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Surfacing

The smell of salt air rushed through the windows she rolled them down the minute the bridge came into sight. Sweet relief washed over her like a warm cleansing rain. All week, she could do nothing but roll around on her bed alternately crying and raging and sleeping so hard she woke with her arm tingling and more exhausted than before she slept. The television grated her nerves and flooded her with memories. Only the quiet creaks of the house as it settled jarred her out of her stupor. The newspapers were piling up and the mail carrier had even knocked on her door, but she had refused to answer. Everyone at work thought she was sick. And she was. Her heart had been skewered. Flayed open and flooded with agony. Nobody knew. Not her friends. Not her family. How could she tell them when she had not yet found the words herself?

Somewhere along the way, she managed to crawl into the shower and brush her teeth. Somehow she dragged herself, exhausted from endless days of being exhausted, into the office where she was almost immediately told to go back home and not return until she could answer simple questions and edit something longer than a paragraph of text without placing her forehead on the table in front of her to hide the tears that splashed down onto the page. Her heart broke a little more. Work was what she did well. She thrived at work and before him; it had been what she chose to define her. Editor. And a damn good one, at that. She knew that if she could not bury herself in her work, then she was well and truly stuck.

As she pulled her truck into their, no her garage, she saw her kayak strapped up on the side wall. It was kelly green and big enough to pack up for an overnight trip, but sleek enough to navigate true and quickly. Her kayak. I had been a splurge and she rarely had time for it anymore, but she used to love spending sunny Saturdays navigating local waters or taking it a little further down to the beach for some saltwater and…the beach. Her engine idled there in the garage, her foot on the brake. The visceral powerful pull of the ocean washed over her in an undeniable current. She needed to go to the beach. She needed to go now, before she could succumb to the dark cool of her sheets and the empty house. She slammed the gear into park and shut off the engine to race inside to pack a bag. She threw socks and sweaters and bras in randomly without her usual tidy and thoughtful approach. No time to think. Thinking would slow everything down and the pain would catch up and she would be lost for days again.

She slung her overnight bag over her shoulder, locked the door and climbed into the driver’s side and slammed the heavy truck door shut. She stopped. Her gaze settled and her large round eyes, normally a defining characteristic with their strange shade of gray with flecks of green, were now swollen to slits and red and unseeing. She could not do this. This was too hard. Slowly she felt herself being sucked into the vortex of pain again and she fought her way, swimming into the light and across the swirling mass of endless spinning thoughts, managing to spark the ignition and reverse out of the driveway. She made it her single mission to just get to the beach; determined just to get there. She could decide what comes next later. She cranked the music up loud to try and drown out her own thoughts. When that didn’t work, she stopped at a gas station and bought a pack of cigarettes. She had not smoked in years, but she lit up and pulled on the Marlboro as if she had never quit. She lit the next one from the butt of the last until she saw that bridge.

She exhaled slowly the calming mixture of smoke and salt as she sailed over the bridge. She was almost there and every cell in her body knew it. The moon was just starting its assent over the water and the clouds glowed mystically against the inky blue sky. She shook out another cigarette, noticing her pack of smokes was almost empty. She slowed for the traffic lights as she navigated her way by instinct to the old hotel she used to stay at with her parents as a kid. It was a beautiful grand and stately hotel in which every room faced the boardwalk and the ocean. It was where she first dreamed of becoming a writer. She made up stories that played out romantically on the beach, mysteriously in the dark corners of the wood paneled library, and they always began by first stepping up the wide steps that draped upwards to the double cut-glass doors. The front of the hotel had an old plantation façade glowingly lit at night and with a gently curving drive that pulled up and around the front to the much more modern car garage situated to the left. It had the southern charm and graceful lull that reminded her of lemonade and playing barefoot where the grass met the sugary soft sand.

The valet took the keys to her truck and she hauled her overnight bag from the driver’s side and swiped the crumpled pack of cigarettes from the dash to shove them in her jeans pocket. She hunched her shoulders against the damp salty air and stepped up the staircase and across the wide front porch. She inhaled sharply before walking across the cool blue and white tile floor to the registration desk and asking for a room. Unsurprisingly, she was almost the only guest what with the season not just yet begun. She rode the elevator up to her room and slipped her key into the door to turn the lock. Inside, she kicked off her boots and flung open the French style balcony doors before climbing into bed fully clothed; falling asleep before her head settled into the pillow.

She woke to the sound of the surf pounding the sand and the call of gulls as they floated by on the currents of air breezing off the ocean. It was cold. She was cold, but not the kind of cold that made it impossible to get warm. Not the scary sickly cold that took hold of her only a few days earlier. She stepped out in her socks onto the balcony and felt the sun warm her skin as she blinked at the dazzling sparkle of the sun as it danced on the water. As she stood there with a blanket wrapped around her shoulders with the sun on her face, she drank in the salty damp sea air like a drowning woman. She was a drowning woman. She had lost the only man she ever loved. No, not lost, was slaughtered by emotionally and then abandoned. Left to bleed out.

They were going to be married. The invitations had been addressed, and stamped with those pretty love stamps, and mailed. She had been receiving RSVPs for a week or so now. She already planned everything to the smallest bud vases and glittery stones for the place settings. She had selected two dresses; a floaty romantic and dramatic dress for the beach ceremony and a sparkly shorter party dress for the reception. Never in her wildest imagination could she have seen herself married. Settled. Domestic. He had slipped quietly into her life and gently changed her mind about how she wanted to live and about planting real roots and making a home together. He softened her. She wanted to become a mother again; something she had not allowed herself to imagine for a long while. He had been supportive, attentive and encouraging. He had also been planning his escape.

Last Saturday, he sat her down at the kitchen table they picked up at an Amish market on a whim, and in a calm and cold tone, told her how he no longer loved her and that he could never see himself actually married to her, much less having children with her. He told her that he had been waiting to close on a new townhouse before telling her that he no longer wanted to be with her. When she asked him why, he simply stated that it was easier to stay with her than to rent an apartment while he shopped for a home. It was easier for him to encourage her on menu selections and wedding songs than to rent an apartment. It was cheaper for him to continue the farce and kiss her sweetly and make the bed, and lower the toilet seat, and rinse his whiskers out of the sink. He was content to make love with her and talk about the family they wanted while he waited for this better deal to shake out. Her shame, her humiliation, her pain was all for his convenience. He had denied that there was another woman, but she hadn’t believed him. Not that it really mattered. He was gone. He left that very day.

She sucked an angry breath in and held it before slowly releasing it, and then she did it again. And again. She closed her eyes and felt a single hot tear trickle down her face and splash upon her collarbone where it cleaved its way across her heart before disappearing into the fabric of her shirt. After a long while, her breath became calm and she felt a little better. She stood there until the sun rode high in the sky. Just breathing and listening to the sound of the surf and the exuberant joyful noises coming from the children flying their kites several stories below. Feeling the cool of the breeze countered the warmth of the sun to create a sense of balance as she grounded her feet through the wool of her socks into the tile of the balcony.

When she finally padded back into the room, she decided that she would go for a run and test the temperature of the water. She was no stranger to cold water and if the ocean called too loudly, she would not hesitate to jump in and soothe the raging urge to dive under the waves and let the surf lift her to shore. She realized she was making decisions again, and setting intentions. Small ones, but measured actions that were reassuring. Her thoughts were starting to clear and her course of action was coming into focus. She could finally think again. If she could think about what she would do next, then she could think about what to do after that, and after that. Go for a run. Take a shower. Have a meal. Call her mother. Call the paper.

Plot her revenge.