



# “Willow”

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Introduction To Literature

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The poem I wrote is based on an incident that occurred on December 12th, of 2016. When I was a sophomore in high school at Hunterdon Central Regional High School, one of my classmates hung herself in a stall of the girl's bathroom. Her name is Allison Vandal. We shared a few classes together my Freshman year, and I was close friends with her boyfriend. I remember being in Spanish class at the time, hearing a scream from the hallway. The school had us evacuate the building, but no one knew what had happened. There were waves of rumors that reached me, but the truth was the last thing that I would've wanted to occur. I saw her that day, we even had a simple conversation, but there were no signs that she was struggling so much. She was in the hospital in an unresponsive state due to the brain damage she received from lack of oxygen for a prolonged length of time. She passed away four days later on December 16th. The aftermath impacted students greatly. Being exposed to such hardships so young left many students, including myself, heartbroken and confused. It seemed that no amount of counseling could nullify the harsh reality of death. I only hope that she has found peace and her soul is at rest. The event triggered an emotional wellness movement throughout the school and local community, and there were many efforts to destroy the stigma surrounding mental health. Many of my friends worked to provide a safer environment for students to reach out and communicate feelings of self-harm, depression, and anxiety. Depression and suicide affects a wide range of people, and there are countless stories similar to this. I wrote this poem in honor of Ally and to promote awareness for mental health:

Willow

You weep for me  
 But I tower above, wading in the green sea  
 You cry out why  
 But I gave you my answer  
 The shackles of life  
 Did nothing to contain me  
 For my roots are free

The vines that rest on my collarbone  
 Look nice  
 The limp limbs lean over my heart  
 Protecting it  
 And your tears  
 Are as good as rain

But wane your weeping  
 Don't die yet  
 Deepen your roots, open your heart  
 And grow  
 Until you tower above me  
 With soaring branches

For now,  
 I will weep for you.

After reading, I conclude that the dominant theme in this poem is acceptance. With the speaker's description of their position and perspective, it can be safely assumed that the speaker is the victim, who has already died. Also, there is no rhyme scheme involved in the poem, as well as an undefined setting.

In stanza 1, lines 1-2, the speaker is aware of their loved ones emotions. They "weep for" the speaker in response to the speaker's death. However, the speaker is not affected by their

sadness. This could possibly allude to the speaker being at peace with the actions they have taken. In the second line, the speaker “towers above” in a “green sea”. This could refer to the speaker finally overcoming or achieving peace. This sea of green paints a mental image of a tree standing tall above the grass. In this sea, the speaker isn’t drowning, they are comfortably wading in it, which tells the reader that the victim is no longer in turmoil.

In stanza 1, lines 3-4, it becomes more apparent that the speaker does not identify themselves as a victim, and instead, they see everyone else as a victim. They questioned the speaker’s actions, however, it seems that the speaker could not have been more clear. The true victims are left baffled, confused, and hurt from what happened, and cannot understand the speaker’s reasoning. Perhaps the speaker’s “answer” could have been found in a note left behind, or simply within the action of suicide itself.

In stanza 1, lines 5-7 there is some more insight as to what the speaker’s answer could be. The speaker saw life as a burden that chained their soul down, however, those chains “did nothing to contain” them. This could mean that at the moment, the speaker is now free from their struggles. Roots are mentioned in the seventh line, adding to the imagery of a tree rooted in a field with the freedom to spread and grow infinitely.

In stanza 2, lines 8-9, “the vines” in these lines may refer to the noose the speaker used, now resting because the speaker is no longer living. The vines are non-threatening and even have a sense of beauty to them, contrary to the dark connotations of a noose. They also could be seen as literal vines snaking down a weeping willow that the speaker has taken the form of. This poem

not only shows acceptance, but also facilitates the idea of reincarnation. The speaker may be reflecting on themselves after being reborn into a more free and beautiful life form.

In stanza 2, lines 10-11, the alliteration “limp limbs lean” conjures two distinct images to the reader: One being an image of a figure’s limbs, lifeless and formless. And another being an image of a tree’s limbs bending with the wind. These limbs are protecting the speaker’s heart, similar to how a tree’s foliage may protect it from harsh weather. This may mean that in dying, the speaker’s heart and essence was preserved. These lines also relate to the speaker looking at themselves from the outside, and are reflecting on what they’ve done. The speaker is also stating that they are granted protection after their death, possibly implying that they no longer will feel pain or strife.

In stanza 2, lines 12-13, the tears of the grieving are used to help the speaker grow. They are “as good as rain” and can be absorbed by the speaker. This may mean that the speaker is validating the feelings of the grief victims, and offering reassurance that their sadness does not go in vain. Although those people may not be able to express how they feel directly to the speaker, their message is still able to be received in a way that is cultivating to the speaker. Each segment of this stanza contains something that the speaker takes notice of, and can be perceived as negative, but the speaker turns those negative images into positive outcomes. Earlier, the vines added to the speaker’s beauty, the limbs are a form of protection, and the tears are refreshing rain. This adds to the theme of acceptance because these positive outcomes stem from the negative consequence of death. The speaker has reached their own form of acceptance. This may

also be seen through the more matter-of-fact tone of the speaker simply noticing how the vines “look nice” or the tears fall like “rain”.

In stanza 3, lines 14-15, There is a shift in the poem where the speaker begins to direct the griever to “wane your weeping”. The speaker sends out words of encouragement, after already grasping the situation. This also tells the reader that those people affected by the speaker’s death are still grieving. The speaker also tells them “don’t die yet” which could possibly mean that the griever is considering taking their own life due to the amount of pain they are feeling. The speaker advised against this and to instead build off of what has happened.

In stanza 3, lines 16-17, the speaker continues to offer help to other grievers to “deepen their roots.” I read this as deepening their relationships with the people in their life, and inviting others into their life in order to strengthen their connections with the world. The speaker tries to help and console everyone they left behind and to help them accept that reality so they can also grow.

In stanza 3, lines 18-19, the speaker believes that eventually, the people they are addressing will surpass them in the afterlife because their time spent alive was filled with loving relationships. Those who are affected will reach new heights until there is an entire canopy above the speaker. Their “soaring branches” will protect themselves and the speaker. This descriptive language leaves the reader visualizing a forest of trees. This could signify that once the griever’s join the speaker in the afterlife, they are able to see how much they’ve grown and learned from the event.

In stanza 4, lines 20-21, the speaker must wait until the day arrives that they are joined by others, and during that period, the speaker “weeps” for them. This could mean that the speaker takes pity on the ones that are affected by their death, but the speaker still wishes for them to be strong and carry on.

Overall, this poem uses symbolism of reincarnation, as well as a unique perspective in order to offer the reader a form of acceptance and comfort. This was made possible through the speaker’s encouragement to live on, and to grow more than they ever will.