

The Swan Princess

BY ZAREENA ZAIDI

As a little girl, I remember watching "The Swan Princess"

A Disney take on Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake complete with an evil sorcerer, a dumb prince, a side-kick toad and a beautiful princess, cursed to transform into a swan every night. The prince and princess grew up together, seeing each other every summer. Until one summer's day the prince said, "You're beautiful"

To which the princess replied, "Thank you. But what else?"

The prince, dumbfounded, responded, "What else is there?"

I remember too, being perplexed. He just called her beautiful, wasn't that the highest compliment in the world?

Maybe it's because I wasn't a swan, no -- I was a duck. Not even, that's too generous, I was a toad for sure.

My toadness ran deep -- all the way to elementary school. This girl, Hannah, would always call out my "flaws" to me every morning, whether it be pointing out my nose hairs, nagging on the fact that I'd already worn that shirt that week or just plain ol' calling me ugly (when you insult someone everyday, you eventually start to run out of ideas). Another girl told me I would never get a boyfriend. Another girl told me I didn't look "American" -- whatever the hell that meant. I would often spend my lunches in the library, reading or talking to the librarian, it beat wandering around the playground alone.

As time went on, I became more social, and I upgraded to a side-kick toad. And a damn good one, too. I became friends with a lot of swans, and a lot of guys would swoon over them. They would come to me for help and I would introduce them to my friends -- I was a great wing woman (without the wings), I was always so astonished by the way boys would flock to them, mesmerized by their feminine charm.

I remember the first time a boy called me beautiful. It was over text at midnight, I was 12 years old and it was past my bedtime but that didn't stop me from squealing, exploding into a cosmic ball of energy jumping on the bed bursting my mom had to come to my room and settle me down.

It's amazing how much energy one little word will give you.

I felt like maybe, just maybe, I had a shot at being a swan.

Sometimes people will come into your life and lift you up, making you feel like the most beautiful swan in the sky. Others will try to tear your wings and make you feel like that groggy toad.

But remember:

You are not merely the swan

Or the toad

Or even the princess

No, no no.

You are the entire fucking lake.

Your lengths stretch longer than a toad can leap. Your depths deeper than a swan can dive

Holding more than just an empty reflection staring back up at the princess, asking "what else is there?"

What else is there, you may ask?

Within you is an entire kingdom, bursting with life and vibrancy

And you cannot be constrained to 3 beau-ti-ful little syllables.