

That's Enough

The water gushed from the faucet into the tub. It steamed and, as its heat filled the air, caused the skin of his body to perspire, contaminating the air with a smell of nervous sweat. Meanwhile, he stared at himself in the mirror. He looked himself over – at every line scarred into his face from years of pretending to be happy, at his ears that forced him to listen to every twisted remark, and at his eyes, red and swollen, which were about to repeat their everyday ritual. In an instant, he looked down at the sink as the tears began streaming down his face. He couldn't bear to see himself become possessed by soul-crushing demons birthed by an intolerable society yet again. He tried to not let it phase him and attempted to recognize himself in the mirror, but his reflection was opaquely covered by a thick fog that clung to the surface of the mirror. Standing there, completely naked, crying into his palms, with a wandering mind, he thought it devastating that it wasn't the most vulnerable he'd ever been. Then, as if he'd made up his mind, he grabbed the razor from the countertop and gazed at it. Holding it in his hands, he started trembling and whatever faux confidence he had a second ago quickly withered away. Nonetheless, he squeezed the blade even tighter between his thumb and index fingers while he inched toward the tub.

Standing over the tub, he turned the knob in the off direction, the water level only a few inches away from drenching the bathroom floor. Cautiously, he raised his left leg first and slowly lowered it into the water as if he were stepping into a grave. He repeated with the opposite leg before crouching and calmly resting on his butt. The water engulfed his body, and, ironically, he felt rejuvenated by the warm embraces of the waves. As he settled into the water, he placed the razor on the edge of the tub and reclined; he recounted the last time he gave himself willingly to the water. He recollected how cold and bitter the water was at his baptism, like his recent relationship with the overseer. The time when he had allowed a foolish person to dump him into foolish waters in the name of a foolish god. He grimaced at the thought of his own stupidity to dedicate his soul to a god that didn't even attempt to protect it from an environment filled with bloodthirsty bullies. Snapping back into the present, he understood how these two occasions were more of an antithesis than anything else. Beginning to feel his eyes watering, he quickly shut them, and tilted his head back against the tub.

“What are you waiting for, you pussy?” an oddly familiar voice questioned.

Startled, he opened his eyes and looked in the direction of the speaker. He saw nothing and closed his irritated eyes again.

“Seriously, are you going to beat around the bush all night or are you finally going to get to slicing?” the voice asked with faint humor.

He quickly reopened his eyes, only to turn and find himself sitting on the far end side of the tub. His eyes widened, and he tensed.

“Yes, it's me, faggot... you,” he said with a smile. “I know what you're thinking. ‘What? Me? How is that me?’ Just know that I *am* you, and I'm here to turn this melodrama into a clean-cut job. In other words, I'm here to give you the extra encouragement you need to make things go a little quicker.”

“Wh– what?” the frightened boy in the bath tub replied, “I’m not going to do anything.”

“Don’t back out now. Need I remind you people who plan on doing nothing don’t typically carry razors to the bath with them?” he condescendingly commented, directing his gaze to the blade sitting a few inches from him.

“That’s nothing,” he retorted with wavering confidence, shifting uneasily in the water.

“Am I really this much of a shriveling little bitch? Please man up or must I explain to you why we want this... why we *need* this?”

He said nothing. Instead, he glared at himself that sat so indignantly across from him. However malevolent, the doppelganger’s piercing demeanor charmed him.

“Well, me, I guess I’d better explain to you how we became the homo-gay-faggot-queer-disappointment-outcast-prey that we are. That led us here.” The doppelganger shifted around on the edge of the tub to meet his own eyes. “Don’t you remember how we just wanted to dance? How we just wanted to liven up the party, entertain everyone, and put smiles on their faces? I do. I remember twisting these hips around, and I remember twerking and shaking. I also remember the look on mom’s face when she told us, ‘that’s enough.’ Do you remember that look of mortification that stained her face? I do. Out of everyone in our family, she didn’t want to be the only one to spawn such a disgrace... such an embarrassment.” The boy remained still in the murky water, but his eyes gave his doppelganger more reason to continue. “Well, if I haven’t jogged your memory yet, think about eighth grade year. Do you remember the day after the school dance when we were told that we danced wonderfully, but so womanly and were met with the slandering accusations that we were gay? Do you remember having to defend ourselves by telling everyone that we were straight only to not be believed? I know you remember finding letters in our locker calling us ‘faggots’ and ‘cocksuckers’ in the weeks that followed. Tell me you remember how we cried into our pillow for hours those nights, wondering how people could see us so differently for being ourselves. I do... which is why you won’t be selfish. You *will* take this blade and you *will* carve a line straight into your wrist. One way or another, you will drain us of all this pain, so, here, take it!”

He held out the face of his hand to accept the tool that offered him relief. Lifting from his recline, he raised his right arm and turned his wrist facing upward. There was a war going on inside of him, and it was up to him to decide if a dishonorable end would bring him more happiness than a disheartening reality. The latter lost this round though. Wrathfully, he, sitting atop the tub, shouted “DO IT!” and, with vicious palpitations of his heart, he sliced a horizontal line through his wrist, moaning painfully. Drained of courage, the boy fell back into his original position, allowing his forearm to rest upwardly in the slightly clear, now lukewarm water, letting his blood infest it. His face lost all emotion – no strain, regret, or rage: just emptiness. His left hand still held the razor, though with a looser grip.

“There, that’s helpful, isn’t it? Don’t you feel relieved?” the doppelganger menacingly suggested. Meanwhile, he lay there in the tub, staring at the faucet, watching small water droplets drip. He didn’t flinch and barely even blinked. “Now, do it again” he demanded.

“Now!” But the boy stayed silently paralyzed in the water, where clouds of his own blood manifested.

“Ugh! I see I’m going to have to force your hand again. Fine... if you’re going to make this difficult for me, then you’re going to make the next cut deeper,” he laughed. “Okay, let’s travel back down memory lane, shall we?” The boy altered his gaze to the water, but, upon seeing his blood seethe into the water, he felt a slight pang and fixed his eyes back at the dripping water. “Remember feeling like we’d lost everyone that we ever thought cared about us? I can recall how our closest friends forsook us. Do you remember how our “best friend” spread that rumor around to everybody? She told all our peers how we said we loved a boy. Don’t you remember asking her why she’d hurt us like that, and she told us, ‘Come on, are you really mad at me? Everyone already knows you’re gay. I’m only trying to help you.’? Didn’t that really burn a hole in our heart? We thought that the people who called themselves our friends would know us better than to ever mistake our androgyny for homosexuality, but when we needed them, they assimilated into the crowd, asking us about or wrongly diagnosing our sexuality. Oh, and please tell me you remember being choked by our own brother. Don’t you remember how he pinned us against the ground, squeezing our neck, screaming ‘faggot’ and ‘you gay-ass bitch’? I know how taken aback we were that the one person we shared a womb with, a room with, and every year of our life with could brush us with such a generalizing stroke. Can you recall how that very night we spent an hour on our knees, hollering out to God to stop our suffering, but He didn’t hear us? Or maybe He did hear us, but He didn’t care enough to stop our sorrow, and we were convinced that these twisted people served this twisted God to twist our life into despair. After all, how defeated did we have to be and how loud did we have to cry for Him to rescue us?”

The boy picked his arms back up out of the water and placed them in the same positions he did for the first cut. He could barely hold himself steady. He placed the sharp end a few millimeters from the first cut on his wrist, began to press it into his skin, but stopped. His doppelganger looked disappointed at his hesitation. Calmly, he whispered, leaning in closer to the boy in the tub, “you’re alone.” This was enough to yank a screech from his throat as he glided the razor across his wrist, tearing his skin, creating a deeper cut than the previous one. Finally, some emotion was restored to the boy’s face as he angrily looked back at his twin who stared at the dyed water.

“Are you happy now?” he asked his reanimated reflection.

“I think you meant to ask, ‘are *we* happy now?’ You’re forgetting that all of this is for us. If no one else will save us, we have to save ourselves,” the doppelganger replied.

The boy flailed back into the water, sliding down on his back into a resting position. He didn’t seem stressed or exhausted, but he was paler and sweat dampened his brows. He had a hateful look upon his face, but he set his eyes back to the dripping faucet and sat there, motionless, as blood spilled from the slits in his wrist.

“Okay, no more games. We need to get this over with. I’ll ask politely one more time, will you just do it again?” The boy didn’t move; he remained in his unsettlingly comfortable recline in the tub. “Oh, boy. I guess I’m going to have to force your hand... again,” he said

annoyed. “If this is how you’re going to play, I guess my case wouldn’t be so convincing if I didn’t make you relive our most heartbreaking moment. So... do you remember that night at mawmaw’s house? It was the same day we got into an argument with mom over how badly we hated her boyfriend. That same day we tried to hang ourselves because we felt like no one was listening to us, and we’d been in that position too many times before.”

With surprising vulnerability, considering his latest angry expressions, the boy lifted his head from the back of the tub, feeling weak, and softly but audibly mumbled, “Stop!”

“Oh, there he is. I see we’ve come to life, haven’t we?” the doppelganger countered.

“Please... just stop.”

“Oh no. You know I can’t do that. You know *we* can’t do that. And if you won’t hurt yourself willingly, then I have to find other ways.” A short pause ensued. “That night at mawmaw’s, we listed the reasons we thought mom hated us. We talked about her treating us like a child, her not caring about what we had to say, and so much more. But... for some reason, out of all those explanations, none seemed more pertinent or concerning to mawmaw than when we mentioned how mom thinks we’re gay. Of course, by this time mom hadn’t asked us yet, but we always knew. Mawmaw asked us why we would think that, and we told her. We told her that mom would often find any flaw in us to correct and make more masculine; from how we held our hands while we ate dinner to the songs we listened to. She’d always try to make us something we’re not... something expected. Do you remember what happened next?”

“Stop,” the boy sorrowfully pleaded.

“Do you remember?” the doppelganger exclaimed.

“Stop,” he cowered.

“I do. Do you remember, in her own secret agenda, mawmaw asked us if we were gay? She asked us vindictively, as if her only intention was to in some way incriminate us. The only thing she cared about was our sexuality. We listed reasons upon reasons! Yet, she chose the one that plagued our entire life. She betrayed us. We trusted her. She was our grandma. She was the one person that we always knew we could rely on. She was the one person who we thought could understand... until she didn’t. I guess we should’ve known because somewhere under her demands for us to stop hanging out with our friends because they’re mostly girls or her not-so-sly interrogations whenever someone told her how we danced, there was her skepticism and disappointment that we were queer.”

“No,” he feebly raised his hands out of the water to his eyes, trying to plug his tear ducts.

“That was the night we lost hope and our desire to live, so you *will* cut yourself... again and again and again. You will not stop until we’re drained of this agony and of these demoralizing memories. You will not stop until we’re gone from this world that never understood us! That took our differences for weaknesses! That turned those weaknesses into targets! That saw us as prey!”

“Stop!” he shouted, crying into his palms.

“No! Now! Do it now!”

“Why are you doing this to me?”

“I’m doing this for us. It’s only ever been for us!”

“No!”

“We’re alone!”

“No!”

“We’re nothing but game!”

“Please...”

“We’re only gay to them!”

“No! No! No!” he closed his fingers tighter around the razor that never left his left hand. Then, overcome with desolation, fear, and anxiety, he took the blade to his throat, and, with a searing roar, forcefully grinded its sharpness across his throat.

It ended. The boy in the tub soaked in his own blood, with his eyes closed and sunken in, and his soul set free. He did it. He slit his demon’s throat. He killed his suicidal conscience. He saved himself and conquered his doppelganger. Liberated, he believed his life would get better. He’d gone lower than he’d ever been before and realized that he couldn’t do anything else but rise. Society had tossed a heavy bag loaded with stereotypes, traditions, and gender roles on his back, hoping that the weight would strengthen him into the manly man he wasn’t. Though, he found a loophole, and instead of bearing society’s load, he threw it off, gaining the strength to do so by gaining the knowledge to be himself. Society pushed him to carry the weight of their intolerance for dissimilarity, but he vowed, in that bathtub, never to accept their ignorance with any more fake smiles. He understood that his femininity only made him more interesting, and, as long as he knew that, what anyone else thought didn’t matter. He recognized that he wouldn’t mind having to walk this life alone if it meant that he could journey contentedly. In the end, as he sat in the cold, bloodied water, he thought to himself that maybe it hadn’t been so different from his baptism. After all, both offered him his salvation.