

My brother's death hit me like a gun shot to an open wound; it destroyed every ounce of joy my family had last year. His body was found washed up at the beach a few days after he was reported missing, and he spent his last few moments doing what he loved most, swimming. I remember him saying that even though he was drowning in debt, he could always swim and drown his sorrows in water instead of alcohol. A regular baptism, he would say. He had hoped his wrongdoings would be cleansed and washed away by the water, swimming was as easy as breathing to him. I didn't think the very thing that gave life to his dying spirit would ultimately lead to his death.

We feared death closed in on him like a hunter pouncing on his prey, and the thought of him struggling to take his last breath left us breathless. I know he felt indebted to us for helping him all these years, but his debt deterred him from drawing up a will. There was nothing left for him to pass on after his passing. Just as we thought the worst was over, we came across a note in his bedroom. My mother's hands trembled as I handed it over to her. She couldn't bring herself to read it, so I braced myself to do so. When I finally did, the note read like a transcript of our last conversation together. He spoke of his dreams and mentioned how quickly they turned into nightmares. One dream in particular was his hopes of breaking a swimming record someday. Something did break but it wasn't the record, it was his heart. Eventually, he realised the only record he could ever have was a criminal one. He was accused of a crime he didn't commit years ago and was mistaken for an armed robber at a grocery store. It ended up costing him his freedom when the only cost he expected to bear that day were the items on his grocery list. The manager insisted it was him because he matched the description of the suspect, but the only description given was a "tall, dark-skinned male". They claimed the CCTV was faulty that day so the cashier's statement was the only evidence available. My brother walked in just as the robber was rushing out, and the cashier looked up to see him when the door closed. She yelled when she saw his face and identified him as the culprit when the police arrived. He didn't get the chance to clear his name because they believed he completely cleared out the cash register. Like a caged bird waiting to be set free, he waited patiently to be released from prison and when it finally happened, he couldn't release the anger and bitterness trapped inside of him. He struggled to land a job and his debt kept piling up, and after years of trying, he

decided to end it all at the one place that brought him joy. He didn't swim for his life, he just let the water overpower him because he felt powerless. But his death had power over us, to this day the mere mention of his name kills every conversation, it turns our joy into sorrow and our happiness into pain.