

For the Moment

The fire dimmed to glowing embers. The smoky scent had filled the air, soaking into their clothes, their hair. It was a comfortable smell, a natural one. The moon brightened the field so they could see the lake, the mist rising ominously from its surface. Dark forms flitted erratically above the water, swooping in and out of the mist. Far off in the distance, a dog, or perhaps a wolf, cried in the darkness.

"What do you think is wrong with it?" she asked him.

"I don't know," he replied quietly, "May he has to go back to work tomorrow."

She laughed sarcastically and pushed his shoulder away.

"I'm serious. He sounds so lonely."

"Maybe he is."

"Loneliness could make someone sound like that."

"Yeah, I guess it could." He smiled in the darkness, having trouble, as usual, taking her seriously. "Lonely wolves," he thought.

"Stop laughing," she said knowingly.

"I'm not laughing."

"How would you feel if you were that lonely?" she asked.

"Well, I..."

"Never mind," she interrupted, "You'll never be that lonely."

"What makes you say that?" he asked, suddenly offended, though only slightly. She only ever annoyed him slightly.

"I don't know. You always have your work, whatever it may be. I guess it doesn't really seem like you need anything else."

"That's not true."

"Isn't it?"

"No. I need you."

"Be serious."

"I'm very serious," he said to her, his eyes shining in the moonlight. The wolf broke the cricket's song once again. He threw another log on the fire. Sparks flew into the air and showered down, going out before they reached the grass.

"Be careful."

"I will. Nothing will catch fire now anyway. Too much rain."

"Yeah, you're probably right. Want to walk down to the lake?"

He reached down to help her up.

"Sure."

The dog woke as they stood.

"Come on!" The girl called and started to run down the slope. The dog ran after her. He watched them, the girl and the dog, and thought how good things were. If only she really did know how much I need her, the boy thought. He walked through the weeds, his ankles and calves getting damp from the dew. He heard her squeal and the dog barked sharply twice, then silence met his ears. He ran to catch up with them, suddenly worried. Then he heard her laughing.

He could see her now. She was half lying in the weeds, the dog jumping around her.

"Help!"

"What's wrong?"

"She's licking me to death!"

He called to the dog. She didn't even pretend to hear him. He ran towards them, then turned and ran towards the lake, calling to the dog. The dog started after him. The girl jumped up and ran after them, the lake looming before her.

She caught up to them at the water's edge. The dog jumped at her heels. She laughed again and blew the dog a kiss. Then she kissed the boy's cheek. She took her shoes off. The sand was cool and the grains tickled her feet. She put her toes in the water.

"Is it cold?" he asked

"Not really. Want to swim out to the raft?"

"What about the dog?"

"Well, she can come too, if she wants."

She smiled. She took off her grey seat pants. He could just barely see her pink bathing suit underneath her sweat shirt. She threw the shirt on top of her pants and dove into the water.

For a minute, the water was completely calm. It seemed as if she had simply disappeared. Then he saw her, perhaps twenty feet from the shore.

"Come on."

He laid his clothes by hers and dove in. She was right. It wasn't cold, he thought as the water surrounded him. His head broke the surface and he felt the cool air on his face. Through the mist, he could just barely see her climbing onto the wooden raft. He reached her in three strokes and pulled himself onto the raft beside her.

She loved to watch him. He looked so handsome, so strong, especially as he climbed onto the raft. She was dependent on no one but herself. And she didn't really like to admit that he made her feel safe, protected. But he did. And she liked the feeling.

"It's pretty out here," he said, sitting down beside her.

"It is. You know something else?"

"What?"

"You're all wet"

"Yeah? Well, you're out of shape!" She reached over and pushed him off the raft.

"Yeah, but you're all wet!" she laughed.

He crawled menacingly onto the raft.

"You're in trouble now."

The dog barked at them.

"Hi pooch!" she yelled, supposedly in the dog's direction.

The dog woofed again.

"Yeah, I know," she said back to the dog.

He grabbed her around the waist, intending to toss her into the water, then he stopped.

"What do you know?"

She looked at him.

"Lots of things. Why?"

"Tell me some."

"What do you want to know? No! Don't tell me. What's the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow, right?" she quoted from one of their favorite Monty Python films.

"Alright, but make it a European swallow," he smiled, playing along.

"Thirteen miles per hour. Anything else I can help you with?"

"I don't know," he became serious, not meeting her eyes.

"Tell me about what happened. You know, before Christmas."

"What do you mean?"

He just looked at her. She knew what he meant and they both knew it.

"Never mind. I know. Why would you ask about that now?"

"I don't know. I guess I've always wondered about it. And worried about it. A lot. You've said you still think about it."

"Listen, it's behind me now, okay? No matter what else I tell you. It's too nice out here to talk about that."

"But..."

"We can talk about it later, if you want."

He let the subject go. No use to push. She'd talk when she wanted to. What mattered was she knew he was there.

She laid down on her back. He put his head on her stomach. She stroked his wet hair back away from his face. Close to the raft, a bat skimmed the water. The bat's wings and the crickets were the only sounds they could hear.

"What are you thinking?" she asked him quietly.

"How much I'd miss you if you'd have gone away," he paused and silence filled the air. "Forever."

In the distance, the wolf cried once more.