

THE DEEP END

By Margie Stokley-Bronz

margiestokley@gmail.com

917-856-5850

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
WOMAN		30	FEMALE
MAN		70	MALE
PAUL		30	MALE

Description: A discussion at a diner leads a woman willing to die with an opportunity to swim out of the deep end.

THE DEEP END

A diner. Newark, NJ. 2 am.

A WOMAN is eating alone at the counter. She is inhaling a cheeseburger. We hear the sound of airplanes overhead.

An OLD MAN enters.

OLD MAN

Is this seat taken?

WOMAN

I got you a milkshake.

OLD MAN

Thank you.

(He sits and takes a sip.)

How are you feeling?

WOMAN

Since I almost died? Starving. Please ignore my manners.

OLD MAN

Eat up.

WOMAN

Can you hear that?

OLD MAN

The planes.

WOMAN

No. The beeping.

(The WOMAN points out the window.)

Sanitation workers.

(The OLD MAN twists to see them.)

Picking up other people's garbage is such an odd job, even more, disgusting from a diner.

OLD MAN

They make a good living.

WOMAN

Everyone says that... why do we say that? To feel better about giving them our shit. "They make a good living." What does that even mean? I'm not trying to be mean. I'm asking.

OLD MAN

What's bothering you?

WOMAN

Everything's bothering me. How can you be so calm?

(She glances at her phone.)

My boyfriend's missing...

OLD MAN

Did you call him?

WOMAN

I texted. He should be calling me. I was the one in an accident.

OLD MAN

I'll never understand texting.

WOMAN

Well, you're old.

OLD MAN

That I am.

WOMAN

It doesn't matter... I can't break up with him over a text anyway.

OLD MAN

Tomorrow will be better.

WOMAN

(Abruptly.)

And I'd like to start it alone.

(She holds a french fry up and then decides not to eat it. Instead, she looks around the diner.)

WOMAN

Did you hear everyone on the bus? Chatting away about how thrilled they were to get a *free* meal... at a *diner*. It was gross. I wanted to scream, "You know they're feeding us because they nearly killed us!"

(She waves fry at the Old Man and then eats it with vigor. We hear the beeping of the garbage men again. She looks out towards them.)

Did you see my face? As we were going down?

OLD MAN

I did.

WOMAN

Was I screaming... like the rest of them?

OLD MAN

No. No, you weren't.

WOMAN

(Confident.)

I knew it! I was thinking about swimming. How much I loved swimming. I wasn't scared at all. I felt relieved almost. (Pause.) You know, when I was little... I was a huge swimmer. I loved swimming... in the pool—the deep end. I swam so much my Mom thought my hands would web. I didn't care. I wasn't afraid of webbed fingers or feet.

Swimming was all that mattered to me. As I sat there thinking, this is it. It's all over. My final moments alive. I was excited. Excited to know, for once, what was next. I've never been religious... I don't know why. I guess God never really mattered to me... because... I felt I never really mattered to him. That fact is, he took my brother away from me in a car crash... Jon. (Pause.) His last moments were flames, and now mine would be water.

Water. I was going to be washed with waves. Deep, dark, blue, cold, wet, scary waves. Shit. I've always been afraid of the ocean, but not today, today I was ready... ready for the end.

(Quietly.)

I wanted to be crushed with... dark blue waves. I've never been religious, but when the plane started going down, I thought... I thought I would get to see him.

OLD MAN

Did you?

WOMAN

No. We landed, and I lived.

OLD MAN

You did.

WOMAN

My sister would've been sad. Sad to be alone and really sad to have to tell people that I died. That's the worst part. The look on people faces. The lack of understanding for your grief. Watching them search for words. Words they will fail to find... every time you see them.

(Pause.)

And my folks, another tragic accident... to add to the litany of *shit* life has thrown at them. But, of course, they'll be fine now. Because, I didn't get to die. I just feel like I did.

(Pause.)

I just can't go back to my life... the way it was... it's a waste.

OLD MAN

You're not a waste.

WOMAN

My life with Paul is. I have to break up with Paul. That's his name, my boyfriend, Paul. Paul. Paul. Paul.

(She gets annoyed at her phone.)

I saw everyone texting and calling loved ones. So, I took out my phone and pretended that somebody cared... cared where I was and what I was doing. And now he won't even answer my text.

OLD MAN

Do you want to be alone?

WOMAN

After Jon died, I thought the only reason to be... was to have a family, but now...

She looks out the window. The sanitation workers are gone.

OLD MAN

What?

WOMAN

Now I'd rather die alone—less carnage.

OLD MAN

Maybe you love him.

WOMAN

Don't say that. No. Falling... when I was falling. I wanted to see him ... so badly. You don't understand. I still see him on the street, his frame walking, my brother. I can't love someone and then not see them again tomorrow.

(Pause)

If he loved me,.. he would have called me.

OLD MAN

Call him.

WOMAN

I'm not that girl.

OLD MAN

What girl?

WOMAN

The nagging, codependent, needy girl.

OLD MAN

It'd be better for him if you were.

WOMAN

Why?

OLD MAN

Because then he'd know you were hurting.

(Pause.)

I was at my usual diner the other day, and I saw this guy. He looked a little weird and had some whiskers. I thought to myself... he looks great. I said to him, "You in the movies?" And he shakes his head and says no. Then I realize he has no money. I guess that he may want ice cream. It's hot... we could all use a sundae, so why not? I said, "You dropped this." And I gave him five dollars. He said, "No, I didn't." I said, "I thought... I saw you dropped this. Could I be wrong?" So, when we were negotiating whether he would get five dollars. So, I bought him an ice cream. Then he wanted to know whether the ice cream got him five dollars or if I was paying for it, making the five dollars mine. There and then, I loved him.

I said, "Of course not. It's yours." On my way out, he said, "Thank you."

Let me tell you something. I'm the guy who has answers to most things people don't even know is a question. I never had a family. When I left the Navy, I was always chasing women in bikinis. Boys will be boys, I guess. And then I met a woman, the love of my life, and loved her till the day she died. I don't want to soil your "Grandfatherly" image of me, but she had her ways of what she could do... always touching me. You have to touch a man. Okay. Enough. My family. I never had one.

My sister said to me, in the hospital, on the day my brother died... “It should have been you.” My father hated me, my brother, and my sister. I never had a family. On my mother’s death bed... look at this face. I think I’m handsome. Handsome enough to get one lady’s love for a lifetime. Maybe not nice all the time, but handsome. My mother hands “this face” a note. As she lays dying, I assumed what it would say. I waited, holding her hand till she took her last breath. Then, holding her hand, I assumed her sentiment. I was wrong. Guess?

Guess. Guess what it said? Never mind. You know what it said. It said... “I never loved you.” You say, “No, it couldn’t... not you. How could she?” Shit, if I know. But that’s what she said. Maybe I’m the devil? Maybe they’re right. I guess I’m close to finding out any rate. Heaven or hell? It could go either way. Your parents loved you. Your brother loved you. Your sister still does. Sure, you may not be the luckiest. Your brother died. I wish I got what you had.

(Beat)

Stop texting. Touch him.

WOMAN

My brother was killed when I was twenty-four. When my Mom called, I was heading to the mall with my three best friends. Thank god I wasn’t driving. She said, “Are you alone? I said, “No.” She said, “Good. You need to be with people.” That was the last thing I needed. She said, “We’re at the hospital; there’s been an accident. Jon’s dead.” She kept saying, “ Claire? Are you there? Claire? Did you hear me? Do you hear me? Are you okay? We’ll meet you at the house. I’m so sorry.” My friends said nothing. Not a word. They just took me home. I never spoke to them again. They never spoke to me, either. Why? People don’t like pain.

(Pause.)

I can’t share it with Paul. He doesn’t want it. Trust me. I never told Paul about my brother. He thinks I’m happy, like a really happy person. I know he does.

OLD MAN

What about him?

WOMAN

Paul?

OLD MAN

Is he happy?

WOMAN

I have no idea.

OLD MAN

Look how much you learned about me over a milkshake.

(Her cell phone rings. She ignores

it.) WOMAN

I can't answer it.

(Text sounds goes off.)

It's him.

(He touches her back.)

OLD MAN

Sometimes you have to give affection to receive it.

(PAUL enters the diner.)

PAUL

Claire! There you are. Jesus, I thought you were dead.

(She stands to greet him.)

CLAIRE

Me too.

(He grabs her and holds her tight. She hugs him back. Paul slowly sits down at the counter. She sits with him.)

PAUL

I didn't know you liked milkshakes.

CLAIRE

I do.

(She touches his back.)

Do you?

Lights fade.

THE END