

DUCKS

by

Megan Polstra

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

AIDEN (15), quiet and distant, is sitting at his desk, doodling swirls in his notebook.

Around him, the rest of the CLASS is in various states of listening to their teacher, MS SIMMONS (34) teaching.

MS SIMMONS

So, when Hamlet says, "To die, to sleep - to sleep, perchance to dream - ay, there's the rub, for in this sleep of death what dreams may come", what is he trying to say?

Silence in the classroom. Some shuffling and coughing but no one raises their hand.

MS SIMMONS (CONT.D)

Hamlet is making a statement here about what, Aiden?

Aiden flinches and shakes his head. Ms. Simmons waits.

MS. SIMMONS (CONT.D)

It doesn't matter if you're right, what do you think these lines are about?

Aiden shrugs, avoiding eye contact.

MS. SIMMONS (CONT.D)

Any idea?

A snicker from the back of the class pulls her attention away from Aiden, who is slowly sliding further into his seat. She sighs and turns to another kid in class, TAYLOR (15), snarky and smart, who was part of the group laughing.

MS. SIMMONS (CONT.D)

What about you, Taylor?

Taylor straightens and smiles.

TAYLOR

He's saying that he wants to die.

Ms. Simmons hesitates.

MS. SIMMONS

And how do we know this?

TAYLOR

Cause he's saying that if he's dead then he can escape all his worries.

Taylor looks over to Aiden and rolls her eyes at him with a sneer. He sneers back but sinks further into his chair and abandons his doodles.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The classroom is now empty of everyone but Ms. Simmons and Aiden. Aiden is staring over Ms. Simmons' shoulder, pretending to listen.

MS. SIMMONS

I know that Shakespeare may not be interesting to you, but I need you to try. I don't want to fail you.

AIDEN

It's fine.

MS. SIMMONS

No, it's not. You could pass this class if you started handing in assignments, you don't need to get everything right -- you just need to try.

AIDEN

I'm good.

Ms. Simmons pinches her nose with her thumb and finger, closing her eyes.

MS. SIMMONS

You're a bright student, Aiden, but you will fail this class if you don't try.

Aiden looks down and shrugs.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

An empty school hallway, with the sounds of the other students echoing but there's no one in it but Aiden.

He digs through his bag until he finds an apple, then sits curled up in the corner with his phone.

Two guys, CORY (15) and BLAINE (16) turn the corner down the hallway, see Aiden, and start elbowing each other.

They both eye him but don't say anything. Actually, they seem to be giving him space as they travel through the hallway.

CORY

So, the teams meeting up tomorrow for practice, even though Coach won't be back until next week.

BLAINE

Hey, nothing wrong with practice.

CORY

Nah, it's nice.

Aiden shifts and the boys' glance over at him, he glares at them and they glare back.

BLAINE

What the fuck is your problem?

Aiden looks back at his phone.

CORY

Fucking weirdo.

They hurry the rest of the way down the hallway and turn off it onto the next.

EXT. AIDEN'S HOME - DAY

Aiden is standing at his front door, key in hand. He unlocks the door but hesitates and looks around.

His house looks average for the area and not particularly old. On the outside it looks innocent enough.

Aiden takes a deep breath in and twists the doorknob --

-- it flies open away from him, almost drag him through the entry way.

His father, JACOB (40s), blunt and mean, is on the other side, staring down at him.

JACOB

What are you doing?

AIDEN

Nothing.

JACOB

Get the fuck inside.

Jacob pushes passed him out the door. Aiden waits until Jacob's heading to his car before entering the house.

INT. AIDEN'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - DAY

There's a messy on the counter, with ERIN (40s), absentminded and demanding, puttering around the space. There's a pot on the stove and music playing softly in the background.

Erin looks up and notices Aiden as he tries to sneak past.

ERIN
Aiden hon! Come here.

Aiden pauses, drops his bag outside the door, and enters the kitchen.

AIDEN
Yeah?

ERIN
Come taste this.

Aiden looks over what his mom's cooking with, focusing on the mushrooms..

AIDEN
I'm allergic to mushrooms..

ERIN
No, you're not. Don't be silly.

AIDEN
I am.

ERIN
No, you're not. Give this a taste.

AIDEN
No.

Erin turns to look at Aiden, frowning she puts her hands on her hips.

ERIN
Aiden, sweetheart, you'll need to grow out of this contradictory behaviour some time.

Aiden nods, but is slowly sliding out of the room.

AIDEN
I have to go.

His mother sighs but says nothing as Aiden exits.

INT. AIDEN'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - DAY

Aiden's not a particularly neat kid and so there's a mess all over his room, but he knows what he's looking for.

He digs through a drawer until he pulls up a bag of sunflower seeds.

EXT. PARK - DAY

There's no one around and the only sound is the splashing of ducks in the water and the sound of them quacking.

Aiden is sat on a bench, the bag of sunflower seeds in hand.

He tosses a few to the ducks and they gobble them down.

He's got a nice collection of ducks, clearly he knows how to feed them and has gained their trust.

He tosses a few more seeds to them, watching them eat them.

For the first time, Aiden looks comfortable. He's not frowning or glaring. He leans back and closes his eyes, the ducks at his feet continue to peck at the seeds.

The sounds of the park are soothing and Aiden relaxes into it.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Ms. Simmons is standing at the front of the class, papers in hand.

MS. SIMMONS

Today we will be looking at Hamlet in a new way. I want us all to think about how we are similar or different to the characters in the play.

She distributes the papers, pausing at Aiden's desk for just a brief moment. They make eye contact but he immediately looks away.

MS. SIMMONS (CONT.D)

This will be due next week. I understand that Shakespeare can be hard to understand outside of class, so there's a link to No Fear Shakespeare on the bottom of the page.

Aiden looks over the paper, focusing on Ophelia. He taps his finger on the desk, thinking.

INT. AIDEN'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Aiden, Jacob, and Erin are sitting at the kitchen table.

JACOB

It was just the worst, I can't
imagine what she must be like
behind closed doors.

ERIN

Some people's children. You'd never
be like, would you?

Aiden glances up but doesn't even try to respond.

JACOB

Of course he wouldn't.

Jacob reaches over and slaps Aiden on the back.

AIDEN

We've told him all he needs to
know, he's got a good head on his
shoulders.

Aiden stares down at his food.

INT. AIDEN'S HOUSE. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Aiden is laying on his back in bed, closing his eyes, he can
hear Ms. Simmons.

MS. SIMMONS (V.O)

I shall the effect of this good
lesson keep, As watchman to my
heart. But, good my brother, Do
not, as some ungracious pastors do,

Aiden gets up and goes to get his notebook, he sits on his
bed, pencil poised over the paper.

MS. SIMMONS (CONT.D)

Show me the steep and thorny way to
heaven; Whiles, like a puff'd and
reckless libertine, HiMs.elf the
primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.

On the paper, the first line he writes is; "I understand
Ophelia".

EXT. PARK - DAY

Aiden is on the bench, backpack by his side, seeds spread
for the ducks, and a copy of Hamlet on his knee.

She chews on a sunflower seed, watching a duck do the same.

In the open book on his lap is the opening scene of Ophelia.

MS. SIMMONS (V.O)

"As one incapable of her own
distress, Or like a creature native
and indued/ Unto that element: but
long it could not be"

Aiden tosses a few sunflower seed into the water, watching
as they sink and the ducks go after them.

MS. SIMMONS (CONT.D)

"Till that her garments, heavy with
their drink, Pull'd the poor wretch
from her melodious lay /To muddy
death."

He stares at the water, finger curling and uncurling around
the book in his lap.

INT. AIDEN'S HOUSE. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Erin and Jacob are at the kitchen table when he passes the
doorway, eating.

JACOB

Aiden, come here.

Aiden shuffles into the room, looking between them.

ERIN

You didn't join us for dinner.

JACOB

Where were you?

AIDEN

I--

ERIN

You know how important dinner is.

JACOB

Your mom works very hard every day
to make you dinner, the least you
could do is be here for it.

AIDEN

Sorry, I--

ERIN

Don't apologize, just be here next
time, alright?

Aiden nods.

JACOB

Now, how did the soccer try-outs
go.

AIDEN
I didn't--

JACOB
Why didn't you go?

ERIN
I thought you loved soccer?

AIDEN
I do--

JACOB
Then what happened?

AIDEN
I--

ERIN
You can tell us anything.

Aiden keeps his mouth closed, shaking his head.

AIDEN
I just didn't make the team.

ERIN
Oh, that's a shame.

JACOB
Practice and I'm sure you'll make
it next time.

Aiden nods awkwardly and then shuffles out of the room.

ERIN
(calling after him)
There's leftovers in the microwave!

Erin and Jacob look at each other sighing.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Aiden is sitting on the ground, ducks and seeds around him with Hamlet and notebook open. He's writing, looking up at the ducks every so often.

MS. SIMMONS (V.O)
"O, treble woe/ Fall ten times
treble on that cursed head, Whose
wicked deed thy most ingenious
sense/ Deprived thee of!

He continues to write, the words seeming to spill from him easily.

He throws more handfuls of seeds to the ducks, stopping his writing to stare at them.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Aiden shows up to the park with a bouquet of pansies. He goes around to each duck and gives them one, smiling when they start to eat them.

He keeps a few for himself and returns to his spot, taking out his notebook. We see that he's got a lot more written than he had before, but now there's some crossed out and rewritten.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Ms. Simmons is collecting assignments. Aiden very carefully takes his out of his backpack and lays it on the side of his desk.

His is different from the others, while everyone else has theirs printed or clearly a good and clean copy of theirs, his is his original copy. The same first line is there in the same messy writing.

Ms. Simmons pauses only slightly, not enough to draw attention, but she smiles to herself as she moves on to the next student.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The classroom is emptying out, but Aiden is lingering, trying not to look like he's lingering.

Ms. Simmons waits until the last student has trickled out before looking over at him. She waits for him to come to her.

And he does, after a few seconds.

AIDEN

I know that mine isn't clean or a good copy, I didn't have time...

He trails off and looks to her, waiting for her to interrupt, but she just stares at him patiently.

AIDEN (CONT.D)

But I like what I've written.

MS. SIMMONS

Good, then that's all that matters.

All the tension seems. to drain from his shoulders.

MS. SIMMONS (CONT.D)
Just from skimming it, I can
already tell you've done a great
job.

AIDEN
Thanks.

He can't look up at her.

MS. SIMMONS
I'm proud of you.

Aiden rocks back on his heels.

MS. SIMMONS (CONT.D)
Would you be willing to tell me
about your ducks sometime?

Aiden nods, starting to smile.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Aiden is sitting in front of the ducks.

AIDEN (V.O)
I understand Ophelia because I feel
like I know what it's like to be
overwhelmed by everyone.

He throws a handful of seeds, much more than he normally
does.

AIDEN (CONT.D)
There's always so much going on and
I feel like I can never keep up.
But like she did with her flowers,
I found a place of my own as well.

Aiden relaxes back into the grass, closing his eyes.

AIDEN (CONT.D)
I don't think I'm "mad" like they
say she went, but I understand her
obsession with flowers and having
something small but all her own.
It's nice.

The ducks quack around him and he pops a sunflower seed into
his mouth.