

That Color

By Jackson Hyland-Lipski

I remember a dream I had. Well, parts of it at least. I was with my father at the beach, both of us in the water. I watched him, gracefully gesturing with a relaxed arm for me to come out farther as a passing wave lifted him up and gently brought him back down. Gently to me now, yet terrifying when I was young. I didn't respond. The conflict within me was paralyzing. I never swam out to him; I never had a chance. Honestly, if he were alive today, I wonder if I would still be watching him from my safe distance close to the shore. A wave slowly passed beneath him and he was out of view for a second. Then I woke up.

Yesterday I was on a boat. The water was a color that I had decided was my favorite color. It was more than a color. It had layers of shades of turquoise marbled from the white foam. The wake of our boat, well our friends' boat, reflected the sun that lay a quarter up from the horizon behind us. I remember that my watch caught the sunlight and angled off into Lily's eyes for an instant, and though I stood some feet away, I could see that same color in her eyes. My favorite color.

Jason and Alice bought a new sailboat recently, and it was now warm enough to spend a day out on the water. We even smashed a champagne bottle on the side of the boat like you see them do for those big ships. Jason paid for the champagne, and had another one for us all to drink. He opened the bottle the way he always did. He loved bar tricks like this, and he never missed a chance to show them off. When he asked me, "Hey grab a knife from the hull for me, would ya?" slapping me on the shoulder, I knew what he was up to. He had taught me this trick years ago. Jason

would take the knife in one hand, gripping the bottle half way down with the other and keeping the head of the bottle angled away from him and everyone else. Of course, he would aim it toward someone first to scare them, to feel that power. He would usually aim it at me, and I was used to it, although I still flinched. “Ah I’m just fuckin’ with ya,” he said, as he grinned out of the side of his mouth toward his wife. He lined up the knife with the bottle, just below the bottom of the imprisoned cork, cocked his arm back and with one swift movement sliced the head of the bottle clear off, cork and all. When Lily would ask if he taught it to me, saying it would be a fun thing to do in front of all our friends, I would tell her I didn’t know it.

We hadn’t seen them in a couple of years, since Lily and I moved to the West Coast, and the few times we called or they called, we didn’t talk for very long. What do you say to an old friend with whom you no longer share any similar interests or desires? But then again, it was great to see him yesterday. And Alice, a beautifully quiet woman. I know she loves Jason very much. She gives him a look, oh how it haunts me. That look she gives him. You can tell she is smiling without seeing her mouth. You can see it just by looking at her eyes.

I can remember Lily giving me that look one time.

It was before we were married, before I had introduced her to Jason and Alice. We had just moved in together, and it was our first day living apart from our parents. In our minds we felt rebellious. We had both saved up all of our money, which didn’t amount to much, to rent this house, well not really a house. It was a studio

apartment, and including our mattress, which lay flat on the floor in solitude, we had one possession. Our kitchen was empty that night along with our stomachs, and although it was a miserable, humbling, and eye-opening night, we were happy to be alone with each other. We had nothing but clean water and working pipes, and heat, well at least hot water. It was January and we stayed in the bathroom all night running a hot shower, creating a sauna for ourselves, a tiny shelter within our home.

We were eighteen then but far from it now. The smile in her eyes faded since, became more stern, less sympathetic, yet never losing that color which yesterday I decided I loved.

On the boat she told me that she loved me, as she had done so many times before. It was comforting, it always was, but it was expected. "I love you too," I said, and it was also expected. Who knows what would happen now, this late, if I did something different, something unexpected. Was I to say I love you to this woman who I know says it with as little conviction as I do? Could I do something about it? Something else? I look at her, at those eyes, a deception, two sirens dragging me in. That color remained as the rest of her became pale and dulled. They tortured me.

I lit a cigarette while Lily was still in back; she didn't like the smell. "You know they'll kill you don't you?" she would say. Of course I knew. I regretted every drag I took, but I knew I couldn't stop. The sun was almost down and the water quickly lost

its vitality, becoming two dimensional, thick and monotone. As the sun fell below the horizon it left a residual haze.

The blinking red lights marking the top of our masts showed me the position of my fellow sailors in the back of the boat. All was blanketed in black as the clouds covered the stars. The line of the horizon disappeared, and half of the time I could see three red outlines of figures in the rear. The lights on our masts were answered by one from the lighthouse. We were not far from shore, the beach I had known my whole life. I had lived west of that beach, and always drove to it with my father after camp when I young, sitting by the water. He would smoke a cigarette and try to explain to me the vastness of that sea, of the oceans and the world, but I couldn't grasp it. I know how seemingly infinite the oceans are. Yet, I know now where they end. I know the limits of these immense bodies, and it no longer fills me with amazement. I wish I didn't know such things.

I never went east of that beach. I knew it was probably very similar to the west side, my side. I wanted to find out. I wanted to jump off the boat and find out. They were in back, they couldn't see any more than I could. Had my brain become so accustomed to this predestined life of mine that I couldn't even imagine veering off of that straight line?

I didn't find out. We were back on shore and getting into our cars. I told Lily to go with them, and she said okay. I was going to tell her that I had to get gas, or get food, but she didn't ask. She didn't need to. I waved goodbye to them half-heartedly. I

would see them back at the house. They always rationalize a couple of more drinks into the night.

I sat by the water, and took out a cigarette, and tried to explain to myself the vastness of this water. I could grasp it, but I couldn't feel it. I wanted to know what my father once knew. I flicked the lit butt of my cigarette away from the water, but the gentle wind didn't let it get too far. Over the wind I could barely distinguish words from noise.

"Come out farther!"

The cigarette butt crept down the packed sand, and as a small wave brushed up the shore it introduced itself to the cigarette and made a final serpent-like crackle that could barely be heard over the roaring waves of the sea.

I wanted to stay there for a while, but I didn't. I just went back to Jason and Alice's and drank and fell asleep. I slept well. Jason and Alice's guest room is very comfortable, like the rest of their place.

I don't remember waking up, but I remember turning over toward my wife after wiping the night from my eyes. She was still asleep. Something was different within me. I was awake. "I love you," I said, my tongue unfurling these words, stumbling as if a baby's first three steps. With a gentle inhale those eyes opened, smiling like they

used to. She was awake. I saw that color once again. Those layers of shades of turquoise, draining into her pupils. I was lost in them; soaked in her gaze. My body became warm and relaxed as I looked down at my hand. It was interwoven with hers. With her free hand she gracefully gestured with a relaxed arm for me to come closer, and with my occupied hand I pulled myself into the womb of her embrace.