

I KILLED MY LAST HOUSEPLANT

By Madison Fiedler



**CHARACTERS**

*Clara, a garden*

*Helen, a gardener*

*Ellory, doing her best*

*Plant, doing her best*

**PLACE**

*A sliver of an apartment building. The room on the top floor contains a mostly clear lake, with reeds reaching from below and no bottom in sight. The room on the bottom floor contains a single dying houseplant in a mostly empty living room.*

*Downstairs, Ellory tries to keep her plant alive. Upstairs, Clara and Helen tread water.*

ELLORY

Please don't die

It was one day, two days at most

At the very very most, I'd swear on my life, no more than three days

I even, I woke up and thought— *right* I need to water the plant but then then I couldn't remember if the glass on the table was full of water or gin or seltzer, I didn't know if you could water plants with seltzer and before I could check I was dreaming again

I dreamed about being held by a person or a tree and I woke up and I'd killed you

I didn't think you needed water every single day, I didn't think

Hey

Please don't die

I was just getting good at keeping you alive

*Helen notices Clara treading with more effort.*

HELEN

You're tired

CLARA

Aren't you?

HELEN *sorry*

No

CLARA

Then you win. Sixth time this week.

HELEN

You keep score?

CLARA

You don't?

HELEN

I haven't even been counting

CLARA

Someone has to count. Can we just float now?

HELEN

But you're tired

CLARA

Of swimming

HELEN  
Floating's harder

CLARA  
That's impossible

*Helen shrugs. Clara tries to float. She starts to sink. She treads again.*

CLARA  
I thought floating was just doing nothing!

HELEN  
Nope, that's drowning

CLARA  
Whoa

HELEN  
I know

CLARA  
I'm gonna write that down later  
Did you say that hoping I'd write it down later?

HELEN  
I didn't think so when I said it  
But I might have

*Helen does a nervous backflip. They both keep treading.*

ELLORY  
Would it help if I made you stand tall again? I could sort of-

*She props the plant up. It slumps when she lets go.*

ELLORY  
I could hold you there like that all day.  
Or even-  
Wait here.

*She runs over to the cabinet and digs around for a ball of string.*

CLARA  
My legs are starting to cramp really bad

HELEN  
I can hold you, hold you up

CLARA

Then you'd get tired and we'd both be tired

HELEN

But I like to hold you

CLARA

That's beside the point

HELEN

Sometimes when I'm tired of treading, I hold my breath and let myself sink down  
Then I come back up when I'm juuust about to run out of air

*Clara considers. Meanwhile, Ellory is tying one end of a ball of string to the stem of the plant. She throws the other end up and over the light fixture, pulling the plant so it stands up tall. Helen notices a shift in Clara.*

HELEN

Now you're scared, what're you scared of?

CLARA

Electrocution, forgetting my family's names, never knowing what kind of a person I really am, being the only one awake in a whole city of people

HELEN

But right now

CLARA (*obviously*)

Drowning

HELEN

You won't drown

CLARA

I could sink and never come back up

HELEN

I'd follow you down, carry you up

CLARA

I could be too heavy

HELEN

No one's too heavy underwater

CLARA

I could get lost in the reeds

HELEN

I'd know where to find you, I'd feel it

CLARA

You'd feel it?

HELEN

I always feel it  
Now you're sad

CLARA

If you sank  
And you got lost in the reeds

...

I don't know that I'd know where to find you  
That I'd feel it

*They tread. Ellory pulls a little too hard on the string and it snags on one of the plant's leaves, ripping it slightly. Ellory panics, digs for scissors in the drawer, and cuts the string. The plant slumps over again.*

HELEN

That's okay

ELLORY

I'm sorry  
I'm sorry

HELEN

I think you would

CLARA

Find you?

HELEN

Feel it

*Clara considers. She takes in a deep gulp of air and starts to sink. Helen keeps treading.*

ELLORY

What can I do? How can I help you? How can I keep you safe?

*She gives the plant more water. She opens the curtains to let the sunlight in. Clara can't be seen. Helen keeps treading, a little worried. Ellory finally just cradles the plant in her arms, rocks it as if to sleep. Clara is gone for a very long time, until Helen can't wait any longer. She swims down into the reeds to find Clara. From a different patch of reeds, Clara swims back up to the surface and takes in a great gasp of air. She shakes the water from her eyes and notices Helen's absence.*

CLARA  
Helen?

*She dives back down to search. Ellory holds the dying plant.*

PLANT

I wasn't sad when you over-watered me at first.

I knew that water was a way of loving someone and I learned that you were the kind of person that gave good things in excess and that was okay, even though I was used to a milder love, a let-alone love, and I didn't need more than that but I learned how to have it

And even when the abundance hurt, I told myself it was a gift and I became accustomed to it Not to the excess, but to the ready givenness of your love, like the giving of it was easy

I wasn't sad when you gave me less water, because you had learned to give just as much as I needed, and that was a kind of compromise you made and it was good for me, and my xylem stopped choking on the excess and the blisters on my leaves healed, and there was love in the less-ness. And I learned that you were the kind of person with the capacity to give endlessly but the grace to give just enough.

I was sad when you gave me no water, not because it was done out of spite but because it was done out of non-spite, non-thought, and that is the opposite of love. And I learned that you were not the kind of person I hoped you were, and I was sad.

But now you're sad, and I don't want you to be. I'm sorry. You're sorry. It's okay.

*Clara and Helen reemerge on opposite sides and swim up to the surface, not seeing each other. Neither of them found each other down there, but they needed to breathe at the same time. The plant dies, and Ellory mourns, but it's okay. It's actually okay. Claire and Helen resurface and see each other. Clara feels it, feels something.*