his flower and I let him and I cried in all the right places and I put on a show while Dolly walked. Dolly went on her long walks, her feet hitting the ground to the beat of waving ex-cherry blossom trees. Catching pollen in her fists and waiting for a sign that This Was For The Best.

Something is crawling between my lungs. (This is what happens when you try to choke down sin and salt).

"I think I am the problem in all of my relationships," I say so quietly, part of me hopes she can't hear me. "On purpose."

"No, you weren't."

8. What else could we have been? (Reiterate)

This summer Dolly is going to be wonderful. And she knows this summer has to be kind to her too because she will practice mindfulness and gratitude. She will sit down on her hands and knees and let gravel penetrate her joints for the chance to be the recipient of endless fruit this summer. For dinner, I will eat my unrelenting guilt.

Dolly doesn't think she can blame someone for who they could have been. Just who they are. I believe in time travel and fault as fuel. I had let myself be loved and when Dolly says it isn't my fault, she can't ignore the taste of aconite between her words. She thinks I'm paying the price for painting her as the negative space between daughter and doting.

9. When our dad's dad died, I was happy he was there when it happened. We imagined what it would've been like if he had come back sooner. Walking to the front door, heavy like a wet sponge, spilling over on our front porch drowned in grief and grief and. Ready to be wrung.

9. (Speaking of being wrung). When our dad's dad died, I had slept in Dolly's bed and she had held my hand until I fell asleep to the sound of her own wet breathing.

"We should go back out," I say.

"Are you sure?"

I am and we go and are wonderful and joyous and pretend to lose ourselves in music and moonlight. Dolly brings out the birthday cake and I close my eyes and count the seconds until midnight. We try to forget about the dead boys standing and standing and standing behind our shoulders as I blow out the candles and Dolly searches the soft shapes of the curling smoke, looking for signs that aren't there. Ephemeral.

10. We are (were, will have been) in the car and ~~he is grabbing my neck~~

~~he is clenching his fist~~

~~he is looking at me and his upper lip is curling in disgust~~

and I am looking at him. I am looking at his hands (they are painted like a Van Gogh, looping patterns of lines curling into each other again and again) and they are on the steering wheel and they look so soft and I follow the line of his wrist up through the arm should soft neck prickles of his beard like smogish snow. His lips look like his sister's, my aunt's, and his hair is thinning but the curls are long enough he can still try to hide it. His nose is like an equilateral triangle and it's the same one that his six brothers have most of them on his name 5 of your 10 children the same thing? We wanted to ask our grandfather the last time we saw him six years ago but neither of us had the courage and now the only thing we remember is that he sang us the full length twinkle twinkle little star and bought us necklaces made of jasmine we mummified ourselves with and he had a poet's pseudonym and his own looping looping wrinkles on his hand and I wonder if Dolly has wondered whether or not he had ever sat in a car like this one resting his hands on the steering wheel heading to a grocery store in the middle of (goddamn) forest fire season. Swallow your tears / breathe in the smoke.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Asma Masude is a student at the University of Washington. She fell in love with storytelling in as many forms as possible at a young age and has not stopped since. Much of her work draws on themes of girlhood, guilt, and grief. When she's not writing, you can find Asma crocheting, collaging, jewelry making, or staring wistfully at large bodies of water, reminiscing about her past/present/future.



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