

## **The Pond**

**By Adair Broughton**

The pond reflected winters' awakening. Naked and swaying branches in clear but cold sky danced in whispering torment, reaching down to the girl with mocking and teasing gesture. She sat on the old log that had survived seasons and acted as a seat of quiet in which her thoughts could drown but keep her dry.

Hours of her life had been lost in sad torment sitting and staring at the water that looked so calm and innocent but in reality was a silent killer. Pond water from her brothers' happy splashes had hit her face and in her memory tears now did the same.

Her weekly trips gave a freedom to talk that helped expel thoughts that could only simmer and hurt if left unspoken. Her brother listened intently even if his grave was not where he rested; it was still where he had drowned, where life had passed his lips never to return. There was no one else she could talk to. This was safe; her thoughts still ones of solitude. In speaking them out loud, telling about her life to her lost brother, a burden was always lifted. She felt he was close and strangely the bond had grown with the years as if love was not held up by physical representation. There was a transcendence of thought, still unexplained and mysterious but she was glad for it, accepted its deliverance. Presence could exist outside of the body. This is what she believed.

She watched the small bubbles rise to the surface and float on the crystal surface, until they would pop, like jewels combusting from beauty, as if perfection could only exist momentarily. It was the fish exhaling in their underwater gardens unaware of the eyes that stared above. So much life lost to the unknown she thought. Small waves traversed the pond, affected by a breeze, which was itself as soft as breath. The pond seemed to rise and fall each time by the smallest amount, as if the pond itself had spirit and lungs.

The water looked immaculate but she knew its dangers. They matched her own. Crystal clear at the surface it soon became dark as she tried to look as deep into its depths as she looked into herself. She knew she was the element of water. She felt that inherent dichotomy too, of how something so clear could become so dark so quickly, darker than shadow, when on the surface all anyone could see was lightness. Disregarding what others thought, her reflection often looked back with indifference and she could not understand why.

She wondered whether her parents knew she came here. She had seen no one here since the accident. It was her space, her time, and her guilt that kept her coming back. She could only presume they didn't, or if they did know, they kept a stern silence, respected her grieving and gave her a little space to heal. If only they knew. Yet she had spared them too, at least in some ways. She had spent a long time balancing an equation whose answer she already

knew. Like every equation it was a calculation but now and again the numbers wouldn't add up.

In a few more weeks ice would cover the pond and shine like perfect glass shimmering with silver reflections from the low sun. It was a strange time then, to be haunted by memories, but also to carry on with her life knowing the truth about what had happened. Who was she protecting?

Her brother's face was still so clear under the ice, as if memory could provide a layer of existence that suffocated the reality. He was trapped, inches away from air, inches closer to death, with only the translucent and sparkling spectacle of frozen water to separate the gulf of difference in living for a moment and being dead for an eternity.

Her brother was the only one who knew the truth but he was gone. Had it made her stronger, changed her?

She could still see his silent eyes that stared with disbelief, and the sadness that did not fade with panic. Searching for breath he still looked at her until the end, her end, not his. Whoever said drowning was peaceful? She had to look away but the memory was burnt into her, a memorial of incomprehension.

Time had passed and any thoughts of sacrifice seemed lost to common sense and silence. Her brother was now silent so she was too, to other people. She could not stop visiting, or stop talking to him. Guilt was often nervous chatter, truth a silence that spoke volumes.

Two years had passed and not one person had questioned her since it had happened.

Would there ever be a time when she would tell the truth? Would she ever need to?

The cold breeze began to bite at her cheeks and she could feel the red and rugged glow that it would produce. She liked to feel the cold, it woke her up, gave her an additional perspective on life. She liked putting her hands on her cheeks, to feel her fingers and palm nourished in pockets that warmed her face from idle frigidity.

She would start the walk home soon, and once again forget about things for a week, enjoy her life and the essence of vitality she conveyed. 'How strong she was' people had said for coping so well with the loss inflicted upon the family. She knew she was strong, but maybe not for that reason. She watched her exhale, the white mist like a spirit departing.

She often wished for irony but all that was left was a bitter and stagnant aftertaste. She was glad of the peace the pond had provided, was glad she gave her brother that same peace.

She looked up at her house, pausing for long moments like she did every time, as if this wasn't really her home, as if there was a sad barrier of reflection she had to pass through. She closed the door behind her, looked at the parents she loved. They were both sitting down on the breakfast table, serious looks on their faces. She knew something was wrong. Her heart beat steady even though small tingles of nerves swept her body.

Her father spoke first.

"We have some good news to tell you."

She wondered why she had felt the trepidation if it was good news, but her parents did not seem sure of themselves, nervous of talking to her. Even if the 'relationship' with her brother had improved, she could not say the same of her parents. There was a distance that separated and she felt there always would be. They were not to fault, not like she was, but they did not know her brother like she did.

"You do?"

"Yes, I'll let your mother tell you."

"Hi,"

"Hi mum."

"So, the news I guess" the Mother said beaming a smile. "Your father and I are expecting a child, a baby brother or sister for you."

This was unexpected. Her thoughts meandered through concern and sadness. Were they trying to get rid of the memory of her brother? She did not want this, felt claustrophobic, hurt that they could even contemplate forgetting their son. She felt alone all over again when she knew she should have been feeling the adverse of that.

Her thoughts became a foggy tunnel that focussed back to that day he had drowned. She had seen him fall in the ice, as if he was made of liquid himself, melting from the world, disappearing into the water in slow motion, a surrealistic calmness juxtaposed to the sudden panic she knew she should have felt.

She still did not know how it happened but the ice had refrozen almost instantaneously, covering his escape route and his air. She had moved to the edge of the pond, stared, as if curiosity and uncertainty were more powerful than panic or care. Then she had turned away from his eyes, there had been something about that look which had haunted her at the time. It had taken many hours of sitting on that log to rid herself of the unease of that memory.

She heard her father's voice as if in a distance, a shallow echo entering her hidden cave.

She remembered back to her brother, finally turning round and not seeing him, knowing he had sunk to the shallow depths of death. She had stood watching the pond, the ice a white barrier that she had not tried to break. She thought of the slow walk back and informing her parents, their shock hiding her own composure.

Now her mother was talking but the words were not forming, she heard something about looking faint.

She was lying on her bed; still no words had formed since her parents had told them of the pregnancy. She had ignored the knocks on her door, feigned sleep. There was a lot to think about. They wanted some words from her, a reaction, her thoughts, some recognition of acceptance, support in their decision but all she had was what she had given her brother. Silence.