

A Different Wind

Nolan McGill

Even though I couldn't move, sitting wasn't so bad. I would never have gotten to try sitting if life had stayed the same. But that was probably just an excuse. A comforting thought can only do its job so many times.

"Are you kidding me?"

An interruption? A distraction. Eight minutes of ignorance, ruined. The ice in my glass had shrunk.

"You haven't heard a word I've said, have you?"

It was Terry. Oh, Terry. Terry, Terry, Terry.

I sighed. "Not really."

"Wow, Chris. I've been talking for ten minutes. I don't know what to say."

You don't have to say anything.

"And yes, I do have to say something," Terry said. "Because that's what friends are supposed to do, right?"

"Probably."

Silence. I took advantage of the pause to notice how cold my thumb was, holding the glass of smaller ice. I thought of my wife's flush cheeks for a moment as I stared at the dark yellow table through my glass.

"I don't have a sliver of your attention, do I, Chris?"

"I dunno. Maybe."

Both of Terry's palms slammed onto the booth table, knocking his silverware onto his booth cushion. People might've been staring. The straw in my glass tipped sideways. "Well, I'm just going to keep talking, whether you're listening or not," he said. "It's been four months since she's died. Four. It doesn't look like you've shaved in half that time, much less showered, and I would bet the shirt off my back, a shirt that I happen to love, that I'm the last person you've talked to before today."

"I'm fine with that," I said. The condensation on my glass glimmered slightly. The cheap blinds of the small café struggled to block the light of the late-morning sun.

Terry leaned forward. "Are you actually fine with that? Because I'm not. It's been two weeks since I've talked to you." Disappointingly, he valued his instinct as a friend. I wanted him to shut up. Why did I even agree to meet with him?

"I know how much she meant to you," Terry said, "but it was an accident, and you had nothing to do with it. You have to pick yourself back up eventually."

An opinion. It would be pointless to say this, though.

"Chris..." Terry began.

Oh no, not that tone again. Here it came.

"It's what she would have wanted."

"Oh, is it?" I said.

"Yes, it is."

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath through my nose. If I hit him would he leave me alone? I opened my eyes to see the ring on my finger glaring back at me.

"It was eight minutes, by the way," I said.

"What?"

"You had only been talking for eight minutes, not ten."

Terry leaned back in his seat, folded his arms, and, annoyingly enough, I could see him holding back a smile. I tried to look away.

“I must be a dull guy if you would rather pay attention to how long you were ignoring me than to what I was saying.”

I didn't have anything to say, so I looked back at my drink. I could feel his eyes still on me. He wasn't about to let it go: I was some amusing puzzle that stood between him and enlightenment. I knew he was still smiling, because he wasn't talking. It almost disgusted me. I didn't want to give him the satisfaction that he was affecting me, and so it didn't disgust me.

“I've got to use the bathroom,” I muttered, keeping my eyes on my glass as I stood.

“So do I,” Terry said, also rising out of the booth.

“Never mind, I don't think I do,” I said, and sat back down.

“Well, I still do, so I'll be right back,” he said, and walked around the corner into the men's room. I waited a moment. Then I left two bucks on the table and left.