

Afterlife – Sofia Cyan, Year 7, VIC

The wedding bells chimed, a melodic chiming coming from the nearby town.

It was almost time, a beautiful warning. A magnificent arch, decorated with flowers ranging from vivid lilacs and pink roses, stood tall and grand at the end of the aisle. The benches were full, flooding with guests wearing suits and prim dresses that reached their ankles, mingling with one another. We were in the middle of a meadow. A meadow which I used to play in as a child before I moved to the city. It hadn't changed in the slightest detail. Sure, there were now new flowers and the dim clouds that constantly shadowed the meadow were now gone, but that feeling of safety - of welcome and faith - would never fade, even with time.

It was a big moment. Arguably one of the most significant in the history of this little, remote town.

It reminded me of when I once thought I could reach this special point of my life. I was filled with naivety and clouded with delusion that my life was growing and expanding for the better. That I could turn over a new leaf and start fresh.

When I was once filled with enough love and hope that I thought it would guide me until the very end.

“Their love is so beautiful isn't it?” I looked over my pale shoulder, staring at the conversing women behind me, both plump and old and covered in cheap jewellery.

“It's too bad that that girl ruined him, wasn't it? I heard Diana proposed to him 3 times before he committed - lad, didn't even have it in him to do it himself. They say it was because of that girl that died - real shame isn't it?”

A familiar pang of an unknown feeling enclosed itself around my heart, building a familiar wall of mellow feelings around the organ. It's not like I haven't heard nonchalant conversations like this - you hear everything when no one sees you - but it certainly never becomes a thing you can desensitise yourself towards.

The events are over - they were only 5 years ago, is what I want to shout. The past is in the past - that past haunts people, so why weren't you one of them, is what I want to yell to his face. Time can heal all wounds - betrayals hurt more than death, is what I want to whisper into her ear until that's all she can remember.

Every smile I cherished when I was with him, every ounce of kindness I gave towards her, every salty tear I wasted on the both of them. Especially him: every small kiss of gratitude, love and passion, no longer important. Because he was marrying someone else. A gorgeous, flawless bride that is not me. Especially her: every moment I ever trusted her with my heart and soul, because she threw it away as soon as she heard the news of my suicide. The cause

of sobs and heartbreak towards my single mother, a mother who was barely surviving but still wanted to give her child a life filled with opportunities, she saw it as a sly opportunity. I regret loving them both.

A best friend, I would once call her. A life companion, I would always think to myself. A traitor and actress, is what's imprinted in my soul now.

All those memories that kept me going until I couldn't do it anymore, they were all for nothing except the burn of humiliation, pain, regret and misery they brought along with them. Those memories and feelings I felt were now tainted. Today they weren't giving me a single glance; not past me, once their friend and lover, nor the me as a ghost filled with haunting memories, brooding at the centre of their wedding. It was a different kind of pain when you don't cry anymore: all you can do is accept it.

I remember the first time I cried in front of him - in front of Archer. I was a mess reeking of pain and a magnet of all things that could hurt someone. But Archer didn't care. He didn't mind that I was sobbing so much my tears were forming small puddles on his bed. No, he only cared that I thought to bring myself to him and not to anyone else. Because he was the type of guy to put the happiness and wellbeing above his own - even if it resulted in stained bed sheets and clothing.

"Hey, I got you, it's ok." He placed my head in the crook of his neck. "I'll make sure you're ok, I promise. I'll always catch you. Forever and always."

And he did that, he caught me when I fell. He saved me when I tripped and he saved me the first time I was standing on the brink of life. He saved me in so many ways it would take me an entire lifetime to repay him back. He was my soulmate, and I was his, even if it was for a short amount of time.

Funnily enough, he'd also damaged me enough times that it would take me a lifetime to make it even.

He broke my heart when I needed his heart most.

"I can't do this anymore," he whispered to me as he clutched my hands and wiped the pouring water from my cheeks. "I love you, Calypso. But you're like a poison, turning everything good rotten without even realising it. I'm just trying to protect Diana, you know. It's what's best for all of us."

I couldn't believe it. The fabric of my shirt was sticking to my skin despite the chilly breeze coursing through the air, my brain was a delirious haze. I don't remember who left first and if they looked back. I couldn't make sense of anything. He said he would catch me, he would always catch me. That's what he promised.

But he had just let me go and fall for the rest of eternity.

The only good thing in my life had just left me alone. He knew I was struggling but had decided to go for the girl with an easier problem. The girl who wasn't struggling everyday to stay out of poverty, the girl who wasn't struggling everyday to attend school and girlfriends who weren't disappearing on the inside. He wanted to deal with problems that are temporary, not permanent.

He wanted an easy way out.

He wanted someone who didn't poison every pure thing they saw.

I was dragged out of my deep trail of memories by the deafening sound of cheers, whistles and applause. It echoed through the caverns of my ears, hollow and ringing.

I looked up; Diana and Archer. Archer and Diana. White lace and a breathtaking train that was as white as pearls. A black suit that made every other's male look disgraceful. They were both smiling, as if their lives were measured by how hard and true their smiles could be. Their eyes were sparkling with newly shed tears, some escaping now matter the effort they put in. Archer's arms were wrapped around Diana's waist, tight and protective. This was their day, and nothing could ruin it. The sun could come crashing down on Earth and they would still be smiling at one another while everyone else was screaming to their pitiful and agonising deaths.

They were the definition of love. If you looked it up in the dictionary, it would be their names. Archer and Diana. Diana and Archer. Forever bonded in a way I would no longer be to Archer.

And that's when it hit me.

But it wasn't the fact he kissed her with so much passion it moved people to tears, nor was it their uncontrollable squeals and laughter as Archer picked Diana up and spun her around like she was a Disney princess and he was her Prince Charming. It was the amount of admirance, commitment. The overflowing amount of love, passion... and promises.

The moment I heard Archer utter those words, the moment he caressed my head and promised me things I couldn't promise myself - I fell in love. I fell in love with the first thing that showed me a hint of kindness, safety and love. Because I couldn't offer myself that, and I needed it - I craved it more than anything.

Love is a tool, love is a weapon. I let myself hand it out too easily and I suffered the consequences because of it. I let my heart expand too broadly instead of protecting it. I let myself feel love with Archer - a romantic love with which I could only look back on now. I

let myself feel love with Diana - a sisterly, friendship, love. And I couldn't take either of them back, I could never take them back.

The wedding bells would never ring for me.

Even in death, I could still poison the things I touched.

And I would start with myself.