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The bloom and loss, of friends

You don't realize it, but you just end up swimming, one day or the other. I don't know why it happens, or how even, it just—ends up that way.

The only thing I can say I suppose is that, it is the closest any of us would ever have, to flying.

The robot men flew up into the sky and so did the jet riders. And we just stayed on the earth in a six by twenty-nine school pool, or air simulator as they call it.

And this was one of those days, where we just end up swimming.

He splashed water into my face.

"Score one for the Imperial Jets!!" he said, raising a water clung fist into the air.

"Not if the Republic comes in!" and I splash a wave up to him. Whenever we fight in the pool he always chooses the empire. I don't know why, not like we would ever end up in that fight.

"Did you hear?" I asked, looking up as we were floating, into the sky. "It's rounding up."

"Ahhh!..." he said with terror screeched sigh, he really hated that, he was always hoping for a chance that he would fly. "Pftw!..." He didn't say anything, but splashed some more water at the vacant wall of a pool, and I just looked on, not saying anything, I mean—what can I say, that he was wrong to wait, that they're gonna come back and lord it all over us—please, I'd rather be spared of that already.

"So what do you plan on doing?" I asked him. And he stopped in his act of bitter splashing.

"What?!" he was obviously tired and pissed, but I asked again, anyway.

"You got any plans?"

"Nah," he said floating up again, looking to the sky "as always..."

"'as always...' huh?"

"Yeah, as always..." we stayed that way for a moment, silent and floating, adrift, looking up at the sky for what seemed an eternity.

And that eternity of an afternoon went. School bell rang, and we were all called to leave and head off orderly.

"Aren't you at least happy?" I asked him, on our ways back home.

"Yeah—sure." He sure didn't sound it. And then under a clump of banyan trees. Their shaded root leaves, warming us with the noon-time breeze, it was, soothing. "Tsk..." he did something in his unusual manner of a hiss and a click of the tongue, really, it's just a failure to sound anything, remotely, manly. It's sad really "I hate this. Let's go do something."

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"What?" I sensed trouble ahead.

"Let's go fuck somebody up."

"Huh?"

"Well, come on."

"Who?" I said, running along after him, the trees passing in rotoscopic shades.

"Anybody!" he screamed back, through the rush of the wind, and autumn's hand passed and all the leaves, at once, and all the branches reached out for heaven, and so he did seem to fly in that wind—I stopped in my tracks and waited. He looked back, only after a long way, when he realized I was no longer besides him. He didn't say anything, just stared—it spoke of only one word, traitor. And he left, running along. And I just stayed there.

It was only the wind that kept running after him.

I only heard of what he did at school the next day. It was spoken in eyeing whispers between classmates, most of the eyes on me, of course.

"Why is *he* here?"

"Where did *he* go when he needed him?"

"Huh, what a traitor."

"A fool."

"Both of them really."

"Yeah."

And what he did? He just picked a fight with some upper classmen and got the shit beat out of him, it was said, or—at least, really, it was whispered that he would never walk perfectly right again, one leg, always lagging behind the other, he was a pretty good runner.

The teachers called me up of course, and asked if I knew about it and I said I didn't. They didn't believe me of course, and tried many methods of persuasion, from threats of suspension, to public shaming, to beating, and finally of course, the kind looks of coercing. But I didn't say a thing. And really, I didn't know that was what he was gonna do, but you know what I mean?

Only, I couldn't say a thing.

"Well...", they said, "we are glad at least, you didn't get hurt?" I only nodded once, and walked out their door, and I think I heard some of them whisper, what a cold little kid and I guess I was, a cold, little kid.

I saw him again, soon enough. And he looked as fine as anyone in his state could be. For the first few months he walked around in crutches, and for the few months there was also a cloud of kids all around him, girls too—and that lasted pretty long.

They treated him like some kind of golden idol, like something to be worshipped. I didn't mind any of that, only thing was—well, he didn't talk to me anymore. I always suspected it was because of the throng of people

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around him and when he got better and when they got the better hang of his rough personality and dispersed, still, he was silent.

I'd see him in the pool from time to time, he'd be swimming in there and even in there, his leg lagged, behind the other. And it was like the water dragged him down further. I was even worried for a few moments that he'd drown right before me, but he was fine, a tough mother fucker he is.

He swam on, alone, and I waited at the far edge, in the shade of the bench for him to be over and he'd come plopping out of the water, all diagonal and flipping about his legs over the pool's edge like flippers, and setting them there he'd wipe them down, and he'd get up, imbalanced for a few moments, then all set straight, and limp, and hop, and walk away.

I didn't know what to say to him.

So I just waited, till the night came from the shade. It was only at that time that I had the pool to myself and that I swam fine, when no eyes were upon me, no whispers, no cold chills as they eye'd me with disgust and hatred, for what? You'd have to ask them, cause I don't know a damn thing about it.

I guess it's just simpler to kick somebody when they're down, and somebody should be down, not everybody can be up, I'd guess, I wouldn't know that. The only thing that was for certain, and the one thing that only bothered me, was that he ignored me, he is no longer with me to watch up at the sky, to swim together, to play together, to talk, to argue, to fight. I had nothing of the kind to say more.

Many winters passed, and the war was over, and everyone forgot about that, about me or him, or anything, consumed by their new thoughts and feelings.

I'm surprised to say myself, that I had found myself a girlfriend. I don't know why, maybe she just wanted a boyfriend? Either way, it was kind of her, I guess.

And I guess she sort of liked me and I sort of liked her, and we got caught up in the days like that. The days, passed.

And I'd see him and his limp was getting better, he was getting taller too and so was I. He played football from time to time, alone in the gym court.

I would be there, watching from the door wide open, and he'd see me too. But he'd never ask me to play, not once, so I'd walk away when the time passed.

I'd play basketball alone too, in the park-court, sometimes with the girl watching me, sometimes not, either way, it was fine for me. All I needed was that ball, and that court, and maybe some lamp lights, except of course when the moon shined. At that time even through the morn, I'd be fine.

I don't swim so much anymore, I don't know if he still does, I never had a chance to go back to that place, anymore. I was either alone or wasting time with the girl, she was a slob like me too, not studying, just fucking about, going to parks and all and arcades, it was a good way to

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pass the time. But sometimes, when the wind picked up, and everything reached for the sky, I'd rather be, alone. But hey—it's nice.

And in the mornings, in the great blue and yellow mornings, I'd never want to leave or even try to get out of bed, my coffin bed, it'd be pretty nice to just curl up in there.

So much time passed and so much nothing happened that I didn't have to say to him anymore, or any reason to. There was no longer a war, there were no longer the old games of war, there was still the pool but I didn't swim, I don't know about him, and there was that girl for me, and I don't know about him. And even that girl would ask me sometimes, what is it with me and him, and I shrug and smile and say

"Nothing."

"Um..." she said, unbelieving. "Nothing, huh."

"What?"

"Strange?" a color came into her eyes.

"What is?"

"There's just this air about you two, some connection."

"Oh." I didn't say anything against it. So maybe I must...

"But I guess, it's not enough sometimes..."

"No." I said.

"I had a friend—like that—I didn't know what happened." She said, smiling through squinted eyes, tears at their edges. "I'd see her—sometimes," she said, wiping at them "but every time, I couldn't move past it."

"What?"

"That barrier—that connection." And we walked on over the bend, the cherries, blooming—and I guess, I understand.