



EYES OPEN, I BREATHE AGAIN
by Samuele Visentin

K. arrives at the seaside spot he rented for the next few weeks. He wanted to escape those feelings of panic and hackneyed dynamics that keep him stuck in a loop of trial and failure back home. How long has it been now since depression loosened its grip on him? Must be more than a solid year and still the rebound from that emotional explosion continues to shake the walls of all places he lays eyes on. Why is it even difficult to remember?, he asks himself. He was there, he knows what happened. This is some bullshit, he thinks, but the memories feel broken and difficult to access. He's been wrongly questioning his past for so long that he now knows emotional autopsy cannot be a form of spiritual recovery. Spotify decides to play *Doomed* by Moses Sumney at random and all of a sudden, the shadows of his unresolved past cast themselves on the walls of the room, like a veiled presence descending out of nowhere.

Time passes and the awareness of geographical distance between him and his daily life gives way to a teenage-like feeling of mindlessness and ease he hadn't felt since 2019. He spends his days between the beach and the house, waking up at 6 am to go have a run and a cold dip in the ocean. He even managed to find some weed on the second day, to make the night feel less lonely and its inhabitants more interesting. The sceneries are beautiful — sandstone cliffs and pine forests all around. A local told him an octopus once stuck to his leg while he was swimming. Since then he's been going into the ocean with an harpoon strapped to his body. It was funny and scary to picture and it made K. ask himself when was the last time he had a problem that wasn't of psychological nature. Maybe that's what loneliness does to you, he thinks.

After a week of resistance and suspiciousness, K. finally gives in. The habits of the holiday replaced the vicious cycles of life as he knows it, and the restlessness he arrived with dissipated into quiet being. If he keeps his head low and his thoughts even lower, he thinks, he'll go back home a new person.

It's morning and he grabs the phone to scroll on the Guardian's website. A huge title in bold letters reads on the homepage: ***Legal definition of woman is based on biological sex, UK supreme court rules.*** What?, he scrambles. When? He skims through the article leaning against the bedpost. "For Women Scotland is financially backed by J.K. Rowling". The pictures show a group of cis women crying and hugging each other as if the war was over. FFS.

How devoid of palatable meaning is this definition of women? Why make it about you even, when it's about independent will and right to self-affirmation? Why the fury against m-to-f individuals specifically? Here is the outline of inverted misogyny for the financially capable. The news reminded him of L., the first trans woman he ever met and a story that she told him the night of their encounter. It never left the back of K.'s head to this day.

She was lively and warm. She told him that once two deranged individuals managed to break into her building. They had come for her. They went straight to her apartment. They banged on the door and windows as violently as possible and screamed "We are gonna fucking k*** you" at the top of their lungs. She was hiding under the kitchen table while this happened, covering her ears and closing her eyes, praying they wouldn't break in.

ALICE AMATI

The image of this young woman hiding under the table continues to resurface every time trans people are a topic of discussion, as if trans people were a debate for the cis. I wonder if those self-proclaimed champions of justice ever spoke to a trans person in their life or only ever heard about them as someone *other* than exists in a distant abstract reality. Fuck this, he says to himself. Enough internet for today.

He packs his bag to go to the beach. A guy he met the night before texted him he would go for a swim close to his house, so he rolls a few joints and heads down. The day is so hot it reminded him of his summers in Italy in the 90s, that tinge orange and yellow the pictures they reminisce. A few dips go by, and he reads a few pages of *Birthday Letters* by Ted Hughes just to put the book down soon after. It's not the vibe today, he thinks.

The guy is here apparently. K. stands up and looks for a tall blond guy. He was so stoned the night before he finds it difficult to remember anything else. He spots him at a distance and his lips pull into a smile. Look at that baby deer, he says to himself. He comes closer waving and smiling and for a split-second sounds are muffled. Inside of him flashes the image of loaded bookshelves falling off a wall in one big crash.

They kiss on the cheek and lie down together just to realise that neither of them is good at small talk, so they jump into the water to think of something to say. He's very fit and it looks like his body protects him like an armour. Or, just or, how about I stop fucking psychoanalysing everything, K. says to himself.

It doesn't take long before the ice breaks and after a few more sustained gazes he comes closer and lays his head on his bicep, close to his armpit. K. brushes his fingers through his hair and he suddenly feels more aware of the blood pumping through his body. He lies lower and they kiss without thinking under a scorching sun. I can't believe I'm here now; he thinks — all that time spent making myself feel like cannon fodder, and I'm still here. Smh.

They go up to the house where K. stays and head to the terrace to look at the view. Some clouds are darkening the horizon, but it doesn't matter. They have sex soon after and it'll feel like the world held them in balance for a few hours.

The day after, K. spends his time tentatively reaching for the phone to send M. a text but pulls away and keeps busy around the house over and over again. Now that he's inside he could read Ted Hughes, and so he does. Incredible how the poet managed to build a ridge inside his poems with such ease. He broke both the rhythmic tempo, and the natural patterns of breath required to pronounce his verses and really said, This is about me, not you. Anyway, that's good for today, he says to himself. He checks the phone, and M. sent him a text while he was tightrapping Hughes' poems.

They go on a dinner date that night in a street-side restaurant. Nothing beats a summer night. On the way there, K. and M. were holding hands walking in the street when a man yelled at them "Hot couple!", to the surprised amusement of the two. God knows what they ate or drank that night, all K. knows is M.'s hand on his leg and his own around M.'s neck. When was the last time it felt good to be alone with a stranger? Never mind, he thinks. I feel good now.

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They spend the last remaining days with each other, each one of them without a cloud overhead. One night after sex, M. turns around in bed smiling and says — so, we both like being love- bombed. They laugh because it's true. But then only a bomb would have woken up K. from his slumber of life. Sometimes only fire can fight fire. He needed to receive new love to prove to himself he was still worthy of receiving it. It's sad, but it's true, he thinks. Anyway, for now K. has nothing to think about apart the position he wants to sleep in and a warm feeling sets in his body, where M. is touching him.

The day after they'll say goodbye. They lie looking at each other in silence, not moving. They never acted upon the fact that this was gonna end, and even now, K. and M. don't seem to be bothered — they just know it's true. They promise to meet again and the day after, when K. is alone in the taxi towards the airport, tears of joy will console him and he'll finally remember that years later, despite everything, the message is still love.