

Stella Harris
The Loud Sound of Silence

She wasn't beautiful in the sense of impossibly silky hair or the enviable ski slope nose; she wasn't cut out for glossed over magazine ads or prom queen glory.

But she had this laugh.

It was the kind of laughter that I felt too insecure to let out myself; it represented the sort of joy that I hoped my little sister felt entitled to experience. She was all of that to me.

None of us saw it coming. None of us knew; she had never told us. We had never asked.

She didn't believe that she deserved to live. She thought she was doing us a favor. And I had no way to make her see, make her realize how she had changed so many people's lives, how she deserved more than to survive; she was entitled to be happy, to feel important and valued and understood. When she came back to school, her wrists bandaged and her eyes utterly empty, none of us knew what to do. She had never told us, sure, but I'm damn sure she had tried. And every single one of us had failed to listen. We had brushed off her silence as mood swings, excused her sudden fondness of hard liquor in alarming amounts as a fun party quirk.

All I wanted was for her to remember the good parts of it all, how I used to sing Beyoncé songs when she entered the room because her thighs were so toned from crew, or how she'd crack up at my apathetic eye rolls while everyone else saw them as cold. Didn't she remember the night that we spent in the soccer field, when the guys had one too many and streaked stark naked to our utterly astonished fits of laughter? Or that time just the two of us left the house party at that artist's loft, how we wandered out into the snowbanks, split an order of greasy fries before she held my hand for balance as we stumbled two miles home at sunrise? Or that laugh of hers. I needed her to see it like we all did, to know how much of a powerful light in the dark it was for all of us except her, the one who truly needed it. After that night, each time I saw her the blurry rush of my thoughts would become maniacal. I wanted to shove it all down her throat, almost more for my own comfort than hers. But all I could ever force myself to do was stare at the ground, picking at my stupid cuticles, reopening the old scrapes and scabs.

Pathetic.

Right before that first attempt, I had come across a quote that read, "Dead people receive more flowers than the living ones because regret is stronger than gratitude." At the time I scoffed at such a cynical idea. Maybe others, I had thought scornfully, but not me. Never me. I appreciated the people I loved and made sure that they understood that. I was grateful for everyone in my life. Of course I was.



Wilderness House Literary Review 12/2

A week later and here I was, considering whether or not to bring flowers to her hospital bed. There was nothing grateful about it; it had everything to do with regret. So yes, maybe she hadn't told us; maybe we truly had never known.

But if she had tried, I doubt we would have listened anyways.