An Awkward Goodbye, Promised a New Vision

By Tyler P. Fick

She said to me before she left for college, don't forget to call. It's not that I forgot, it's just that I didn't want to. So what if we haven't really talked for about four months, not to mention those lost nights in the summer. *I think every thing will be normal when she and I say hello again. I think it won't be awkward at all. Nope, I am not scared in the least bit to see her again.*

I have been thinking a lot about hellos lately. Probably because there have been so many reunions. College brings with it so many so many hellos. Coming back home for the first time since you left brings hellos that feel like you never left or ones that feel like you should never come back again. What does it mean when you say hello to someone, and then they immediately look away from your eyes? Probably nothing, right? I am just over analyzing our first hello since our last goodbye. She has recently done that to me a lot. I can remember all she meant to me, and I am wondering how I have let her drift so far away. But maybe this time, I shouldn't blame myself. It isn't like this is how I wanted it to be. It just seems to hurt less so I am going with it. Why am I happy about this? Why am I not fighting my decision more? Why do I feel leaving her life is the only way?

She and I became friends by mistake. I stumbled upon her at a dance. I had known her since eighth grade but our friendship was never established among our peers until sophomore year. The object of my affection that night was a boy wearing an orange shirt. Orange is my favorite color. I remember her laughing at me as she insisted we follow him around the entire night. She told me that she went down to Ocean City, Maryland with him every summer. I went down to the ocean with her that summer. She and I became inseparable.

Looking back, maybe our friendship was based on the all the wrong things, maybe she and I rushed into things, maybe I labeled her my hero too soon. But you see Susanne had this way of talking to me without even opening her mouth. I utterly adored her. She was a bag of mixed emotions; everyday was something new and her problems always seemed to mean the end of the world, little or big. She was sometimes very sad. Her life was dedicated to ice skating before me; her mom had passed away when she was eight, and she had a rebel for a little sister whom she tried to be a mother too. I had never met anyone like her. Her life was destructive, and she brought me down with her. But I almost worshipped the fact that she made me reach lows I had never experienced. I thought she was only opening my soul. I thought her to be some kind of soul mate for me. Now, here I sit writing our eulogy basically. Our friendship has died, and time has really only poured salt on our open wounds. She thinks the distance has been good. But the truth is, she just doesn't know how with each passing day I spend a part from her, I long to see her less. And she just doesn't know with the distant between us growing wider, the more I worship my other friends for actually sticking around.

Now, I often wonder if she was a dream. If she ever crosses my mind anymore, I often feel as if I am thinking of someone that I had made up, another character for my stories. I am only truly reminded that she was real when I see a summer moon. Then and only then I know she was real. She was my summer friend, never before had I ever connected with someone like I connected with Susanne, along the shoreline of a beach night. She was my soul mate then. She was my summer friend.

I gave her, her first beer. That was our thing. We would stay all day on the beach, sitting in the sun, soaking up each other's souls. During the night we would head down to the beach and get drunk together. Those are some of my happiest memories. Sometimes we would invite others to come with us, but in the end it was always just Susanne and Tyler, even if the others had stayed. That's the way I liked it anyway. I can remember how she looked when I handed her that beer. She was scared. She was innocent; nothing had been truly tarnished inside her yet. At the time, only 16, I considered myself *an expert* on drinking because I had been drinking for the *eternity of a year*. I told her not to be scared, its just plain fun. She opened it, we toasted to each other and we got drunk that night. Today I hold on to that night, and I am wishing for it back. After that, I introduced her to a boy. I introduced her to the girls with the high ponytails tied brightly with a colored ribbon at "that" lunch table. I introduced her to her first party. Sometimes I wish I had never done any of that.

I always called her my summer friend. She and I would tear up the summer. With our little bronzed faces, we would smile and I remember lighting up the world as a duo. She never saw the world like I did. I don't really know how she looked at the world. Her depression is indescribable. It is a problem she has yet to confront. Maybe that is what has destroyed her today. She just needs to get her vision fixed that's all. Then her sadness would go away.

After that first beer, there was more to follow. It wasn't cleaning up after her that bothered me; it was driving her home. Driving her home and helping her stumbling body walk up the stairs to an empty house, and tucking her into a cold bed. No, I didn't like that very much. I can remember asking her a thousand times if she was okay. She would always whisper a slurred yes. But she never really was. When I confronted her, I remember her anger. She had a wild temper. No, I didn't like that either. Sure, I had other friends. But those friends weren't her; they didn't understand me like she did. It was so hard for me to realize at only seventeen, staring down onto her enraged face to accept the fact she didn't even really understand. We still went down to the beach that year together and we still stayed out all day long. Then she and I would go home and sit on the back porch watching the waves, as soon as the first star appeared; once again we would attack the summer night on the beach. One night I remember placing our chairs on the tip of the shoreline. After a long discussion of emotions, boys, people, she paused for a bit. She paused and I almost spoke her next words for her because I knew what was going to come out of her mouth. She always talked about her mom, I forgot to tell you that. I knew she was getting tired when she would talk about her mom, because her mom always was the last thought that would go through her head before her body would succumb to the pressure of sleep. She would always cry too. She taught me so much by the shoreline. I don't remember how it started, but I stood up and she followed my lead. Her eyes were teary, even through the darkness I could recognize that. I hugged her. Then out of the night air, I heard a rumble, and then I felt quick, stunning breeze of a huge wave coming, more like crashing over us. We both fell down, soaking wet and toppling over each to get up. I laughed to her and said, *"I think that was your mom"*. And she laughed with me and responded with, *"yeah, she just gave us a hug"*. It was stuff like that; those moments happened all the time with Susanne and no one understood. No one understood, but the two of us.

In senior year, Susanne stopped drinking and all of a sudden she hated everything that had to do with it. She hated "that" lunch table, she hated those drunk boys, she hated those teenage parties. She hated the world I lived in. She worked on her grades, spent her

days with people better for her reputation, and she started to smile even when she was sad. Somehow through all these changes, she even managed to steal the light that had once shined down upon me. I saw less and less of the person I knew her to be. Instead I saw an image of the person she thought she was supposed to be. She was always changing. She was a cheerleader with the happiest people, she was an artistic soul with the artists and confused writers, and she was an intelligent debater with the honor students. She was always changing. Sometimes I couldn't keep up with her, nor would she slow down for me. I guess that is hard to do though. As she floated around everyday quoting the gospel and inspirational quotes, I stayed by her side even though I didn't understand what she was doing or what she intended to gain. I can still remember we had some nights when I would sneak my mom's car out and go to her house at 2am. She and I would drive around to the lake by our houses and go swimming just because we would miss the ocean so much. She always wanted to go to the lake a lot more than I did. I remember one time, I had heard she had forged a doctor's note to get out of school early. When my last class was done, I left school and went straight to the lake. I never found her, but I dreamed I did. I dreamed I found her wading in the water. It was a perfectly white scene. Snow was undisrupted, only the one track of her footprints could be seen, the thin ice on the water held about an inch of white snowflakes on it. She stood in a crack of ice, fully dressed, as silent as the snow itself. I went down beside her, dipped my shoes in the lake water as she had done then I took her hand and we stood there together, as silent as the snow.

I guess when we graduated, I kinda already knew she was gone. I didn't know her anymore really. Even though I pretended I did. She was everything to me, and she didn't even know how her absence had hurt me. She was too blind to see. Her sadness was something I could not cure, even though I longed for a way. There wasn't much I could do; I could not beg her to stay. I could not beg her to change.

I went down to the beach with her that summer as always, but this summer we never soaked each other with our souls, and I never saw the shoreline of a summer night with her. An era was over. I stopped talking to her, she met a boy and that was that.

I remember she called me the night before she left for college for the first time in a long time. She asked if I would come over and bid her goodbye. I sensed a bit of my old summer friend in her tone. She suggested a late night swim. I said no coldly and full of revenge, then I hung up. Crying and pleading, she called back about a half an hour later. I heard that temper again; she accused me of being a bad friend to her because I wouldn't at least spend five minutes with her before our life, as a duo would change forever. I hated her at the moment she made that comment. Our life as a duo changed a while ago, but her vision didn't allow her to see that…I guess. I told her that maybe I would stop by if I had any spare time between other good-byes, then I hung up.

I did go to her house that night. Against everything I believed I went over there, I think expecting the same summer friend. And I walked up those same stairs that she once stumbled upon, I opened the door to that empty house, I walked towards her cold bed, she was packing. I stood in the doorway silent until she finally looked up at me. In that single moment, I had seen how far apart the two of us had become. I moved in closer to her, but as I sat down on her carpet and listened to her talk, I had never felt more far away. It was obvious she was nervous about being alone with me. It was obvious our friendship was now nothing more than a feeling inside both our bodies that we had to be polite to each other, like it was some kind of rule that we were suppose to stay *friends forever*. Blah,

blah, blah, I hated it. I never really looked at her. I didn't really want to though, too scared I guess I might even find a glimmer of the person I once found her to be for me and then I would stay in her destructive life. I do remember though, looking up at her once. I remember I looked at her because she had stopped talking and the silence began to sting, so I looked up to see what she was doing. She was staring at something in her hand. If I remember correctly, she was looking at a photograph. Susanne saved photographs like no one I had ever met before. She had only a couple of her, my friends and I. And I often wondered why she even saved those ones because I thought when she stopped sitting at our lunch table and began to roll her eyes when we laughed that she had began to hate them. I could tell just by how she bit her bottom lip that she wanted to be in that picture that she held in her hand. The picture was taken of her, my friends and I at a dance. I had my arms around her. I laughed to myself because I remembered a boy had dared us to take five shots of tequila, and I can still hear her raising her glass to me as we clinked our sixth shot together. *"That was when I was friends with all of them; that was a good night,"* The emotion in Susanne's was almost haunting. I guess it was kind of scary for her to be staring down at a stranger. I thought about how much I used to love it when people would ask if she and I were twins down at the beach. She was right, in the picture Susanne looked really happy, that had been a really good night.

I soon finally found the courage to tell Susanne I needed to go home. It was an awkward goodbye. Nothing could really be said, I guess she knew then that I was not going to stay by her side this time.

I have only one picture of her up in my dorm room. Our little bronzed bodies, those world-blinding smiles, that fantastic duo. I was supposed to see her over our Thanksgiving break, but I never did. Sometimes I like to sit in my dorm room and blame the whole thing on the fact she and I are at college. And if we went to the same college, our lives would be different. Maybe they would. But maybe it is better to love and then loose. Maybe there is a lesson in here somewhere.

So, now what am I supposed to do? She called me last night. She made me laugh. She said she was sorry. She said that she knows I come home tomorrow for winter break. She suggested a late night swim. I am afraid. I have no idea where her depression has taken her now; I have no idea why she always returns to me. I have no idea why I always let her. Her future is so unknown. I wonder if she will even be alive. Maybe I am right to think of her as a ghost. Her soul left her body years ago, now she just wanders around in places where people can't see her. She still spits our words of better days, rainbows at the end of a rainstorm, and of a love that one day I will feel. I know she has better days, and I know she has loved and felt guilty for not giving that complete package of love and happiness back, but I can only hope that she will reach her rainbow that ends her rainstorm. The truth is, now I am confronted with the full knowledge that tomorrow when I pick her up at 2am and take her from her cold bed, I will have to look in her eyes, say hello, and then immediately look away. I had a dream though. I had a dream that I looked straight into her eyes. She took my hand, and we pretended the lake was our summer home. I took the hand of her ghost in my dream; her body was to numb for me to feel much less grasp. I said goodbye to the memories. I said goodbye to my summer friend and welcomed in the winter. It was an awkward goodbye.