

On the second anniversary of Mia's death, Avery left her phone and her shoes on the shore, swam out into the sea, and hoped she'd have the courage to drown.

Was there a way to die without creating another tragedy? Some deep part of her had believed it was possible she'd keel over purely from lack of maintenance – if she went long enough without eating, sleeping, grooming. If she never laughed. Never hugged anyone. Never listened to music, never looked up at the stars. So far, no luck. Perhaps if Avery could deprive herself of everything both necessary and wonderful in life then her body would eventually start to sputter and then break down, once and for all, like a neglected sedan. All leaking, rusted parts. Total me, baby, I'm a wreck.

Avery clung to the algae-covered buoy a hundred feet from shore and caught her breath. *Coward*, she thought. Same as always. She would dangle her feet off the high dive but she couldn't really jump, right?

Avery swam back to the beach and crumbled on the shore. She let the ocean air console her, the wind drying her face. The sand held her close, clinging to her thighs. She watched the sun set over the Santa Barbara coast and deleted texts from her mother and her other various grief sympathizers, a few less than last year. Death turned everyone into saints and hippies. It was always: *Lifting you up in prayer. Or: Sending positive vibes your way.* It was pure filler, they wanted to say something and they didn't quite know what but they wouldn't let that stop them from saying something anyway. They all wanted to help but none of them seemed to know how.

Maybe this would be enough, Avery thought, deleting text after text. To be as close to dead as possible, to play the part. To fold into herself and fade away with each day alone, with each call left ignored. With every bridge she burned.

Maybe she could live life forgotten, like dust in couch cushions, alive in the light for a second when someone sat down too hard. *Hey, do you remember Avery?*

Was this too much to ask, to be dust?

i don't want blood

i want asbestos

or like, a gas leak

i want plausible deniability

i want mystique

i want the same hike every sunday until i slip

i want the coyotes to get me

i want a freak reaction to almonds

i want the brakes to give

i want the jaws of life to come just short

i wanna give the conspiracy theorists something to work with

i want a viral tiktok

i want a million likes

i wanna be deleted

i want to swim out until i can't swim back

idk

i should quit dairy

and commit to a nut milk

At the grief group, they weep in a semicircle and serve green tea with stale shortbread cookies. They add a metal folding chair, just for you. *Don't forget your name tag!* they say. When you cry, they rush across the stained carpet and they hold you tight. They wrap their arms around you and pat your back and use your name like they had known it all along, like the name tags were just a joke. *It's okay, Avery. You're okay.*

At the grief group, they speak in the plural. *It doesn't get easier, but we get stronger. We grow. We adapt. It's just what we do.* Who was this *we*? Already, by taking a seat in their weeping semicircle chain, Avery had been fully accepted into a club she had not applied to. Had it been the crying? Or had it been even before that? Did your membership begin with the death? Is that how the dues are paid? You had no choice, loss put you among the losers.

At the grief group, they hand out a questionnaire and neon gel pens. Circle YES in bright green ink for *I don't think that I will ever feel better*. Is there a prize at the end of this? My best friend is dead and all I got was this t-shirt. Perhaps a gift card? A key chain? Just, **SOMEBODY'S DEAD!** All caps. Embossed. Circle YES for *Since she is gone, I am no use to anyone anymore*.

Avery kept texting Mia long after her phone had been disconnected, long after the texts went green.

so the funeral was a fucking drag

slideshow way long

too many baby pics

not enough of mine

i should've never let them use "fix you"

sorry