

An Afternoon's Elegy

Five minutes can send your head swimming in bedlam. An insignificant amount of hours can alleviate and put you in a state of acceptance and denial all at once. Then a day that indefinitely distorts into night can have you feeling shitty as ever as the truth doesn't spare the pain in delivering itself like a hammer to the skull.

And five minutes was all it took to distort a normal day.

I seem to be telling this story backwards, almost as backwards as this whole situation seemed. There is a beginning.... The uninteresting beginning: my mother cleaning every crevice of the house, and my frivolously compensating for a week of lost practice on my violin. Bella, my Siberian Husky, was sprawled out somewhere in the living room, where she usually was.

Barely audible underneath the rhythm I was rehearsing was the sound of howling. I slung my bow off of the strings to listen to my surroundings as the vibrations under my chin clamored until they were inaudible. Had that noise just come from Bella? "Bella, what's wrong?" My mom asked. "What's the matter sweetie?" She continued as her silhouette disappeared into the living room.

When I reached the family room, Mom was crouching over Bella and stroking the top of her head, which was unnaturally lying on the wooden shelf of a piece of furniture. Her chest was unsteadily and stiffly heaving. Even my violin appeared uncomfortable as I set it down against a pillow on the stiff living room couch. It was impossible in that moment to perceive the symbolism it would later hold when I returned home and found it calmly laying right where I had left it; a bold statement as it seemed so exposed and lonely on the starch white couch.

"She won't close her mouth." My mom mumbled. Bella's eyes were wide, and the way she so vacantly stared into space made it appear as if she was unaware that we were hanging over her. The sporadic admission of air filled her stomach and I prayed that these determined breaths weren't numbered. I was afraid to pet her anywhere close to her stomach, as if my touch would deflate her lungs with the air she seemed to be fighting for.

It didn't take long for Bella's tongue to creep out of the slit that was her open mouth. It was the color of the sickest bruise, a purple and blue that would send a shiver up your spine, especially seeing it attached to something still breathing.

Mom started to apply pressure to Bella's quivering chest with clasped hands. At some point, her cell phone started to ring, yet neither my mom nor I twitched in an attempt to answer the phone. Although leaving the phone unanswered was an act of courtesy, it was eerie to hopelessly whisper our love and stroke our vanishing pet to the infinitely repeating hum and sensuality of steel drums.

As quickly as everything had started, it ended. It was startlingly similar to and critically-acclaimed drama when the tragic hero's grip loosens on the helpless character's desperate hand, and he appears to be as unnecessary as a table's centerpiece decoration. Bella went from looking as erect as the wood her head rested upon, to limp and still.

"Bella?" Mom's voice had a tinge of panic to it.

No acknowledgement.

"Bella?" Now it hardly sounded like she had a voice at all, it was so high and hoarse. One of Mom's hands contained sorrow as she covered her mouth and her eyes began to close, and the other held apprehension as she placed it on Bella's arm and shook it a little bit. Bella's body reverberated against Mom's jostling, but she settled back to being peacefully still.

Mom shook her again. Bella's head had sagged towards the corner of the wooden shelf, and her eyes became no more visible than two barely recognizable pools of blue.

I threw myself onto the floor and stared at Bella. I hugged my mom. I started to cry. On occasion, Bella's body would stiffen and she would gasp, we assume as a reflex that continues even after a creature has passed away. Mom left me alone with Bella and called the vet. In a whirlwind of foolish optimism, as Bella seemed to be gasping more frequently, I performed CPR on a dead dog until we dragged her onto a maroon blanket for her last car ride.

Once in the car, I glanced at the body perfectly nestled in the blanket behind me. The car made a turn and she languidly followed. I felt sick.

After a drive that will forever remain suspended in time, the car finally pulled under an overhang at the vet's office, and mother told me to wait in the car while she spoke to the vet. I looked back again at Bella, and began to pet her... just in case she wanted company. If there was any chance she was alive, it was gone because it had taken so long to get to the vet. Then I started talking to her. I didn't say much, I just said "My Bella..." I gently patted her head and grabbed her ear between my fingers. "...hi." As demented as it seemed to address her with a greeting, it was all I dared to utter. Words seemed irrelevant and corrupt amongst a moment so surreal. In spite of all that had disappeared so quickly, I smiled as tears trickled down my nose and effortlessly danced from my cocked head as they plummeted into the depths of her thick fur.

A man and a woman were walking briskly behind my mom as she reappeared from the vet's office. The man climbed into the van and bent over Bella to check for a pulse. He stayed like that for a long while. The woman nonchalantly and correctly comforted my mom. "And, mm, at least she passed on listening to her violin." She mused. The woman then peeked over the man still rummaging for a pulse that may be buried within the greatest depths of Bella, and gave me one of the most polite grins I have ever received, and waved to me. I smiled at her; but seeing as she had brought up such a

powerful point, that Bella had died while I was practicing, made me quickly turn away and let the tears mercilessly flow once more.

Eventually, I caught glimpse of the man in the backseat pursing his lips and ever so slightly shaking his head. He got out of the car, and soon enough, Bella did too. I will never forget the man and woman grabbing onto the ends of the blanket as I watched an undefined lump resting within the blanket travel away with them. A familiar black and white tail that my brother and I would bop around as young children curled out of the blanket.

The profound strength of “goodbye” at last struck me, and I bravely watched as they carried my best friend away.