

cosmos

He never really liked going to the beach. The feeling of the grainy sand beneath his toes and the sweltering heat on his back always made him uncomfortable. That, and the threatening presence of the ocean caused him to fear beaches - primarily because he never learned to swim. Large bodies of water had intimidated him from a young age, what with all of the unknown creatures lurking beneath the surface and the fact that so much of it was yet to be explored due to its dark and unreachable depths. From afar, however, he thought beaches were beautiful, especially when watching the sky aflame in the afterglow of the setting sun and its stunning reflection on the water below. But, as with most elements of beauty, they were only meant to be gazed upon from a distance. He found that the closer he got, the more devastating the consequences were for him and so it was all he could do not to be lured into the trap disguised as elegance that would only end in disaster.

It is commonly known, however, that one's resistance to temptation is feeble. Because of this, it was only a matter of time before he gave in to his fascination and returned to the beach he disliked so much. He described it as fate that he did, for it was on that very same day that the stars aligned and he saw *her*. For him, it was love at first sight - she was the epitome of everything he had hoped for and because of the way she glowed in the sunlight, he saw it fitting to name her the *sun*. Conversely, she passed by him without so much as a glance his way, not caring to pay attention to anyone but herself and the flowers she was neatly arranging in her hair.

A couple of days later, when he finally worked up the courage to approach her at the same beach he first laid eyes on her, he did so accompanied by some flowers, noticing her deep affection for them as she intricately weaved them through her hair. He had picked them out himself, admiring the various shades of pink with bright yellow centres that each one of them contained. They were called *cosmos* and symbolized peace, harmony and walking side by side - all of which he hoped to experience with her. As he neared her, his nervousness intensified when he saw just how beautiful she was up close. She only noticed him after he was directly in front of her and as soon as she did, he rushed to hand her the flowers and get his words out all at once, not wanting to give her the chance to walk away. She giggled as he awkwardly stumbled over his sentences and he blushed in embarrassment before letting out a small, sheepish smile. They talked for a little while by the seaside about anything and everything and afterwards, he felt happier than he'd been in a long time, declaring to himself that there was nothing he wouldn't do to hold on to her.

A couple of months passed by, in which a few more blissful dates with her occurred that he cherished in his memories. He didn't believe how quickly he had grown to admire her in the short time that they'd spent together and yet he already couldn't imagine his life without her. He had his doubts about her, of course, especially in moments when it seemed as though he was the only one committed to their relationship - he did everything for her



while she simply revelled in the attention - but he decided to overlook those flaws, for they paled in comparison to her otherwise perfect traits.

Noticeably, she was only ever happy when she got what she wanted - most of which were material items - but he was content to provide her with anything she asked for, regardless of whether or not she truly needed it. Though he gave more than he ever got, she always rewarded him with a radiant smile that lit up the entire room which he thought fitting for the name he'd first given her: the *sun*. However, it was as if she was a different person entirely when she didn't get something she wanted. She would lash out at him, ablaze with her fiery anger, and blame him for his inability to get her what she desired, making him feel pathetic and undeserving of her. Subsequently, she would begin to cry and give him a flimsy explanation for her outburst. And though she apologized for losing her temper, she never once made an effort to take back her harsh statements about him. In response, he would console her, somehow feeling it was his fault in the first place for being so incompetent, vowing to never let her cry again. What he didn't realize was that she had him exactly where she wanted him. Her tears had masked the slow smile on her face, knowing that he would do anything for her. Like the sun, she blinded him to the truth in order to get what she wanted and, in this case, it was him.

Perhaps it was his naivety or his desperation to be loved that caused him to remain ignorant as their relationship worsened over time. Or maybe it was because, without her, he felt worthless, lost and alone. She made sure of that as she gradually isolated him from everyone he had ever cared about until it was just the two of them left. *Only* the two of them. She was the sun in the sense that everything revolved around *her*; his needs always came second to hers and his entire life now consisted of trying to please her for fear of her wrath and the frequent belittling comments she directed at him. And yet, he loved her so much it hurt. It was unbearable for him to think of ever letting her go as it was exclusively with her where he felt like he was valued, even temporarily. She was good at that - manipulating his emotions for her own benefit - and her lies were as deceitful as the sun on a frozen winter's day.

Constantly, she would think of something sweet to tell him; a poem or a story, a sentence or a song, and yet no matter how many times she told him she loved him, it never felt quite real. It felt as though she was only telling him what he wanted to hear and not what she truly believed. However, with time, he began to trust her instead of himself. He began to put her feelings above his own since it seemed as though she had done the same for him - or so he thought she had. He started taking away pieces of himself, chipping away at the walls he had put up around him to prevent this from ever happening and then gave them all to her, assuming she would give them back, although he now realized she never did. And then, he started to accept that what she was telling him was the truth. He allowed himself to believe in her; believe in their relationship. He trusted her, at first, until the pure sweetness of her words formed cavities in his mouth and the bitter stench of deceitful lies and broken promises overwhelmed him, causing the decay of all his teeth that not even a

dentist could fix. Though he had hoped the *cosmos* he'd first given her would represent the tranquillity and harmony of their relationship, instead, they did the opposite, and symbolized all that they could've been but never would be.

Now, it only hurt him to love her and when he looked in the mirror at the unrecognizable figure staring back at him, he cried for the man he used to be, merely a shell of who he once was, hollow from the inside out. He stayed with her still, not because he wanted to, but because he had no one else to turn to and he was dependent on her to tell him what to do. Indeed, that is exactly what she did and he followed her blindly because it was the only thing he knew how to do. She had always been ahead of him while he trailed after her, regardless of the consequences. Although he was chasing after the perfect woman that only ever existed inside his head, it was because of this delusion that he was led to his demise on the very same beach where they first met. While he had believed that their encounter was the beginning of a blossoming future together, it was truly the beginning of the end.

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By now they have been together for a couple of years and are making their weekly trip to *their* beach, as she likes to call it, against his wishes - though he doesn't have much of an opinion when it comes to decision-making. The one and only thing he ever refuses to do is to get within six feet of the water, still never overcoming his fear of the sea. For the most part, she respects his distance but never fails to make a snide remark about his cowardice while he shrinks into himself, believing her cruel words. Today, however, she feels bolder and decides to push him out of his comfort zone to amuse herself. He startles as she grabs his hand and guides him closer to the water, closer than he's ever been before. His discomfort and unease are evident but she remains determined to test his limits, goading him on to get him into the water. When he still doesn't budge, she skips into the water, seeking adventure, all the while heading deeper and deeper against his protests.

Soon, she floats away, drifting on unsteady waters, unable to do anything but be swept off by the current. Her body is positioned like the star she is, flat against the water, and she beckons him towards her. She smiles as she goes, with a look of complete and utter peace on her face that refuses to be washed away by the water she now fights to stay on top of. He finds it funny how only as the distance between them lengthens do the *cosmos* meant to symbolize tranquillity truly take effect as she becomes more peaceful by the second. Her hair is splayed out around her head like a crown, guiding her along with the current below. The waves lash at her unmoving form - not violently but rather, gently - and her body responds to the rhythm of their movements as she rocks up, down, and side to side. Her summer dress sticks to her skin as it glistens with the shimmer of moisture from the surrounding water. Her hazel eyes remain closed which is probably for the best, as the water would undoubtedly flow into them otherwise, drawn in by their iridescent beauty as he once was, while her motionless body almost seems unreal, more statue than human.



He tries to reach out to her before she is gone completely by extending his left arm out towards her ever-fading figure, dampening the tips of his toes in the process. As her small form begins to fade away into the distance, his hand relaxes and falls back down to his side while his fist clenches around what should've been her hand but is now only air. She is so far gone, he wonders if she was ever really there to begin with.

Unsure of what to do without her, he timidly steps into the water, replacing the soft, dry sand beneath his feet with the sand's murky counterpart that lays beneath the water's surface. As he begins to travel into deeper territory, he shivers as uneasiness seeps into his pores, grabbing ahold of his body and stopping him in place. He glances back at the smooth, safe sand by the shore, wondering if he could go back alone but immediately realizing that there's no way he could ever live without her. He takes a deep breath in an attempt to steady his shaky breathing and works up the courage to continue, positioning himself in the exact same way she so gracefully did before laying down on top of the water. He envisions the way they might look: *two stars heading into the sunset alone together, drifting on unpredictable, peaceful waters*. A smile curves his mouth upwards and he relaxes completely, blindly trusting the water to hold his body up as it so easily did for her.

Instead of floating, however, he begins to sink and soon the lower half of his body is completely submerged. He uses his hands to push down on the rising water to no avail as the water pulls him in and refuses to let go. Panicked, he begins to hyperventilate, unable to maintain any semblance of stability. He kicks and he flails, desperately tilting his head upwards to delay its inevitable descent into the sea for as long as possible.

Despite his best efforts, it's not long before he takes his last breath, gasping for air. The thick water fills his eyes, his nose, his lungs. It's everywhere and nowhere, suffocating him with its invisible weight as he falls deeper into the unknown. In his final moments, he decides to open his eyes for the first time after being blinded by the one he calls the *sun* and behold the beauty of all that he missed underwater due to his fears. He tries in vain to return to the top, reaching with his right hand stretched as far as it can go, hoping that someone will pull him out before it's too late. When no one ever does, he brings his hand back down and clenches his fist which is now filled with nothing but water. He considers it a laughable sort of irony that he is able to find tranquillity in the waters he has feared for all his life but is grateful for the serenity, revelling in the quietude of his surroundings. Strangely, in his last moments, he thinks - not of her - but of the *cosmos*, realizing belatedly that the flowers were never meant to represent their relationship but rather the severance thereof, for it is only without each other that they could ever truly be at peace.

In the end, he's left drowning in the large expanse of sea he followed her into, knowing full well he never even learned to swim.



His body rises up to the surface and he lays face down, unbreathing, unmoving, lifeless. Though partly hidden beneath the water, his face expresses a state of shock but also resolve, as if he was prepared for his outcome. In a way, he was, some part of him



knowing that when he took his first step into the water; or when he first handed her the *cosmos*; or when he first returned to the fated beach he disliked so much, he was destined not to make it out alive. Initially, he gave her the *cosmos* and in return, she gave him chaos. But now, he is leaving with the very same *cosmos* she left behind, reclaiming all that she took for granted which was rightfully his to begin with.

The current guides his body along the water, pushing and pulling him to and fro. The waves are unrelenting, tender yet forceful, as he drifts along the surface. His clear, blue eyes are wide open, glossed over with film and constantly invaded by the surrounding sea. His hair is permanently matted to his head and his clothes stick to him unnaturally, sloshing between his skin and the water. The wrinkles on his fingertips and toes make it seem as though he has aged a lifetime since his journey began and indeed he has, learning with stunning clarity that the closer he got to the sun, the more likely he was to be burnt while the sun lives on without him, undisturbed by his presence - or lack thereof.

His limbs are spread out by his sides, legs and arms extended on either side of his quickly fading figure. He is *a star, heading into the sunset alone, drifting on unpredictable, peaceful waters*. Placid, he floats away, glowing like the *sun* he is - or once was before her.

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