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The Pond

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THE POND

I sat on the dormitory porch, leaning back in a chair, my feet up on the banister. The autumn breeze felt cool; the day was calm and I had enough pot on me to keep it that way. Then, Lisa walked up the steps.

"Hey, Nick." She said, her brown eyes glancing at me, her voice blending with the wind. I looked away.

"Hey..." I said, my voice sounding far away. Lisa looked at me for a long time. I stared out at the pine trees, my eyes burning, my lids thick and heavy.

"Nick, are you okay?" She asked sitting beside me. I touched my face, my hand felt warm, sweat, shiny in the lines of my palm.

"Yeah...yeah, I'm fine." I'd met Lisa only a couple of weeks ago, and did not want to get close to her. After four years of the private school world, I didn't want to get close to anyone I'd have to say good-bye to. Why was she even here on Thanksgiving break? Lisa seemed the type that would have a nice family to go home to--she had everything going for her, anyway. She was a promising artist her first year here in tenth grade, had an interest in writing and had perfect grades. But she was sitting here next to me, and I was hoping she'd leave. I don't think she quite understood--I'd stayed here this Thanksgiving because I needed space from people and from school work. I'd told the Resident Advisor I had no money to go home and my mother that I had exams to study for. I wasn't about to go home and meet my mother's new husband. I'd been down that road three times already.

"I'm going to the pond." I said. Lisa looked startled as I turned away and walked across the porch. I could feel each boot thump beneath me, one step at a time. Damn...I was coming down again. It was like coming through a time warp where everything is much slower on the other side. I descended down the steps, slipping my hands in my pockets. I had to get away from her. I needed more space.

"Wait a sec, and I'll go with you." Lisa insisted. "I want to bring my journal, though, just one minute." She ran into the dorm as I looked up to the sky, wondering whether I should just keep on walking. It was a dark and cloudy day, the sun covered with a mass of gray and white. My eyes slid back to the dorm. It was the oldest one on campus: yellow paint peeling, the porch sagging. Suddenly Lisa burst through the door, her face a bright contrast to the dreary day and to my darkening mood.

"Sorry I took so long." She said bouncing down the steps with her journal in one hand and a pen in the other. "I have something I want to read to you." She said between quick breaths, as I walked briskly toward the pond. I looked at her and saw those big brown eyes staring up at me.

"Yeah..." I grumbled. We reached the pond that lay in a clearing of white oak and pine and sat beneath a pine whose trunk was bowed and whose boughs curved over the water's surface. It was one of my favorite places to smoke.

Lisa immediately opened her journal, turning the pages with long

delicate fingers, stained with ink. She read the poem slowly at first, her voice soft, but becoming stronger as she gained confidence.

"Chem Chem Chem
mia ma mia ma
words cannot express
deep root flesh
how flowers bloom.

Mia ma mia ma
veins run far
through pink velvet petals
stems sip black waters
of soil as your heart blood
flows through a paint brush.

Hide inside, mia ma,
where my eyes cannot see you
through colors in rainbows
my heart cannot feel you
under warm soil.

Mia ma, mia ma,
where should I go?
My colors do not pretend
and I am cold."

When she finished, she looked up at me with a faint smile. "What should I do with it, Nick?"

I shrugged, taking a pack of cigarettes out of my pocket. I glanced at Lisa as I lit up a crette. She was staring at me eagerly for an answer.

"Well..." I took a quick drag, "The rhythm works, and the images are bold, but the center is not clear enough." I waited for a reply, but there was only silence. I didn't want to say anything else but I felt compelled to because I sensed she was somewhat confused and I thought possibly she would leave if I gave her the advice she was looking for. "What you need to do is paraphrase the poem a bit and show what you want to say by putting it in chronological order."

"It's about my mother--about the way we can't communicate, about her never letting me in."

I looked out at the pond, sighing. Brandy colored leaves skimmed across the surface, like fingers stretching towards shore. "Do you think you could help me with it?" I looked at her a moment, then took a drag from my cigarette.

"let me see it." I replied, smoke circling around my head and up into the naked, grey trees. Lisa handed me a poem scribbled on sketch pad paper, folded inside her journal.

"I have three more that I'm working on." She said, closing her journal. "Mr. Moss said that if I got enough done, I could enter one of the contests." Then she asked again seeing that I wasn't going to respond. "Do you think you could help me with them?"

"Why can't Mr. Moss help you?" I asked angrily.

"Well, I'd rather have your help," Lisa replied slowly, "I've read everything you've published in the school magazine and you must be good to have won all those awards."

"Yeah..." I reached into my shirt pocket for a pen, but settled for a joint. "I haven't written for quite a while." I mumbled, putting the joint between my lips and then pulling out the pen.

"Well, I should get back to the art building." Lisa said looking at the joint. She brushed the pine needles and dirt off the seat of her jeans. "I'll put the poems in your mailbox, okay?" I nodded reluctantly.

I lit up, breathing in the sweet smoke, and felt myself drifting again. Why me? Why did she have to come to me of all people? I looked down at her poem and read the lines slowly.

"Hide inside, mia ma,
my eyes cannot see you....
my heart cannot feel you...."

It wouldn't take her long to get the poem together. I didn't want to help her, though. All I wanted was to get away from everything. That's why I liked it here by the pond. I felt hidden beneath this pine--in this little alcove. I turned the paper over and scribbled a few words of my own, taking a long drag from the joint, filling my lungs, my throat burning.

"There are secrets
inside white pine
where I hide,
where brandy leaves
reach out to the shore...."

The words on the page were beginning to run together and my fingers slowly opened till the pen slipped out and rolled into pine needles around me. I looked at the joint between my forefinger and thumb; then stared down at the pen, which seemed far away. But something pulled at me inside. I drew in a deep breath letting fresh air fill my lungs. I looked at the pen again, lifted my arm and threw the joint--hissing red amongst the floating leaves, then slowly sinking into the pond.

Angela Hoxworth