

The Pain After Death

Trepidation. That was one of our vocab words this week. It's the fear or anxiety of something that might happen. As I saw the car in my rear view, swerving its tires like a toddler scribbling outside the lines, that's what I felt. I feel it now as I lie, unmoving, on the frost-covered concrete. The only movements that are manageable are shakes from the endless chill of the breeze. The cold numbs my senses, but not my pain. I breathe in, jagged and uneven, to scream, yell, anything that will get someone to hear me. No matter how much it stings.

"Help." All that comes out is a faded whisper. Slowly, my body enters a state of comfortable warmth. I try to close my eyes but doing so is like an attempt at picking up one of my dad's old dumbbells. Impossible. The fog surrounding my brain lifts, making everything as clear as before the accident. I still cannot close my eyes, so I look straight ahead, let them glaze over. Staring at nothing and yet everything at once.

As if I summoned it with my small, breathy whisper, an ambulance comes blaring towards me. Following it is a line of police cars with their deafening sirens and bright blue lights that stand out against the orange sunset sky. Officers and emergency medical technicians race out of their vehicles toward the scene, their visible breath breaking through the air. There are too many of them to count and yet everyone has a job, a place to be.

A man strides up to me, quickly and confidently. He's done this numerous times before. Crouching down, he places two fingers on my neck. I expect to feel the warmth of his hands, feel something, but I don't. The man kneels and shakes his head. Clasp one hand on top of the other, he starts administering CPR. I wait for it to hurt. I was told it could break ribs and those ribs could puncture something inside my chest. *Why can I not feel it?*

"Stop!" I yell, but my lips don't move. I try to scream, kick, swing my arms, but nothing happens. I lay still and warm, eyes open and glazed. Trapped.

The man keeps going for what feels like an eternity. When he finally slows to a stop, he just stares at me, solemnly. He closes his eyes for a moment. Maybe he prays for me.

“DOA.” His voice carries far enough for his team to hear. DOA? That means ‘dead on arrival.’ Right? Why would he say that?

“I’m so sorry,” he says, placing his fingers on my eyelids to close them. I don’t feel it.

“The other guy, he’s drunk. He’s ok, if you’re wondering, just a minor head laceration and sprained wrist,” he explains. I changed my mind, I do not want my eyes closed. I can hear everything, the sirens, police scanners, a woman screaming, I just want to see it. I hear the man’s crunching footsteps fade into the distance. I wish I could have seen him go. No, I wish he would have stayed. I don’t want to be alone.

“Amelia!” My mother’s voice cuts through the air, high pitched and frantic. She shrieks my name again and the gut-wrenching, guttural sound hurts more than the moment of collision. I cannot quite make out what she says, but her voice is so close I believe she’s holding me. A wave of gratitude washes over what’s left of who I am. That man may not have saved my life, but he did save me from seeing my mother in this state of suffering. As exhaustion hits, I drift off into nothing, setting me free from my final moments.