

before flowers bloom

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FIRST DRAFT

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EXT. FIELD - SUNSET

The Sun hangs low in the sky over the outer city field. Aside from the sound of cars on a distant road, it is silent.

The gate squeaks open as five teenagers enter the field one by one;

ZAINAB; holding a bottle of 'Parma Violet' flavoured gin by the neck in her right hand.

CONOR; nestling a bottle of whiskey in the pocket of his pullover hoodie.

ROWAN; cradling a clear plastic drinks bottle filled with a mysterious dark brown (clearly alcoholic) concoction.

TOBY; holding a 2 litre bottle of coke mixed with rum in both hands.

And MAIA; wielding a bottle of lemonade diluted with cheap vodka.

The five of them stand in the corner of the field - looking for a place to sit - before ZAINAB points out a location, and promptly leads the way.

The others make no hesitation to follow her as they gather to sit down. As they form their congregation however, they leave an extra, empty space for a missing sixth person.

Before each of them sit down, they open their drinks - pouring some of it into the empty space, then proceeding to settle on the bristly summer grass.

They sit in brief, mournful silence. None of them quite sure where to look.

Conor attempts to take a swig from his whiskey, but is interrupted by ZAINAB.

ZAINAB  
Before we start...

Conor lowers his bottle.

ZAINAB (cont'd)  
We should recognise who we're here for. Without whom, things feel...  
*different.*

CONOR  
Quieter?

She narrows her eyes at him, then raises her bottle.

ZAINAB

To Lily.

The others follow suit as they clink the necks of their bottles together, and all take a swig from their respective drinks.

MAIA and TOBY go back to looking at the ground they're sitting on - avoiding any eye contact.

CONOR

To be fair, I think Lily would appreciate us continuing her legacy of making terrible life decisions - no offence, Tobes.

ROWAN

(stifling laughter)

Shut up mate.

CONOR

Am I wrong though? I mean it's hardly model citizen behaviour to have a piss-up the night before a funeral.

ROWAN

It's not a piss-up Conor.

CONOR

Well it's hardly brunch is it? Don't get me wrong, I'm sure Lil would be proud of us getting plastered; the party animal.

ROWAN laughs at CONOR's remark. TOBY observes the two's interaction, while MAIA remains fixated on the grass beneath her.

ZAINAB

Alright you lot, that's enough. We're here to *remember* Lily-

CONOR

Funny way of remembering isn't it? Drinking so much we forget where we are.

ZAINAB

Conor, enough.

He shuts up, leaving them all to sit in silence for a few seconds.

ZAINAB (cont'd)  
Why don't we tell stories?

CONOR  
Stories?

ZAINAB  
Yeah! We're all here to keep Lily's memory alive, and the best way to do that is to talk about what she was like when she was still... here. So why don't we take it in turns to tell stories about her?

ROWAN  
That's not a bad idea. Who would go first?

CONOR  
What about Toby? I'm sure he'd have *loads* to talk about.

Upon hearing this, TOBY takes a long swig of his drink - which only ZAINAB seems to notice.

ZAINAB  
Maybe someone else.

ROWAN  
Maia?  
(MAIA looks up at him)  
You two were inseparable - you must have something to talk about.

MAIA  
Oh yeah, right...

She sits up, the rest of the group all turn to face her - TOBY lifting his head briefly to look at her before re-diverting his gaze to the grass.

MAIA (cont'd)  
I guess I should start at the beginning?

(she takes a deep breath)  
Lily and I have been - had been - best friends since, pretty much our first day at school. I remember seeing this loud girl with pigtails spotting the quiet girl in the corner of the playground, and approaching her to ask if she wanted to play a game together.

(MORE)

MAIA (cont'd)

And that was it from then. "Lily and Maia against the world" seemed to be our motto for the next ten, eleven years. I used to wait for her to get out of detention every time her loud mouth would drag her into trouble, and then I was the one who had to explain to her mum that we just revising so she didn't get in any more trouble. Rowan's right, we were inseparable, we were *best friends*. But here we are now - separated - it isn't me and Lily against the world anymore, it's just... me.

Their faces drop when MAIA says this.

MAIA (cont'd)

And I want to be sad. I want to scream, and cry, and grieve, and *beg* to see her again - to live like we're sixteen one more time, but I can't. It's painful - don't get me wrong. But through all the confusion - deep down - I can't help but feel... angry. Because, at the end of the day, she wasn't the best person out there, and she did so much she should've apologised for, and she never did.

ZAINAB

Are you sure this is the right time for this?

CONOR

Let her finish.

MAIA

I know it's not what you want to hear, but sitting here and pretending she was perfect isn't fair to any of us, or her for that matter. I'm sure she wanted to care - she must have. I just don't think that the way she treated me was just... *wrong*.

They keep looking at her - even TOBY raises his head to hear her out.

MAIA (cont'd)

A couple years ago, when things weren't going so well at home, Lily used to leave me like, fifteen missed calls and two voicemails while I was asleep - all full of stuff about how she needed to see me, and that she couldn't "do it anymore". She used to get mad and blame me for being the reason things were shit if I didn't reply soon enough, and then when I finally snuck out of the house at four in the morning and ran a mile to see her, she was fine. She would hand me a cider she swiped from her parents' cabinet and tell me she "just missed me".

(she pauses to think  
about what she's  
saying)

It was never a two-way street. She had her issues, but I just had inconveniences to her. I mean for God's sake my parents were getting *divorced* - screaming the house down in the next room - and I couldn't talk to her about it. I just had to live with my problems while I listened to hers. That didn't feel like friendship, like love, but I knew nothing else. I knew her, and I thought that was enough.

They all sit in silence for a moment.

CONOR

She has a point. Lily really does have a habit of being a right twat sometimes.

ZAINAB

Conor! Can we please keep all the shit-talking to a minimum please, it's not fair to talk ill of... our friend.

ROWAN

I mean, she could be sometimes. I hardly knew her like Maia did, but she had her moments.

ZAINAB

She used to set you up with people all the time. How is that "being a twat"?

ROWAN

Yeah but...

(he hesitates)

Every time I showed any interest in a girl, or a guy, she would jump into matchmaker mode - insisting that she wanted to help. Don't get me wrong, she was bloody *brilliant* at it - remember Alistair from sixth form?

(he turns to CONOR,  
who nods)

I thought hell would freeze over before he asked me out, but one conversation with Lily and he seemed to think the world of me.

ZAINAB

Exactly! So what's the problem?

ROWAN

They all agreed to a first date, and that's where it started. Just before the date - sometimes a week before, a day before, or even on the day of - they'd all give me some excuse as to why they couldn't make it, or just straight-up ghost me. No explanation, no postponing, just outright cancelling. I had no idea what it was until I saw Alistair at a house party about a year ago. It took five rum & cokes to finally talk to him, but when I did he went on this long spiel about how Lily told him who I "really was". Turns out that every time I asked someone out that Lily set me up with, she'd go behind my back and tell them about how I was this narcissistic nymphomaniac type - sleeping with anyone who caught my eye. She even told a couple of them that I tried pushing myself onto her. Anyway, when I finally asked her about it, she simply laughed and told me it was "all a bit of fun". "Besides, it's not like you had a *real* chance with any of them." was her reasoning.

(MORE)

ROWAN (cont'd)  
No apology, not even an  
acknowledgement that she might have  
been in the wrong - just excuses

He sighs. ZAINAB and CONOR look at him silently - ZAINAB  
leaning back, while CONOR leans in towards him. MAIA's focus  
is on TOBI, who remains looking at the ground.

CONOR looks to ZAINAB, and then to the rest of the group. He  
chuckles under his breath - his opinions reaffirmed.

CONOR  
So there we have it, right? She was a  
twat.

ZAINAB  
Okay stop it now Conor.

CONOR  
Stop what? I thought we were talking  
about how Lily used to be. She was  
depressing, manipulative, and a shit  
friend.

ZAINAB  
Why the fuck do you care? She clearly  
meant nothing to you! She's been the  
butt of all of your jokes, even after  
she-  
(she hesitates.)

CONOR  
She what? Killed herself? Left us all  
to pick up the pieces of her fuck-  
ups? How dare you tell me I didn't  
care about her when I was there every  
day to check in on her, and everyone  
else she lashed out at. Day in and  
day out I messaged her to check on  
how she was doing, and every day she  
told me she was "fine" until she  
never messaged me again.

(he pulls out his  
phone - scrolling  
through text  
conversations  
between him and Lily  
and showing them to  
ZAINAB)

That's why I'm so pissed off -  
because she lied. She needed help,  
and she refused to get it. And now  
look at us.

(MORE)



CONOR (cont'd)

We got dragged down with her, and we're drunk in some random field - the day before our friend's funeral. None of us should have to be here right now. None of us should have had to deal with the shit she gave us for no reason.

ZAINAB

She was hurting!

CONOR

And that gave her the right to hurt us? That's not friendship! It sure as fuck wasn't love.

He turns to TOBY - who is burying his head further into his lap.

ROWAN

Conor, come on mate. Don't do this.

CONOR

No because they deserve to know. Tell them Tobes. Tell them about how she used to be to you. There is a reason you lot ended things, ain't there?

TOBY stays silent

MAIA

I don't think he's ready for that right now.

CONOR

Well if he won't, I will. She treated you like shit, didn't she? Berating you, lying to you, manipulating you. Hell, I don't know if she went through with it, but she definitely *wanted* to get with other guys while you were still fucking *together*! And for what? Attention? To make life more interesting? Maybe she just wanted to push us all away so it wouldn't hurt as much when she finally gave up. But we're still here - celebrating the girl who treated us like the shit on her shoe.

CONOR stands up and walks over to TOBY - now standing over him. ZAINAB stands up to stop him.

CONOR (cont'd)  
Well, go on then. Aren't you gonna  
say anything?

TOBY refuses to look up.

CONOR (cont'd)  
It's not like she can say anything  
about it now.

ZAINAB gasps, TOBY immediately stands up. His teary eyes meet CONOR's. He holds his gaze for a few seconds, before quickly walking off towards the nearby woods.

The rest of the group sit in silence in the field. The silent tension thick like fog. CONOR's expression softens upon the realisation that he - like Lily - had lashed out at his friend in his anguish.

ZAINAB  
Happy now?

CONOR doesn't speak - he can't.

ZAINAB (cont'd)  
You need to go and talk to him. Now.

ROWAN  
That won't help.

CONOR stares at TOBY as he walks out of view - unable to bring himself to follow him.

CONOR  
(quietly)  
I just wanted to help - to get him to  
talk about it.

ZAINAB  
Fat load of good that was.

CONOR turns to ZAINAB, ready to rebut, but MAIA stands up between the two of them, interrupting.

MAIA  
That's it. Enough. You were both  
trying to help, in your own way.  
(she turns to CONOR)  
You didn't want to hurt Toby, but you  
did. I know that wasn't your  
intention, but maybe it'll give you  
some perspective.

She starts to walk away.

ROWAN  
Where are you off to?

MAIA  
Someone needs to check on him.

MAIA leaves, with the rest of the group staying behind.

EXT. CLEARING - SUNSET

MAIA wanders through the forest, looking for TOBY.  
Eventually, she spots him in a clearing in the trees,  
leaning on a fence that overlooks a nearby crop field.

MAIA  
Toby?

She approaches him.

MAIA (cont'd)  
He didn't mean to be so harsh. I  
think this has been harder on him  
than he realises.

TOBY  
He's right.  
(beat)  
Lily was shit girlfriend. She used to  
tell me, all the time, that the  
reason she felt... like that -  
like... ending it all - was my fault.

MAIA is shocked into silence.

TOBY (cont'd)  
She couldn't help it though, and  
neither can Conor. She was hurting,  
and she didn't know what she was  
saying. I knew she cared, deep down,  
but sometimes we get overwhelmed, and  
we say, or do, things without  
thinking about what they do to the  
people around us.  
(beat)  
Of course I'm angry. She hurt us all  
without thinking about the  
consequences. And now she's gone, she  
doesn't have to deal with them.

MAIA joins him in leaning on the fence.

TOBY (cont'd)

Sometimes I wonder if that's what pushed her over the edge - that she *knew* what she'd done, and couldn't live with herself thinking that we all secretly hated her.

MAIA

But I didn't *hate* her.

TOBY

None of us did. Sure, we would all be right to be upset, but we all knew why she did it, and if we'd left her to fend for herself, god knows what would have happened.

The rest of the group join them in the clearing.

CONOR

Mate I'm really sorry. I was being a right twat.

TOBY

It's fine, really. You were just being protective. It's what you do when someone hurts your friends.

CONOR

Yeah but I was out of line.

TOBY

But I don't blame you. Grief makes you say things that are out of line sometimes.

TOBY turns to ZAINAB.

TOBY (cont'd)

We *all* have stories about Lily. Like our first date; we went into town, and my mum had given me a tenner to buy us something nice, but it had fallen through a hole in my pocket. I was absolutely devastated, the date felt like a disaster, but Lily took me to the park, and bought us both an ice cream from the ice cream van. I remember sitting next to her on a bench - eating our ice cream - and wanting to tell her I loved her. But you know Lily, she just *had* to get there first.

ROWAN giggles. ZAINAB smiles tenderly.

TOBY (cont'd)

But not all of our stories are great - after all, she *literally* broke my heart - and it's not fair to pretend that the pain she caused didn't exist. It would be unfaithful to our memory of her if we didn't talk about the bad, as well as the good.

The group stand in silence, listening intently to TOBY.

TOBY (cont'd)

And what hurts the most is that she'll never get a chance to apologise. She'll never get a chance to grow up and be a better person, so we'll never know if she's sorry for what she's done.

(beat)

Of course I miss her, we all do, because there's *so much* she left us with. So much pain, so much confusion, so much anger, even. It's like cutting the stems off of plants before flowers bloom - you'll never get to see the full potential of what it'll grow into. And it could have been so beautiful.

MAIA

We've got each other though.

TOBY

Exactly! Lily is the reason any of us know each other. She was always the one arranging for us to hang out, and look at what she's done, she's gotten us all together again - even after she's gone.

The group congregates on the fence. ZAINAB hugs MAIA before leaning next to her, ROWAN leans next to TOBY, and CONOR puts his hand on TOBY's shoulder, standing close behind the rest of the group.

As dusk purples the sky, they look into the sun setting over the field - brought together, one last time, by Lily.

END