Eve

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SAVE ME

Whitney Sharpe

Lay on the floor
Take jagged breaths
Hours go by
What I wouldn’t give
To just be saved
Nothing I wouldn’t do
For a touch
A hug with concern
A kiss with passion
Something to fill me
The people I love
Too far to call out to
The man I want
Too far to reach for
Hands clasp together
And I cry
Long for something else
Only wish I knew what
Close my eyes
Sigh with frustration
I want more
Than what I have
I need more
Than what I’ve got
Please
Someone find me
Save me from myself
Take me home

EVE
FROM PART TWO OF “A VIEW FROM THE CEILING”

Jennifer Smith

Eve was sure she would have told him, if only he hadn’t died. That thought, because she kept trying to convince herself, echoed in her head, mixed in with thoughts of the oppressiveness of the hospital lobby. And as she sat there on the scratchy wool couch, she was sure that everyone could hear those negative vibrations rattling around just behind her forehead. The silence in the lobby was overwhelming. The pale green walls offered no solace, even though she knew they were designed to. You're beneath them, her traitorous mind taunted her. She sighed, and rubbed her face. It was eleven at night, and her eyes were so dry they were beginning to burn.

I wish I hadn’t been the first one to get there, she thought churlishly. I wish I had burst into hysterics when they told me Jeremy was dead. But no. Instead I ask questions like, “Are his organs salvageable?” and “How long did it take him to die?” She'd said no to coffee or tea, like an idiot, thinking she'd be better off without them.

Eve couldn’t help it. She started to imagine what the funeral would be like. I should wear a dress, she thought. But I don’t look good in dresses. I won’t look sad in a dress. Mentally she cataloged her wardrobe. Why do I have so many black clothes? Am I just waiting around for funerals? Finally she picked one in her head. The one that ties in with my ceiling. That should be adequately funeral. Besides, I haven’t anything else nice enough. It’s really too bad you have to wear black to a funeral. I look better in blue. More dignified. Could I wear a dark blue? No. She smoothed out the wrinkles in her forehead, while, for a moment her eyes closed.

The funeral would be nice, Eve supposed, as funerals went. Not like her uncle’s. Her uncle’s had been bad. People had been falling over drunk, even the priest, especially the priest, and her second cousin had hit on her. No one will be drunk this time, she told herself, trying to be positive, or late. The reception will be at his parents’ house afterwards, and it won’t be bad either. No one will say anything too stupid. That’ll be good, for Ed and Amanda. Everyone will just sort of hum their apologies to me on their way by, never looking me in the eye. I suppose I won’t look too devastated, but I don’t really think I should look devastated anyway. Besides, no one wants me to have a breakdown, or throw myself on the coffin. Everyone just wants to know that I loved him, that I wanted to marry him. No one wants to feel guilty when they leave because no one’s died in their family. I don’t mind. She really didn’t.

Since the reception would be at Jeremy’s parent’s house, she knew she would have to stay until everyone else left, cleaning things up. That, she supposed, was her role as fiancée of the recently deceased. His parents would disappear long before then anyway, where to she wasn’t sure, so she would wander aimlessly, collecting all the cards and “I’m sorry” things into one general stack on the kitchen table. Then she would go find them. They would be in his old room, now a den. I wonder if they feel guilty for converting it, she thought nastily, as she imagined listening to them composing themselves.
She would manage to smile when they opened the door. “Listen Eve, if you need anything,” they would say, and squeeze her hand when she demurred. I should be saying that to them, she yelled to herself, upset at her daydream. They’ve lost a son. They’re the ones who won’t sleep tonight for thinking about him. But still she knew she wouldn’t say anything. They would take her silence for despair.

“In time,” they would offer, and she knew she would have to resist her frustration.

Eve’s mind snapped back to the present. The TV overhead, which was silently playing some late night talk show, switched to commercial, and in a half second of black transition she saw their reflections. Great, she thought, resigned, just great.

“One,” Amanda whispered, her eyes wet with fat, glossy tears. Reluctantly Eve rose to be folded into her bulky mothering arms. Amanda squeezed her painfully, swaddling Eve in flesh, and then released her to her husband Edward, who did the same. Eve had hoped, absurdly, that they wouldn’t come. And even as she had hoped it, she knew she hadn’t a chance of it being true, Jeremy was their child after all. Together they walked into his room, arm in arm, making, Eve was sure, quite a picture of grief.

The sight of him still on the table reduced Amanda to sobs, and she collapsed in her husband’s arms. Eve went to the table instead, and stared at his chest, where blood had stained the sheet covering him. She tried to think of what to do next, and as Amanda peered at her from the safety of Edward’s arms, all Eve could think to do was kiss him. They did it in movies, she told herself. His body is cold, his lips are cold. But not as cold as I thought it would be. Aren’t dead bodies supposed to be freezing? Why doesn’t his face show signs of the accident? Look at the blood on the sheet. His chest must be pretty mangled and red. Like meat. Did I take anything out for dinner? Why am I still kissing him?

Abruptly she pulled back up, and looked over again at Amanda and Edward, to see if they’d noticed. They hadn’t. Eve eyed Jeremy’s chest again. The doctor had told her that he had punctured his lungs flying through the windshield. His lungs had filled with blood, and, basically, he drowned. He’d barely made it to the hospital before he died and now she stood next to his lukewarm body.

What am I going to do? she wondered, covering her eyes with her hands. I would have told him. I would have. I would have.

Several hours later, back in their apartment, now her apartment, Eve told Jeremy’s fish Melvin instead. She sat with a glass of wine, her sixth, staring at the colorlessly decorated apartment, the apartment that Jeremy had decorated. Then she remembered something else, and told Melvin that too. “Someone told me today, a doctor I think, because he knew how Jeremy had died, that when you drown, after the water has filled your lungs—I guess in his case blood—but before you actually die, that there is peace, that life is...serene...that drowners actually smile.” Eve took a sip of wine and stared at Melvin. She hiccuped.

“Fish can drown you know. I don’t mean when you take them out of water...that’s not really drowning...but if they are in something else, that’s not water. They can’t get enough oxygen, asphyxiation, cells bursting...all that jazz.” She waved her hand in the air to elaborate her point, and then walked away from Melvin into the kitchen to refill her glass. “That must be the nicest feeling in the world.” She walked

over to the fish tank and rubbed the glass affectionately, knowing better than to tap it. “Too bad you have to die to find it.”

She paused for a minute, and then looked at Melvin again, one fish alone in a big glass tank. “I didn’t cry.” Eve sat in the middle of a large white couch, Jeremy’s, glad for once that it swallowed her. “It’s not that I’m not sad, or that I wanted it to happen. It’s not even like I didn’t feel anything for him, it’s just that...” Eve broke off her sentence, afraid of what Melvin would think, until she remembered he was just a fish. “It didn’t break my heart, and it didn’t shatter my world. It mattered...but not a lot. I’m okay. But I think that means I’m horrible.”

Melvin swam toward the bottom of the tank. He looked disinterested, bored with her whining. **Jeremy was always bored with you too.**

“No. You don’t get it,” Eve insisted, suddenly vehement, wine splashing over the rim of the glass as she leaned forward, eyeing his snowy yellow skin. “I’m not repressing—I’m okay. I feel fine, except for the fact that I feel fine and I know I shouldn’t. Don’t you understand how horrible that makes me? He was my fiancé, and he’s dead, and I am an unfeeling monster.” Melvin seemed to perk up at that, and swam closer, his eyes looking gross and huge and bulbous. She could make out her reflection as well, and figured she didn’t look much better, though she was sure it was due to the bend of the glass.

She leaned forward to stare at him. “I didn’t tell anybody. That would have been crazy.” Her voice sounded slurry, so she worked to enunciate more clearly, pushing her loose hair out of her face. “You see,” she asked, imagining Melvin did not see, frowning as she continued. “Do you know what I thought about?” she asked repulsed by her ugliness. “I wondered what I would look like at his funeral. I wondered what I was going to do with all his stuff, including you. I wanted to leave because I was...over it. And then, his parents came, and everybody kept squeezing my arms and consoling me, and I wanted to shoot myself.” She flopped back down onto the couch and covered her eyes. “His parents tried to console me,” she said dully. “They couldn’t even see me. And I...I couldn’t face them. I couldn’t say anything to them, because I was afraid that they’d know how much less it meant to me. And when the funeral comes, they’ll sit in his room and cry, dying on the inside, fading away in front of my very eyes, and I’ll do the dishes.”

“I know I didn’t love him. But still, what does that say about me?” She interrupted herself, avoiding the question. “I was going to marry him after all. I keep telling myself I would have told him, but I mean...Jesus.” She sagged further into the couch, hoping again that it would eat her alive.

“I don’t know. I don’t even know what I want the answer to that question to be. I can’t even bear to think about it, because I’m afraid of the answer. All I know is that some part of me feels...” She trailed off unable to say the words, but both she and Melvin knew she was going to say “relieved.”

Eve looked at her wine glass spitefully. She hated red wine, but it was all they, she, had in the house. **Jeremy just adored red wine. Always had to have red wine didn’t you Jeremy?** She tried not to feel resentful, but she did anyway. You’d think, she muttered to her brain, that when your fiancé dies, even if you are having a breakdown, that you could be a little more forgiving.
Eve rubbed her arms and smiled suddenly, almost good-naturedly at Melvin. She felt a little dulled. Wine was very nice for some things. “I should go to bed. I’m tired. I’m too drunk to go anywhere, but I live here, so it doesn’t matter.” She stood up slowly, trying to maintain her balance.

And then, unexpectedly changing her mind, she decided she would move Melvin’s tank out of the bland living room into the kitchen. She figured he deserved a change of scenery. Hell, she thought, he loved Jeremy too, maybe more than I did, this has got to be hard for him. She ambled toward him, and grabbed his tank in her arms, staggering a little since it was a fairly large and awkward contraption. She wondered, briefly, if this was a good idea, but dismissed the concern with a shrug. Slowly, she moved him to the kitchen, placing Melvin’s tank on the counter next to the sink.

She pulled a water bottle from the refrigerator, and a wave of dizziness took her. “Eve?” She thought. Her vision receded into stunned. “Eve?” Her mother would be out this early, even considering the time difference. She looked at the clock; it was barely five.

She tried again to hoist herself up, and was successful. Well, there you go, she thought. One step at a time. She swayed a little. She tiptoed over to Melvin’s cup and saw Melvin overturned, lying on his back like he was sunbathing. She realized, that instant, what she’d done.

“I’ve killed you,” she whispered. “God, I’ve killed you.” She picked up the Evian bottle and glared at it angrily. “Salt water you jerk,” she screamed at herself, “he’s a salt water fish. Not Appalachian spring water. Sali! Don’t you know anything?”

She let go of the bottle. Her eyes, horribly wet, mocked her. Why’d Jeremy have to have a salt-water fish anyway, she wondered, why couldn’t he just be normal? Why couldn’t he have been more lovable, or realized I didn’t love him, or dumped me and taken his stupid fish, and his bland white apartment and his red wine with him, so that I wouldn’t have had to deal with this. So that I wouldn’t have to wonder if I’d ever have had the guts to leave him. So I wouldn’t have to go to a stupid funeral, or get stupid stitches or anything. Now I’m a killer, I’ve killed a fish. I don’t even like fish. She kicked the cabinet. She hated her life. She hated Jeremy. She hated herself more.

I am going to be late for work tomorrow—today, she thought. Maybe I just won’t go. I’ve got reason enough. “I won’t be in to work today,” that’s what I’ll tell them, and if they ask why, I’ll say “because my fiancé died about 8 hours ago, I need stitches for my knee, and I’ve just murdered a stupid saltwater fish.” And any semblance of the person you once were drowned in Jeremy and now he’s dead and you can’t get it back.

Eve decided she needed a vacation. If she could ever get out of the kitchen, and through the funeral, she was going to take one. And then she was going to redecorate, buy a real pet, one that didn’t live in water, and live happily ever after with it, and no one was ever going to get to die on her again, whether she really loved them or not, because she was sick of this.

Eve peered at Melvin, his bloated little corpse in a coffee cup coffin. Poor thing. You’re not smiling, I think they lied.

And then, suddenly, an idea occurred to her. She ran to her room, slid on a bathing suit and grabbed a pair of Jeremy’s old goggles. She slipped downstairs to the apartment complex’s pool. She was going to try and almost drown herself—just almost, enough to get that peace.

The pool water was warm, but still cooler than she was, and Eve repressed a shiver. A saltwater pool, she noted, how perfectly convenient. She slowly descended the stairs, and could practically see the salt and chlorine swimming towards her, eager to drag her under. She hunkered down to let her body get comfortable with the water, but keeping her head above, so she wouldn’t fog the goggles. She paddled over to the bench, put her goggles on, and pushed herself under. Fighting against her body’s natural tendency to float, she wrapped her legs around the legs of the bench, and pressed her hands to the underside of it. Her skin turned pale green, colored by the dark early morning and the water around her. Everything looked too still.

Ten seconds later, not smiling at all, and not feeling an ounce of peace, Eve realized that she couldn’t just hold her breath, but that she had to swallow water.

“Call me when you get this.” Eve rolled her eyes. Only her mother would be up this early, even considering the time difference. She looked at the clock; it was barely five.
shut her eyes, pursing her lips sourly. This is dumb, she thought, really dumb. She started laughing at her own stupidity, but rose quickly as she swallowed water. She banged her shoulder on the bench on the way up and shouted underwater in pain, sucking in liquid inadvertently. Coughing, sputtering, and gritting her teeth against the pain in her shoulder, she still managed to laugh in the air, water trickling from her nose. When she finally cleared her lungs, the absurdity of what she planned still hung around her, pressing a smile to her lips. Eve ducked back under the water, the wind too freezing for her skin to bear. She moved back over to the steps and dipped her hair under to smooth it, her face resting softly above the surface.

“Ma’am?” A security guard loomed overhead suddenly, filling her eyes with his wrinkled face. Eve started, and, feeling indecent, backed away to the opposite wall. “Ma’am, you can’t be here. The pool doesn’t open till seven.” He frowned repressively at her, showing her his watch which clearly said ten to six. Eve slunk back to the steps again and crept out. He shoved her towel at her and tried his best to look stern and giddy.

“Sorry. 7B. I’m in 7B.”

He looked confused for a second, then nodded. “Oh, Mr. Bentham’s girlfriend.”

Eve rolled her eyes. “Sorry,” she murmured again, wrapping the towel under her arms. “I was just about to get out.” He looked skeptical. “Honestly.” She felt oddly giddy. She wanted to run to the door, but she was sure the guard would deem that horseplay, which the large blue sign at the gate forbade. He softened a little at her smile, but still he hustled her to the door.

“Just don’t do it again.”

She nodded, and was about to leave, but then stopped abruptly, stretching a hand out to the security guard. “Can I ask you a question?”

He looked at her puzzled. “Sure,” he said, and shrugged.

She pulled the towel up closer around her shoulders. She couldn’t believe she was about to say this. “If you,” she paused, searching for the right words. “If you had to tell someone something, something big, but never got a chance to because...because they went away. But it would have hurt them. Would you regret it? Would you feel like you hadn’t earned...” She knew she hadn’t asked her question clearly, but the guard seemed to understand.

He looked at her as if he suddenly saw her, his eyes suddenly sad. “Worst thing I ever did in my life was cheat on my wife. She had cancer, and was dying, and I just couldn’t take it. So I cheated on her.”

Eve made a face. She had asked, but she wasn’t really prepared for this confidence. He misread her confusion for disgust. “I only did it once. And then the next day I was back at her side, holding her hand.” He rubbed the back of his hand over his forehead, lifting his cap with the movement. Eve stared at him, and silence fell as Eve tried to figure out what the hell his point was. She shifted awkwardly. He smiled, almost shyly at Eve, but then sobered and shoed her away. “I only want to see you here during regulation hours.”

Eve started, and then chided herself for being so trite. Well, what did you think he was going to say? That he never told her, and she died only a few months later. That it was the worst thing he ever did, but the worst thing he could have done would have been to tell her. Did you really expect him to say something as backhanded as “I regret cheating on her. But I don’t regret the hurt I never caused her.”

Eve leaned in impulsively and kissed his cheek. “You got it,” she promised, “I swear it won’t happen again.” She grinned and slipped away, leaving gleaming footprints on the tile.

Back in her apartment, Eve was still smiling. She walked to the bookshelf where pictures of Jeremy beamed from the shelves. She picked up one; he was grinning broadly and waving, probably to her taking the picture, since she’d always been the one taking the pictures. He looks really stupid. Did he always look that stupid? Where did he get that shirt? She shook her head. “I wasn’t going to marry you Jeremy. I don’t know when I was going to tell you or how. But I would have told you. I’m glad I didn’t get the chance to though. You still would have died, and it would have hurt you, God, I hope it would have hurt...” She moved her thumb in a circle around his face, “...it just doesn’t matter.” She put his picture down and touched the tip of her finger to his waving hand. What an awful shirt. Tears dropped from her eyes, threading in at the corners and weaving back out. She gave a quiet laugh, and let herself cry as long as she needed to.

When she stopped crying she turned away and wiped her footprints off the floor. She wove her way into the kitchen, and grabbed Melvin’s cup, and headed toward the bathroom. She gave him a solemn flush down the toilet and a minute of silence. Finally, she looked at herself in the mirror. She looked pale and sticky, and she knew she should shower before the chlorine turned her hair green, but she figured it could wait. She was surprised to see she looked almost normal, pretty good in fact. Then she reminded herself it had only been one night, that her conscience hadn’t even gotten a chance to paint circles under her eyes, and that it wouldn’t. She twisted her hair to push the water out and grinned.

As an afterthought, she walked back to the waving picture of Jeremy. “I’m sorry I killed Melvin,” she said. “Say hi to him for me will you?”

Eve looked at the clock. It was just barley after six. She knew Amanda would be up. She reached for the phone.

“Hello, Amanda? Yes, my mother called. Is there anything I can do? I could order the flowers...Yes, I could make a casserole.” Eve smothered a small laugh. “Tuna all right?”