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## Dry Drowning

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## Dry Drowning *Sara Campanelli*

When he breaks your heart, you'll feel like you're drowning, drowning in something that you can't see or touch but that will fill your lungs, your throat, your brain. You'll want to find a way to justify the drowning so you'll go to the bar around the corner so often that the bartender knows you by name and asks you about work. He'll start to give you a free drink every now and then. You'll think it's because you're a girl and you hear that this happens to girls frequently, but you'll soon consider the possibility that maybe the bartender knows a way to deal with your drowning.

As you consider this thought, he'll bring you another drink before your first is even finished, but this one isn't from him, he'll say, it's from someone else down the bar. You'll look where he points to a trio of men who seem like the only other building they've ever been inside is a gym, and you'll notice that the biggest one is staring at you with a practiced smile. You'll know from the way that he looks at every part of you besides your face exactly how to hurt him like the he who broke your heart hurt you, so you'll pick up his drink and take a sip before sliding off of the stool and into the crowd on the dance floor behind you. A quick wink will be needed to ensure that he follows you before you dive into the sea of thrashing bodies.

You'll pass through scantily-clad women dancing with men who look like they've just rolled out of bed, bumping and grinding their bodies together while the drinks in their hands rain onto the cement floor. The strobe lights will flash the throng of people with shades of deep green and blue and a cheap bubble machine will make the dancers look like they are trying to escape drowning, too. The man who bought you the drink will be right behind you as you rock with the waves of glittering dancers, swaying between their glazed-over stares, losing your drink somewhere along your path through the crowd.

All the while you'll be aware of the figure trailing in your wake.

You'll be almost to the other end of the dancefloor when he'll reach out and catch your hand. He'll twist his arm and pull you to him so that the two of you will be standing face to face, the crowd around you pushing your bodies closer together. He'll shout over the music that you're beautiful, and you'll shout back your thanks, but he'll pretend not to hear you so he can lean his head closer to yours. You'll know exactly what he's doing, but you'll place your hand on his neck anyway and he'll grab at your waist as you repeat your thanks. He'll smile at you with his perfect, white teeth and slide both hands to your back so that you're swallowed up by his broad chest.

He'll introduce himself as Scotty or Johnny or some other name that grown men use when they aren't really ready to be grown men, and then he'll tell you that you're beautiful again before you even have the chance to say your own name. You'll raise your eyebrows

at him and he'll laugh and take this as a sign that he should kiss you, and he will, and you'll cradle the back of his neck in your hand and hold his face against yours as you kiss. Someone will jostle the two of you and ScottyJohnny will tear away from your lips, looking to fight whoever was responsible for this jostling, but you'll touch his arm and he'll focus on you again.

You'll both move to a decaying couch and you'll kiss until he pulls away and tells you that he's sick of this place and his apartment is just across the street. You'll tell him that you're fine staying at the bar and kiss him some more before he pulls away again. He'll promise you breakfast and a ride home and to treat you like a queen, but you've had enough, and the game isn't fun anymore. You'll put your lips close to ear and just brush him with a whispered no before disappearing through the thinning crowd, heading to the bar and not looking back.


The bartender will be there already pouring the drink you will be about to ask for even though your head is starting to feel fuzzy. He'll tell you that the bar is closing and that if you'll wait he'll walk you home, but you say you'll be fine and you'll finish your drink until you're one of the only people left in the bar.

You'll stumble outside with the last of the crowd, vision blurred from tears or from drink or from both. You'll rest your forehead against the cool, gritty metal of a streetlight that stands just behind the small building, wishing that this streetlight had arms to wrap around you to keep you steady and loved and then hating yourself for wishing that.

While you're wishing and hating, a hand will clamp down on your shoulder and spin you around. It'll be ScottyJohnny, his face red from anger or from drink or from both and only inches away from yours. He'll growl about never being said no to before as he forces you down onto gravel that is slick with leftover rain. You'll struggle against his bulk, looking around in a panic to notice that his two buddies are the only ones in sight, both watching with disinterest as they lounge against your lamppost. Your heart will thud with adrenaline and you'll start twisting your arms out of his drunken grip, surprised when it works and he starts to lose his balance. You'll bring your knee up without hesitation and drive it into his groin so that he cries out and rolls off of you. The two friends will advance on you but you'll all freeze when the sound of a glass smashed against a wall makes you all look around.

The bartender will be standing in the doorway, glass shards at his feet, saying something about the police and nightly rounds. ScottyJohnny's buddies will look at each other and pick him up, vanishing fast around the building.

The bartender will walk over to you slowly and sort of squat down above the wet gravel, asking if you're okay but careful not to touch you. You'll realize that he has seen this



before, that maybe he tried to help another girl who was too afraid of his outstretched hand, and he doesn't want to scare you either.

But you won't be scared of him. You'll be shaking and could use a friendly touch, so you'll reach out to him and he'll help you sit up.

You'll both sit with your backs to a stack of pallets standing against the wall of the bar, shoulders and hips touching, heads inclined back against the damp wood. You'll feel your breath return to normal as you glance over at him. His hand will be bleeding from where a shard of glass cut him and you won't know how to fix it but he won't seem to care about the cut anyway as he stays there with you. And maybe you'll stop feeling like you're drowning, at least for a little while. The air around you will be still and quiet and you'll turn your attention to the midnight sky, wondering why the moon has to wane instead of just staying full all the time.