

Julien by Marisa Parker

The power, the raging desire, the burning-oh, the endless, persistent stars exploding in my heart, weakening my body. Forgetting all around me, not caring whether Life was real or not, because my world was in your eyes. You could keep me alive- pumping the blood through my veins, providing my lungs with oxygen-and just as easily obliterate everything I was.

These memories come back to life. But I don't mind.

I remember when I saw you, that very first time, when our eyes crossed because we were at the same lunch table, with the same friends, and you liked the same music I liked. The Killers. We are both Killers fans and that pretty much describes our two opposite personalities to this day. No matter what happens, nothing can ever drag us away from what we started out as; we are two people hidden from society by masks and mysteries and denial.

It was funny speaking to you that first time. We were so caught up in our worlds that we barely recognized one another; there was nothing bringing us together apart from our music, so we took our brief memories of each other and went our separate ways. You were working towards a degree in medicine from Oxford. I was playing the guitar in the streets late at night until I fell asleep outside the convenience store.

I remember gluing back together your posters around school; you laugh, with a hint of amused humiliation, every time we think about those posters promoting the story you had written, because we both know everyone in school spent lunchtimes tearing them down. I loved them, though-I loved how you had made them all by hand, I loved how you and your maths genius friend spent hours taping them to every door and noticeboard and most of all, I loved the fact that you wrote. That you had published something. Somehow, in the infernal macrocosm of our middle school, you found the inspiration to write, to imagine a magnificent world around yourself where your stories could come to life... So I took to fixing all the posters I found lying on the ground; I flattened them out of their ungracefully scrunched state, and found enough cellotape to almost restore them to their former glory before pasting them in high-up places that most people couldn't reach.

Of course you never knew about all that.

If only I could have asked you how you did it; maybe being like you could have saved me. I had all the confidence in the world, and yet I was incapable of telling anyone that things weren't okay. I couldn't show that I needed someone to be there. So I never spoke of the matter to you, or anyone else.

Part of me wonders if that was when I began to fall in love with you.

I remember all those nights I went home crying, just because I couldn't take it anymore. I walked home back then, so I had a good half hour to let down my barriers and allow my heart to unleash the flood of tears it tried so hard to keep locked up. Walking, walking, coming home to an empty house, leaving, walking, walking, coming home to fights...pretending I didn't know it was all my fault...

I remember when people started catching me off guard when I was drowning in despair I couldn't take it anymore. I walked home back then because that was my problem and no one else's; I didn't want to inflict that on the world. So I lied. I began inventing every possible tragedy I could think of, from being hospitalized to seeing my uncle in a pool of blood on the road after being run over by a truck. As time went on, I lied more and more; I wasn't a liar – or at least I never had been before –but it was my way of explaining to the world why I couldn't be like everyone else. It made people understand why I wasn't always okay, and sometimes they would try to comfort me with hugs or handshakes or reassuring words.

I hated myself for it, but on one hand, it was the only way I could get my friends to be there when I needed them.

At least nobody really saw what I was becoming. When my allies became too close, I pushed them away.

I wasn't really suicidal, but that's what everyone thought. I wonder if maybe they gave up on me long before I considered giving up on myself.

I remember seeing you that time in the park. It was the summer before we started high school, and you were trying to find a date for your best friend who was searching for excitement. You two were so funny together, like Bert and Ernie living on a totally different planet from the rest of us; it was great to see how neither of you cared what the world thought—if you wanted to act completely ridiculous and have a vegetarian food fight at the beach, you would do it. I didn't know how much you were hiding by pretending you were as alright as the rest of it. You could have told me, you know. I would still have seen you as superior, even if I had known that you were fighting a battle behind bars which were slowly closing in on you.

Taking your friend to the movies wasn't exactly how I had expected to pass my time, but I did it because the two of us had a fun time together; she bought popcorn just to throw it at me in the theatre and I told jokes to the usher to make him lower the price of our tickets. We made it a weekly thing, and all because you talked your way around me at the park; your words are more powerful than any force I have ever come across.

Then she left town and I never saw her again. You lost contact with her because she went off the rails, and I think you and I were both lonelier than ever after that.

I remember our first day at high school. You didn't see me and I didn't see you, but in one day, we managed to drift so far away from one another without noticing it that no omniscient power could ever have expected us to speak again. We had seen each other briefly throughout

the summer, and even though I couldn't say we were friends, there was something there. Maybe an understanding. A silent promise.

In any case, you helped me through the holidays and yet had no idea you were saving my life.

That day I found a whole new group of friends from the one I used to hang out with. There were so many more students and in those thousands of individuals I found boys who were ten steps ahead of me—boys who could have cared less about school and who skipped classes to smoke whatever they could find behind school.

Even today I know that I could never actually have been like them. It was more of an illusion than anything else that caught up in things I regretted even as I did them. I lost you as soon as I started using rubbish like that and in a way, that's what I regret the most about it all. If only I had gone to you instead of them for an illusion than anything else.

I remember what it was like starting at the boarding part of our school: terrifying, petrifying, mortifying, and a million shades of excitement. For the first time in my life, I had almost unlimited freedom to be with these friends who showed me aspects of the world that baffled me, intrigued me, adventurously destroyed me. I could go crazy and no one back home would ever know, which I loved.

I never wanted to hurt anyone; those people just caught me at a time when I would have given anything to escape.

Lying to my new friends was easy. Like it always had been. Lying to you was harder, but I forced myself to do it.

You were so incredibly different to me! How it was possible to become even more studious than you were at middle school, I didn't know, but you did. The few friends you spent time with were quiet girls who looked up to you for being You, and the rest of us losers didn't come into your social circle.

Trust me, I see why. We were bad influences even on ourselves.

But in the evenings, when we were all eating in the canteen, I loved glancing in your direction. You were such an opposite to what I had become that I felt like looking at you was looking at who I wished I could be. When you smiled back, you gave me some sort of energy—I don't know how you did it—and in the split second that followed, I could throw my head back laughing about anything, like for once I was actually free.

You never realized how much I loved you.

I remember finding out you were at an evening party in the room just above mine, sticking my head out of the window like an eager puppy to see if it was possible to chat like that, breaking my back just to lean back on the metal barrier and look up at you.

Of course my friends wanted to get in on all the fun, so they all clambered over one another to join me at the window, shouting out to you and your study buddies who were drinking fruit juice out of champagne glasses. Two worlds clashing—it was epic and kinda sad at the same time.

We made sweet wrappers into paper airplanes and tried to throw them up to you. You tossed pillows at us and watched, giggling, as we begged for drinks and cookies.

I had been totally out of it that afternoon; not even the fact that it was school photo day had stopped me from messing with my limits between classes. I stank of smoke and my eyes were red—somehow, my whole body hurt—but watching you laugh as the moon began to rise seemed to put some of my broken pieces back together. It was the first time we had spoken since the beginning of the school year and just like always, we were the only ones who could see through the masks of the other; you noticed the scars on my wrists, while I couldn't help but notice the way you stared off into the distance, staring at nothing for incessant amounts of time.

I remember when we talked for the first time. Really talked. I remember waiting at my window for hours without consciously knowing why, I remember cursing the skies above me for being so cruel, and I remember losing the notion of time altogether when you suddenly appeared at that window once again. For hours I had been playing the guitar to the stars, but when you came, listening, a mug of hot chocolate in your hands and a baggy pink sweater over your pyjamas, the music began to come to life. The notes became a tune, which became a rhythm and turned into a melody; each note seemed to ring out in the silent night, crying out, screaming out, calming the world as the clouds fell asleep for the night.

It could have been hours before I stopped playing; there was something calming about letting the music fill our ears and knowing you were listening.

It was for you. It's all for you.

You're an incredible listener, you know.

It was late and we should have been asleep, but all of a sudden we started talking. I hadn't even finished my song when just then, you—your smile, your words, your little laughs, your caring—became my whole world, the only universe I wanted to belong to. We talked about nothing, and everything, and then anything. Whispering, so as not to wake up the rest of the boarders.

No one else in the world existed.

When you said you had to go to sleep, your words like warm lavender honey, sweeping through my limbs and breaking down the walls into my stony heart, I felt like a shattered vase.

Empty. Capable of holding something beautiful, but nothing on my own.

And suddenly you began to cry.

Your tears were like drops of salt in the sea, falling into the open landscape, streaming down your face, flooding your soul and weighing you down. I saw you bury your face in your hands, lean back against the wall and slide down it to the ground.

In a heartbeat, I had tossed my guitar onto my bed and was swinging out of the window, pulling myself up to yours, biting my lip through the pain burning through my muscles.

All I wanted to do was to keep you safe. I didn't care about anything else. All I knew was that I had to have you in my arms and take your pain away.

I never realized how little you were until you huddled up to me and buried your face in my shoulder. Your presence was like a gentle whisper in the wind, a touch of magic I would hold onto for dear life no matter what. As if I had been kissed by a fairy.

When you cried, my heart beat faster, as if it were desperately trying to store all those marauding memories so you wouldn't have to. When you smiled through the tears, looking up at me with emerald eyes that shined brighter than the most stunning of constellations, I felt like the light of the world itself was flickering.

You felt so guilty about what had happened. You had fought for everything you had and lost so much... No one can please the whole world but you tried so incredibly hard to. It killed you to be selfish and slowly destroyed you when you remembered all those important things that had eventually disintegrated into nothing.

I wished you could have seen yourself through my eyes. I wished I had the words to tell you just how perfect you really were, independent of whatever people said. I wished it was possible to let all of your pain flood out of your body and gush into mine instead; I would have given my world away right there and then to make sure you were happy.

'I can't do this anymore,' you whispered. 'I can't keep pretending I'm keeping it together, because the truth is I'm not okay. I'll never be okay again.' You looked as if you might kiss my cheek, but then pulled yourself away. 'I can't believe you stepped onto those train tracks all those years. I won't believe you would do that to me.'

And in an instant, I'd lost you. Lost you the way you lost me four years ago, and suddenly I felt as if it was you who had become no more than a mirage over the years.

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