Catching Up

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I sat down today to write some of my memoirs. I'm not sure why I'd want to do this. I really am not the type to write things down. As a matter of fact, I never liked to write, but I'd been thinking a lot lately, and thought it might help to ease my mind; if there are a lot of mistakes, forgive me. I don't even know to whom I'm writing, but I have a feeling that someday someone will stumble upon this, and it will make sense to them, at least I hope it will."

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I sat down today to write some of my memoirs. I'm not sure why I'd want to do this. I really am not the type to write things down. As a matter of fact, I never liked to write, but I'd been thinking a lot lately, and thought it might help to ease my mind; if there are a lot of mistakes, forgive me. I don't even know to whom I'm writing, but I have a feeling that someday someone will stumble upon this, and it will make sense to them, at least I hope it will.

Anyway, as I was saying, I was sitting down to write memoirs (maybe I just like the word memoirs, and wanted to be able to have a claim to it...I don't know) when I was interrupted by a phone call from an old, mostly forgotten friend from home, or rather the place I was before I started to live on my own. It was all so strange. I still have no idea how she got my phone number. I thought (and hoped) that I'd left my past behind, somehow I knew it would always come back, though.

She had news about another old friend of mine. It's funny, now that I think about it, because even in high school she was the person who got news around. I guess some things never change. Maybe it is true what they say about changing and staying the same.

He died. That's what she called to tell me. The friend she called about died. He's young, too, only a year younger than myself, and I'd hardly call myself old. It's weird to think about life ending now. It seems to me that it was really just the beginning. Maybe it wasn't for him. He was always taking chances with his life anyway, so I guess it shouldn't be a shock that he died. I remember the nights when he'd get wasted and drive down this dark windy road. The road was down near the lake— he loves the water. Anyway, he'd turn off his lights and go as fast as his car would let him. Sometimes, I think he hoped that every trip would be his last. That was definitely the mildest thing he did then.

Once, he did try to kill himself. He was going to use his father's handgun. He shot some things in the house, but never did end up shooting himself. His father came home before he aimed for his head. After that, he went to the hospital for a couple weeks. I remember going to visit him. I could tell he had everyone there (doctors especially) wrapped around his little finger. He's extremely good at manipulating people that way. So manipulative, it's amazing!! He's very convincing, too, and somehow charming, but not in a normal way— kind of entrancing. It's like I know that he shouldn't be believed, but there's no defense. Believing him is inevitable. It just sits at the back of my mind that I shouldn't believe him, but all the while I do. Time and time again I would get in so much trouble because of that.

I don't know how he died. I didn't ask. She didn't say. He just died. The whole conversation was odd. I felt like I was sitting in my parent's family room again, listening to the latest gossip. How pathetic we were. The bunch of us thrived on the misfortune or glory of others. It was almost like anything that happened to one of us happened to us all.

I have to admit, he was crazy. And powerful, now that I think about it. I often wondered if he was liked as much as he was feared. If he was in a bad mood there was no way of knowing what he was going to do. One young skate-rat suffered the consequences of his mood when he inadvertently hit him in the arm with a pebble. He left him unconscious on the sidewalk. I remember him telling me that it made him feel better.

I guess it's kind of stupid of me, but I don't know if I was ever afraid of him. I know I was afraid of myself with him. Oddly enough, he was
a good friend to have: loyal, trustworthy, honest, protective. But he's the most hateful enemy. I know that I wouldn't want him on the opposite side of a fight. He's had too much practice. One day he was jumped by three city boys. One had a knife and another had a bat. I didn't see the fight, but when it was all over he was the only one to walk away. He was bruised and had a couple of gashes, but for someone who amuses himself by seeing how many tacks he can stick in his arm to test his pain tolerance, it probably wasn't too bad.

We were a definite group. I wouldn't say he was our leader, more of a director. He could tell what all of us were thinking just by looking at our faces, and he seemed to make the future happen according to his predictions. That's why he's a director and not a leader. He didn't know the future before it happened; he told us the future as he wanted it to happen, and that's how it moved. We all just accepted it as fact, or life, or at least beyond our control. Our lives were under his direction, and we never objected. I wonder why.

It wasn't until we were out of high school that I realized I had to get away. Not just from him though, but all of it. I began seeing my life through his eyes, the way he wanted it, and for the first time, I objected. Maybe it was just because mine was the only life he still tried to control. Of course, I never really said anything, but I knew -- he only had to look in my eyes, or through my eyes, to see it. He never said anything about it, but he would just look at me sometimes.

Then one day I left. The last day I saw him, he was standing in his father's garden next to the tall sunflowers. He had his fingers fanned around his face, just like a sunflower. He smiled at me while I got in my car, and with this look on his face, mouthed the word "Good bye." Maybe it was pride or sorrow or just plain knowledge that was on his face -- I really don't know. It gives me the chills to remember.

After she told me he died, we just talked about what we had been doing with our lives. I told her about college, my job, my apartment, my cat, the weather. She told me about her life. If I ever had thought about what she would be doing right now, I would have guessed it perfectly; married to one of the group with two kids and one on the way, not working just making cookies and dinner every day. She told me about everyone else's life, too, but I stopped listening. She did ask why I left without telling anyone. I almost told her that he knew I was leaving, but she wouldn't understand the truth. I didn't know what to tell her, so I said the past is gone, and as long as we keep in touch from now on, that's all that matters. It seemed to make her feel better.

When we hung up I poured a glass of milk and shared it with my cat. I started thinking about how I felt, and realized there wasn't much to feel. I guess, I loved him, but it seems odd to me that every time I reflect back, I begin to believe that I've never loved before. It's all so frightening -- that I could feel nothing when someone dies.

I'm going to hate leaving. I was actually starting to like it here. ☺️