

We Are One

Jennifer Thompson

Sylvia Plath's writing speaks to my injured soul on a deep level, but not as much as her biography. Reading through her journals I felt like I was reading through my own journals, there are constant parallels. As a 30 year old, single mother of two young children, trying to find my way in the literary world, I'm all too familiar with the desire to end it all...the overwhelming urge to throw in the towel. Having contemplated suicide since I was a teenager, it doesn't take much to push me back to that place where the days seem impossible to navigate, where life seems impossible to manage on my own, wanting to give up on this thing called life. I connect with Plath that way, I feel her pain inside me. I've struggled with the decision she struggled with.

December 2007

Foot prints in the snow...I stare down at my uncertain death. Scenes flash forward, depicting images of what would follow, were I to take a step. My 3 year old son, dragged through a hospital, barked at to behave, lost and confused as everyone wait for my survival to be determined...waiting for his mommy. Images of the future my children would have flicker so boldly on the snowy ground far below the edge of my toes hanging over so precariously.

I hear a giggle behind me...my baby inside the toasty warm house, searching for me. I step down from the balcony railing, feet planted firmly on the ground...for now. Seeking out my little boy, I bury my face in his neck, breathing in his sweetness, his strength, his love. Days later the indentations of my feet in the snow are discovered. "Did you go outside?" my husband asks me.

"Yes," I reply. He leaves it at that, uninterested in the reason for my winter balcony escapade, just as he is uninterested in all of the parts of my life. Never knowing he is the reason I looked down at uncertain fate and contemplated my mortality.

When I finally escaped my husband, I felt the emptiness Plath felt when she found herself alone. Sleep alluded me, life alluded me. I read from Ariel, lingering over "Lady Lazarus," a longtime favorite poem, reflecting on my own history, reflecting on my own unwillingness to continue.

"Soon, soon the flesh
The grave cave ate will be
At home on me

And I a smiling woman.
I am only thirty.
And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.
What a trash
To annihilate each decade."

I spent the night hours on the balcony, cigarette in hand, reading the poems aloud, wondering how to continue.

May 1998

Sixteen years old, sixteen years of abuse, sixteen years of wanting to be finished with this thing called "life" ...but sixteen pills wasn't enough. Mood stabilizers, not a whole lot of stability as I washed down the pills. Irony, symbolism, tragedy...it would make for a great story, if anyone would tell it.

Lying in bed, stomach churning, my mother, not knowing what I had done, tried to rouse me with screaming, with fists. Assuming me another lazy, drunken teenager, she leaves and I sleep...for sixteen hours.

Awake and nauseated, I stumble from my room, devastated that my plan didn't work. Devising a new strategy, I knew the 2am train would be a sure thing.

The next day those who knew me best saw it on my face, under the bruises, deep in my eyes...my soul screamed with despair. They summon men with a straight jacket and butterfly nets. Rooms spinning, one after another, doors locked from the outside, doctor after doctor, I remind myself...the 2am train would be a sure thing.

How do I express sixteen years of tragedy? Of trauma? Of abuse, murder, rape? If it was traumatic, I had experienced it and I was done. Forced to sleep on a bare mattress outside of a nurses station, nothing but a hospital gown and sheet to hide under...if I didn't want to die before, I certainly did now.

Three months of staring out the window of the hospital, longing for the sunlight I never got to feel on my skin. Three months of digging into my "psyche," three months of zombie pills and fucked up teenagers. Wanting a home, an actual family, a little stability. Doctor after doctor try to medicate these desires out of me, to make me unsure of what I'm longing for, yet I long nonetheless. In my head I hear "Lady Lazarus" on a loop:

"Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.

I do it so it feels real.

I guess you could say I've a call.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.

It's easy enough to do it and stay put..."

My parents come in to consult with the doctors, family therapy, evaluations and there's an explosion of light bulbs over the heads of the overlords of this unique version of Hell. "If I had parents like that, I'd want to kill myself too," the faceless doctor tells me, "there's nothing wrong with you." They're wrong, the 2 am train would be a sure thing. Nevertheless, I'm glad to get out and back into the sunlight...not so glad to be returning to the illusion of "home."

My mother's younger brother, more of a big brother to me than an uncle, returns from the Army to babysit me. We were always close when he could be bothered to be around. I always felt like he was a protector...my protector. He paces my bedroom as I tell him everything...EVERYTHING!

"You stole my favorite shirts," he barks, pulling the Grateful Dead, Rush, IU and Notre Dame t-shirts off hangers from my open closet as I say to him, "The 2am train would be a sure thing."

He turns and looks at me sitting cross-legged on my bed, his expression unreadable. The

seconds pass into minutes as the silence deepens, our eyes locked. "Get some sleep," he finally says, and walks from my room, shirts in hand.

The morning sun awakens me from a drug induced sleep and I smile as I notice the stack of folded t-shirts left at the foot of my bed. I don't see my brother figure in the morning...just more doctors as they check my dosage, sanity, etc. Two weeks go by in a medicated blur. The next doctor check comes and I'm abandoned at the clinic. There's been a family tragedy, I'm told...I won't be able to handle it, I'm told...your mother may be lying, I'm told.

Suspiciously, with a hint of dread and a knot forming in my stomach, I ask what happened. "Your mother said your uncle killed himself, but we honestly think she's making this up."

"Which uncle?" I ask, the knot making it impossible to breathe, something tells me this isn't another lie.

"She said the one you call your brother...something about a train." My knees buckle and my head screams, "THE 2AM TRAIN WOULD BE A SURE THING!!"

What kind of a person would subject their family to that kind of pain twice, now I'm trapped. Stuck in a life that I did not hope for, did not dream of. Every time I manage to pry part of me free, I feel the lid slam closed again and there I am...sitting in the stagnant air, breathing in my own exhalations...my own personal Bell jar. I endlessly spin my wheels, always trying to get somewhere, be something, but it's all for naught.

If I work harder at school, I let down my kids. If I work harder to be the mom they deserve, my schooling suffers. My friends tire of my inability to play on their schedules and disappear. My family has given up on me. Regardless of what I do, I'm letting someone down...it's exhausting.

Keeping all these balls in the air...having a vivid picture of the life I crave for myself and my children, yet cannot obtain, is exhausting. So here I sit, wheels spinning, trying my damndest to get somewhere...but never really moving.

"There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
For the hearing of my heart—
It really goes.

And there is a charge, a very large charge
For a word or a touch
Or a bit of Blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes."