

Silence

I grip my toes on the side of the pool. The tile is slimy and cold under my feet. I reach up and fidget with my goggles, securing them tightly on my face. My teammates are conversing behind me, I hear their laughter and loud speech. The sounds are muffled by my bathing cap, which is pulled securely over my ears. It's been a long day and I am not in the mood to join in their lighthearted conversation.

My thoughts wander back to earlier today. I had woken from a nightmare in a panicked sweat. Shaken by the dream, I stumbled out of bed and got ready for the day. I shoved my books in my backpack and sat on my bed. I called my mom to see how she was doing, to see if the side effects of her treatment had gotten better or worse. I hung up, promising I would call her again soon. I had gone to the dining hall, poured a bowl of cereal that I didn't touch, and gone to class. I stopped at Dunkin Donuts along the way and grabbed a medium iced coffee, the same thing I order every day. I rushed off to 5.12 recitation where my TA breezed through synthesis problems. I nodded and pretended I understood, but my thoughts were elsewhere. From there, I went to 7.02 lecture where we covered material that I had already learned. I then rushed off to eat a quick lunch before heading to lab for 7.02. In the basement of Building 68, I pipetted, I vortexed, I centrifuged, and I plated. Transforming yeast cells is a simple and boring process. It is monotonous. Before I knew it, it was five o'clock. I raced from the east side of campus to the west, trying to get to the Z center before practice officially started. I ripped off my clothes, threw

on a bathing suit, grabbed my cap, goggles, water bottle, and equipment bag, and walked to the pool deck. Exhausted and hungry, I stretched out my sore legs and arms. I threw on my cap and goggles and adjusted my suit.

And now, here I stand. Toes gripping the slimy edge. A four hundred free is the first thing on the agenda today. The pool is calm, the surface remains unbroken. The entire team is standing on the pool deck. I shake off the thoughts of today. I inhale deeply, throw my arms in front of me while simultaneously pushing off the deck with my toes. I remain airborne for a split second. There is a loud clap as my arms and head pierce the surface of the water. And then...

Nothing.

Complete and absolute silence.

I feel the tension begin to leave my body. I relax. I am no longer worried about my classes, my mom, my annoying ex, my pestering friends. I am alone in the water. I embrace the silence. I glide for a bit more before I start to kick. Each fly kick starts from my core and undulates out to my feet. Over and over I wiggle my body through the water. My head remains securely positioned between my arms, which are grasped in a tight streamline position.

I have enjoyed the pool entirely to myself for this single lap. The pool is still silent. All I hear is the rush of water moving past my body. I pick my head up and begin to surface. I have nearly reached the end of the pool. I blow the air out of my lungs; bubbles stream out of my nose and up to the surface. I break the surface, my head pops out, and I breathe in.

Sound rushes into my ears. I hear my teammates, the other pool patrons, the water lapping, the lifeguards chatting. My perfect, complete, utter silence has been broken. I snap my legs and push my head back into the water and begin to swim freestyle. Right arm, left arm, right arm, left arm. I complete a flip-turn and begin to head back in the other direction. I follow along

the black line on the bottom of the pool. My teammates have begun jumping into the water. The silent water becomes cacophonous. Water rushes past my head and beats upon my eardrums. It is loud but it is soothing.

This is my favorite place at MIT: buoyed by the water, pivoting from side to side, water rushing by me. No matter how stressful life gets, no matter how many psets I have, I will always have swimming.

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