

# The Snake in the Well

Summer always feels a bit empty for me—like someone scooped two months out of my heart with a rusty spade and left a snake down there just to see what would happen. The sun is hot and school is out for most of the kids and young adults—including myself—but I can't help but feel like the whole season is some kind of joke. Just like, what, two months-ish out of my calendar? Maybe more, maybe less, depending on if you have summer classes or shitty family vacations? And don't get me started on when it starts to end.

August summers are the most bittersweet, in my opinion. That slow close to the ending summer and new year of school approaching never failed to leave me feeling a bit like I had to ration what little time I had left.

Parties, though they'd feel long, always felt like they came with a slow, burning, yet icy kind of dread, deep in my heart. I just imagine a snake coiling, turning around in my chest, slithering through frost and trying to seek its new prey. Ready to snatch at any moment. And that well, dug deeper with that iron spade, shoveling in tandem with that icy cold snake. Deeper and colder.

I'm never really ready for that moment when I do truly have to leave and go back. When will the snake finally bite? When do I get to climb out of this bottomless pit?

I just take my mind off of it though. No need. I'm already resting in my bed, staring up at the ceiling.

My sheets don't smell of much to me, but whenever my parents walk into my room, they always seem to complain of how much it smells like a frat house or "like some homeless man died and shat in here at the same time". Funny they say either—I only ever drink upstairs and not in my own room, and my laundry is always kept at a consistent cycle of once a week, every single Sunday afternoon. Not like before, of course, but I guess some things don't change. It's too bothersome to change the sheets. Maybe that's why they smell.

I still lie there though, not really thinking about much. My smartphone is enough to keep me company for a short while anyway, and I had no shortage of free time since I didn't have anything until the end of the week. No need to shower, no need to clean, just keep it barely up enough to be acceptable. I wasn't really hoping for much when it comes to my summer weeks

anyway. Weren't they supposed to be spent relaxing? I'd rather not spend the extra effort to think about what I'd actually want to do or take any actions—fuck that shit. Laziness is a boon, and can't I just be free-flowing Dionysus for a few days longer?

Whatever. Even I know that's wrong: Dionysus partied all the time and I'm here watching SelfTube videos on some game I've never heard of. This is the life, truly.

Until I get bored that is. I hate it when that happens.

It's bound to happen that the video I was watching turns out to actually be boring, especially because it's about something I don't care about or even have invested more time in than a single finger tap on a smartphone screen. I ignore the feeling coming up in my chest again—that snake—and grip it by its head and push it down towards my legs covered by fuzzy blankets.

It bothers me, really. It's like a cold chill—a blizzard flowing in the shape of a serpent, as my heart beats at a mile a minute. It doesn't want to be bitten. But the snake, in its search for prey, finds that core and chases after it. It upsets me.

So I decide to switch my phone activity. Can't really run from the beast when it's right inside you.

I quickly open up Nextagram for that curious scroll of friendly pictures. Much faster content than the old 'Tube, that's for sure. I'm a junkie, just looking for that quick hit of dopamine from those sweet sweet colours and sounds. Hopefully the snake will be fed with that sort of sustenance.

It isn't long until I find something interesting. Interesting enough that I'm staring at my phone at something that isn't moving for longer than five seconds.

A purple circle around an old classmate's profile on my feed. Her profile had nothing but a derpy drawing of some elvish anime character, along with her initials. She hasn't changed it in years, she told me. But, I'm still shocked.

She made a close friends post? That's rare. I don't ever see purple circles around most of my friends' posts, let alone her. Did she add me to these story posts recently?

The last time we'd seen each other in person was when she was kicked out of the university in my fourth semester. She'd been on academic probation for failing most of her classes three semesters in a row. For her first three semesters. Now that it was the fourth, the university wasn't going to let her down easy. She came here, bombed her first one and a half

years, and the institution said she couldn't stay. Or something like that. I never really paid a whole lot of attention to what she was doing.

Most of the conversations we'd ever have would be things about games or occasionally debates around politics. I remember we were discussing the policies on our university and how it was strange how difficult it was to apply to specific majors. We were on opposing sides on the argument. Most arguments, actually. One time, in second semester she broke up with her boyfriend and told most of her friends. Save for me, of course. I asked her how she was doing during that second semester. She said she was doing bad. But of course, I just had to ask again.

"Oh, that's sad to hear, how come?"

"I'm not telling you," she said, shaking her head with a smile on her face.

I only learned that she broke up with her partner her final academic semester. I didn't really know how to react to that.

But, even if we weren't close, during that fourth semester where she had to leave, she held a party before she had to fly back home. I was broke though, so I couldn't go. I had no money to spend on cheap Chinese takeout even with my real friends. Not that I would've considered her much of one: who in this world constantly argues with their so-called "friends" and get themselves into receiving passive aggressive comments like "I'm not telling you" or "You're a dour person to talk to"? I'd try to constantly just keep it cordial with her and that's what I get? Like, what? I go there, go to the university, just to be insulted? What kind of joke is this where some person like her comes up to me, after not having talked to me for months, ranting her problems of how she accidentally took a plane here though she's literally been fucking kicked out? I just—

Ugh, dammit. What the fuck ever. I can't believe I let the snake bite me.

Let's just not think about that anymore, I say to myself.

I stop my little bout of reminiscing and click on the purple circle with the silly anime picture.

A schedule of the days, Monday to Sunday pops up on my screen, organized into seven columns on a pure computer white background. There's coloured blocks on some of the horizontal lines denoting the time of day for each workday, designating time for some activity, like PROV2 or BIBL1.

It's a school schedule of course, but I recognize none of the class codes, and there's also instruction on Saturday. I hurriedly type a message to my old schoolmate.

"Hey! What classes are these and what college are they from?"

And then I pause. I don't click send.

I leave it there while I go and search up the class codes online.

Entering the class codes online yields an array of interesting results. They're mainly QueryA and ReadIt posts asking about the differences found in the classes, like BIBL1 and BIBL2, but they all connect back to one college in her home country.

Guess I should've expected that since I didn't recognize any of the class names or schedule timing. And I also guess she's not coming back to where we used to study either. I feel a smouldering chill at the bottom of my heart, and like someone has just dug their spade into the yard of my chest, lifting the dirt to begin digging a well.

What else can I find about this place?

From my original relaxed position, I sit up straight, but the slithering chill still remains. I type the words, now hunched over my phone. "St. Joseph's College", and I go to their website. It takes longer to load than I expect, and the chill freezes over my chest as the spade digs deeper and the snake circles the forming well.

The website is nothing interesting web design wise. It's just a regular college website with tabs to open up info for classes, new students, campus news, etc., but what strikes me is the choice they make for all the professors and students depicted in their promotional video.

Everyone is floating and flying through, even in standard classrooms, and they have that standard advertising promotional smile. They glide through air like butter, and make scientific learning discoveries, or mock political policies all while airborne. I scroll down.

Even the little buttons they have leading to program information have flying people too. Scrolling down or up makes them fly a little higher or lower. It's cute, but I can't help but feel that chill again. Why is it there?

Ugh, whatever. I click around to see what these classes could be about.

Searching through their website leads to the undergraduate program directory, where I see images of people seated at computer desks (thank god not everyone is flying in these smaller sections) or collaborating with other students. I find a specific program, "Game Design and Development".

I reckon that's the one she wanted to take. She was always one for wanting to develop games. It's the whole reason she went to our university and our department: we had one of the best programs for people wanting to break into that industry, and it's why I go there too. If me and her weren't casually arguing over dumb shit, we'd talk about games that we wanted to play, or new games with cool mechanics. Heck, even one time I stayed over at her dorm and played on some of the old consoles we had. But, I guess we were a little too art specific and specialized, and maybe our campus just wasn't for her. It's nice to remember those times we did actually get along, but I still can't shake off the chill. Why does it feel like the spade keeps digging into my ribs, and the snake wants to be in this new well?

Either way, there isn't anything left on the website that tells me more about the classes or reveals anything about the class codes. There's some PDFs that give degree requirements—obviously they'd be there, but I didn't care enough. I just say to myself it isn't there. I'd rather ask her anyway. Why not chat with an old acquaintance?

I go back to Nextagram and finally press send on my first message. I wait for her response.

It doesn't take long, however, until she pings me back with her reply.

"oh, this is St. Joseph's College in my hometown. i have classes in phys ed, religious studies, computer programming and visual art. i major in game design and development."

Dang, can't believe I got it. I'm a bit taken aback as to her speed, though I don't really have any background to go off of—I'd never really messaged her before this. But, I continue my facade into curiosity. I'm hardly interested at this point, but I might as well be courteous. We did share a few classes after all.

"nice, interesting. never would've expected the classes on religion and phys ed. sounds like a cool campus."

"yeah, it's a religious school, but they're pretty woke, honestly"

I respond.

"oh, that's good...? sorry. i'm not really too familiar with how you feel about religion."

I'd never really considered myself as spiritual or religious by any means, but I won't deny I've always had a fascination with it. She gives me her response as I ponder what she might say.

"i'm atheist, but i was raised catholic"

She goes on.

"i used to go to church every sunday, even went to sunday school all the way up until high school" she said.

"if i wasn't convinced then i won't be convinced now" she followed up in a second message.

She was always one of those people who used her intelligence like that. There was this one time we were talking about a new economic policy coming up in our nation. I stood pretty firmly on the side of disagreeing with its inception—she did too, but our conversation afterward derailed pretty fast. I had no way to defend my opinion, just that I disagreed with the potential future abuse of its wording, and what I'd heard from people who shared similar political views as me. I'll never forget being told my ignorance is a fundamental flaw in my personality. What does she know, fucking up her stay here where she studied first and ruining her chances at having a reputable degree studying internationally? Can't she see we're all trying? Trying our hardest? What does a dumb girl like her who can't even pass her classes here know about—

Ugh, FUCK! I can't believe I'm writing this out to myself and seeing this. I just have to write a line, a fucking long dash, so I don't go haywire. Ugh. Fucking Christ. Why'd the spade have to jam itself into that snake?

Whatever. Just don't think about it. Just respond.

"ahh i see"

Christ. I couldn't think of a better response. I had to follow it up.

"sounds unfortunate that you had to do that, but you seem pretty solid on your beliefs. i have a similar experience too, but i don't really know where i'd stand spiritually"

Whatever. Playing my classic move. Just reflect what they said and try to relate it back to yourself. Classic tactic. Works every time. Maybe.

"idk, i'd just think by this point i'd be convinced."

Guess she's not wrong. Maybe I should know too, even if I don't.

"yeah, maybe. wish i had more to say on the topic, i'm not the most experienced religiously or spiritually"

And it's true, but I don't really think too much about it. I'm just responding at this point. I'm not really listening to her.

"my dad took the bible as allegorical, but even my parents don't go to church anymore. which is weird, considering my grandmother was a deeply devout catholic and was a science teacher? and both my parents are stem majors?"

Guess she isn't really listening to me either. She just completely ignored my inexperience in this topic. I don't even know what she's saying, at this point. Why is she telling me this?

"eh, it's whatever" she says in a new message.

"yeah, i guess so. world works in mysterious ways" i type. I end the message with a yellow crying laughing smiling face. I guess it's whatever too. The slithering chill goes away for a moment as I think the conversation is over.

"yeah whatever" she says, quickly responding.

The fuck does that even mean?

"lmao, i'm just jesting" I reply back.

"sounds interesting though, the place seems cool. also seems nice they have queer events" I follow up in another message. I hit send. She sees the message.

And I wait.

It's just a few seconds...but it feels like a frigid agony of slow freezing ice. I can even hear my watch tick the seconds by as I stare at my phone, still hunched over.

I type a few message ideas.

"you liking it there at st. josephs?"

"how's your hometown?"

"any classes you're looking forward to?"

I retreat and delete all of them, but the freeze doesn't dissipate. I wait for a few more seconds. She isn't typing back. I settle on a message.

"how is the school? better than the old university?"

I hit send, and then she's typing.

"there's like a million lesbians and a bunch of trans people here as well"

Wait, what? That wasn't even a response to my old message.

I scroll up a bit to see if I missed something.

"we have a whole building dedicated to the arts, it'd be interesting if we didn't support lgbtq rights"

Huh. Guess I did miss it. She just kept going on her own train, though.

"i'm still closeted from most of my relatives, but honestly i'm just waiting for most of them to die so i can come out."

She still continues as I respond.

"LOL relatable", I reply, again with that crying laughing face.

"being gay is one thing but not wanting to be a girl is another" she jokes.

"yeah, i get you, hard out here being a trans person"

That was one of the things we had in common, but never really bonded over. Out of our entire department and year, we were both transgender, but we never really talked about it. There were a lot of people like us at our university—and from her response, I guess it was the same where she is now—but I felt like we should've been closer because we're both transfem, or at least leaning that way. We'd get into conversations about our gender with the queer people at our school: how we felt, when we knew, all of those things, but us specifically? Not once. Strange, because we had similar experiences with our gender going into it, and I did truly relate to not wanting to come out to people in our lives. I wasn't lying to her when I said her experience was relatable.

But I couldn't shake the feeling, that maybe, it was impossible for that to happen.

Ugh. The surface of the ground on my chest feels like it's freezing, like its the chillier months of October and November, and the grass is starting to become white with ice. The spade isn't there digging anymore, it's just sitting upright in the new hole, with the cold snake circling around the bottom, cozying up to the metal blade.

"it's chill. people are just confused as to what i'm supposed to be sometimes"

I can't take this anymore. The snake is making its home now.

"yeah, i get you. anyway"

I have to lead this away.

"thanks for chatting me up, i always like to hear about what's going on in people's lives after they switch unis or if they'll come back"

I send a smiley face too. I can't tell if it's sincere. The cold in my chest is freezing my brain over, and only my fingers are moving.

"good luck in your classes and finals! please tell me if you ever make a game, i'd love to play it"



I send two smiley faces. I can't tell if they're sincere. The cold seeps into my spine, up through my chest and into my skull. It's moving to my fingers.

"ty" she says.

And then she's gone.

And then I'm cold. Really cold.

I shut off my phone, place it onto the bed, turn it face down, and put my head in my hands. What the fuck am I doing?

Really, what the fuck am I doing?

I could've ignored her message, could've accepted she's moved on and not there anymore, but I just didn't.

We weren't even friends. We were barely friends. That I am sure of.

But I can't deny the spark she had.

She always beat me in terms of knowledge, conversation, and creative projects and assignments, even if we both failed to come to class on time or at all most of the time. She had all the resources, all the knowledge, all the intelligence to pass through and stay here.

But why was I the one with the better GPA?

Why couldn't we have been friends? Just friends? Literally just had a conversation that was deep and meaningful, like we'd really knew each other and weren't at each others throats?

Because then, I could lay this heart to rest. I could let its fangs of ice rest.

But her heart had icy cold fangs too.

And we always let them cross. Only fang to fang, fang to heart, never heart to heart.

I know myself. I know these aren't romantic feelings. I know I have no sexual attraction to girls even if I want to be one.

We talked about it once, and I even thought of it. And I was disgusted, just like every other girl I've met.

But these feelings. That pit. The one the spade shoveled through so the snake could lay in its place.

I just wanted a friend like her.

But I know something.

With someone like her, a heart doesn't just have fangs of ice. The flesh is made of permafrost.

I shouldn't be surprised to learn that warmth doesn't travel far in the winter tundra. Or that time and entropy make things colder until they reach absolute zero.

But why, after I've given my warmth, does this equilibrium feel colder than before?

I pull the spade up from my heart, next to the snake, as the sun touches the horizon. My heart—the snake—bears so many bites, but now there's two more. Still, I take up the spade and shovel dirt over the icy snake that is my heart. Once the dirt has covered it all, I kneel, knees pressing into the ground, head in my hands. The earth spins beneath me, and then the summer is cold and empty again.