

The Light Only Shines in the Summer

June 2007

Aris walked up the steps the light shining from above, her feet practically dragging. She was not sure why she even agreed. The conversation with her mother from a couple weeks ago replayed in her head, “Josh could really use the help, not to mention, you could use a vacation.” Her mother had told her. She was not wrong, Uncle Josh did need the help, and leaving the city as well as any thought of school seemed like bliss.

Even still, Aris felt a hesitation as she neared the burgundy door. It was in severe need of a paint job, as did the rest of the house, including the lighthouse attached, her first goal however was to paint the shop down the pathway a few feet away from her. While Aris was majoring in marketing and business, intent on eventually running a shop of her own, she was still very interested in the appearances. She had decided after taking one look at the property in front of her, that she was not impressed, not that much had changed since the last time she visited.

Uncle Josh and his wife Julia made sure that Aris was settled and comfortable after welcoming her through the slim crowded hallway. Aris made sure that her face was set in a satisfied fashion, despite her feelings of unease.

“I’m sure you’re tired from your train ride, so I’ll let you settle in further and then if your up for it, tomorrow we can go down to the shop.” Julia said gently, “Ben will be there. He came back from college early.”

“Ben?” Aris asked

“Yes, Ben. He might be willing to help you paint.”

That did not seem like a terrible idea. While Aris was sure that she could repaint and clean up the shop and the lighthouse in the three months she planned to stay there, having Ben there would definitely make the process faster.

Uncle Josh and Julia showed her to the guest room and left shortly after. Aris finished unpacking and headed straight to sleep. Julia was right, she was exhausted.

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The shop located on the first floor of the smaller home of the property was the same as it had in the past five years when her uncle had first bought the property. The walls were still that tacky yellow and the little lighthouse models on the shelf looked as though they had not been touched in years. The sign at the entrance still read "North Light Shop" and still sold all sorts of goods from fishing equipment to lighthouse keychains. Aris walked past the few displays in the cramped house-turned-store to get to the back room which may or may not have originally been a kitchen.

Someone with short blond hair was standing on the other side of the room. Ben.

Ben gave her a charming smile as soon as he noticed Aris standing in the doorway. She could not tell how genuine it was. Her instinct told her that part of it was, her head told her otherwise.

Looking at her slightly coyly, He introduced himself, "I'm Ben,"

Aris already knew this. Ben lived a couple blocks away from the North Light and would work at the shop whenever he wasn't at college.

She looked at him blankly and responded, "I'm Aris." Before turning around and walking out of the backroom, out of the shop careful to avoid the displays standing erect, and back outside. Aris did not know why she did. She told herself it was because the shop felt claustrophobic. It definitely was not because of the slightly pained look on Ben's face, or her guilt.

The next day went slightly better. Aris worked alongside Ben in the shop and even made small talk as they restocked the shelves. Aris was finishing to ring up a customer when Ben walked over and asked her why she was staying at North Light for the summer.

“To help Josh revamp the shop. I’m planning to start clearing the shop and start painting over the weekend.” Aris was actually surprised when Josh agreed to closing the shop for the weekend, she had been expecting to put up a fight and even had a list of reasons as to why appearance was important when running a business.

“Can I help?”

Aris pondered Ben’s question for a moment. She definitely needed any help she could get, Julia and Josh had plans to leave for the weekend, so as not to disturb Aris while she worked.

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It took Aris and Ben the entirety of the weekend and over eight gallons of pale blue paint to cover the entirety of the shop, including the backroom.

Aris found herself enjoying Ben’s company. While they painted, they talked about all sorts of topics such as their favorite courses from the past semester. She smiled and shook her head when remembering how Ben had mentioned that he enjoyed Calculus.

“You’re crazy, only crazy people enjoy math,” She said with a snicker.

Ben gave a look of fake-offense, “You’re only saying that because you barely passed Algebra I!” He threw back biting back a smile. The constant teasing went back and forth the rest of the weekend.

As the two of them began to get closer over the next month between working together as well as hanging out on the nearby beach, however, Aris began to feel weary about her relationship with Ben. While Aris was willing to give up information about herself, Ben seemed hesitant to share anything personal about himself. It was almost like she did not really know him, yet he knew so much about her. She hated how

familiar that feeling felt. The feeling of caring about someone who could not open up. The feeling of giving more than what one was receiving.

She chose to ignore that feeling. She chose to care about him. A lot. So, Aris gave as much as she had. She gave her secrets, her fears, her greatest memories, her kiss. She gave these despite knowing that she may not receive all of it back.

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Aris knew there was no going back during the second month of her stay. Uncle Josh and Julia were leaving for a week. Aris decided to tackle the lighthouse. Not only did it need a paint job, but the inside needed to be cleaned out and organized. It was near impossible to walk up the iron spiral stairs without tripping over boxes at least a couple times. The top of the lighthouse was just as bad. The third-order Fresnel lens, a beautifully cut-glass cage in which the now non-functioning light sat, as well as the glass walls of the small light room were coated in a thick dust.

Aris's goal was to completely clean and repaint the inside of the lighthouse and she enlisted Ben to help her. She decided to keep the exterior the same, growing fond of the red and white stripes. If all went according to plan, Aris was also hoping to replace the light in the Fresnel lens so the lighthouse could shine its light once again.

They were wiping down the Fresnel lens when Aris found the courage to speak, "Ben," She always found a way to say his name, she liked how it felt on her tongue. "Ben, you're confusing me."

Ben turned his head to the side and gave her a quizzical look, "explain," he said simply.

Aris did not know where to start, so she just let the thoughts flow out her mouth. She told him as tears streamed from her eyes that it felt like she cared about him and whatever their relationship was, it being currently untitled, more than he did. She told him about how at moments he would give her a look that would make her feel special, only to feel unnoticed for several days in a row. She told him that she had a

feeling that their relationship would end up with her in tears. She told him that she wanted commitment from him.

When Aris ran out of words, Ben walked the few feet over to her and embraced her in a hug. He did not contradict what she said. He did not say he would commit. He knew this conversation was coming and still did not have a response.

It did not stop Aris from caring, it was too late to go back.

After their embrace, the two of them went back to working as if nothing happened. While it was normal for Aris to do most the talking, Ben began to talk about the lighthouse. Since Ben had known the previous owner of North Light, he was also familiar with its history. Ben talked about how North Light was a private lighthouse built in 1880 by Alfred Finkel who hoped to impress his wife. Apparently, it didn't work too well. He told her about how the Fresnel Lens invented in 1822 by Augustin-Jean Fresnel to help project the light encased within it. He told her about the weather log, that the lighthouse keepers had to enter information into every day. Ben was fond of the idea of a lighthouse keeper. He said that while the light was the heart of the lighthouse, the keeper was its soul.

The two of them continued to work through the day and into the night, Astrid not saying a word, while Ben continued to share his extensive knowledge.

By the time that they finished organizing and painting, the morning sun was beginning to peak out from the lake. The two sat on the grass outside the lighthouse huddled together in the cold morning air.

Aris turned to face Ben, "Ben, let's just give it a try. I am willing to stay here longer. It's worth giving it a chance, please just tell me to stay because if you tell me, I--"

Ben cut her off "You know I can't"

"But why not?" Aris pleaded. Her face pained and hurt despite knowing inside that this would be his response.

“Because I can’t, I’m not ready for that relationship. I am not ready for that.” He repeated.

Aris felt another small tear roll down her cheek as she laid her back. The two of them sat in silence for five minutes. Then Ben got up and left. Aris assumed he went home. Aris headed to the room she was staying in shortly after.

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Josh and Julia were thrilled when they returned from their trip, their lighthouse looking its absolute best. Aris told them she was not able to find the correct tools to change out the light in the Fresnel lens, to which they told her not to worry and that they would take care of that.

A week passed and Aris did her best to avoid Ben, he seemed to be doing the same. Josh noticed the tension and asked Aris about it.

“It’s complicated”, was all Aris was able to reply with.

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Aris’s last month went by fast, her and Ben were now back on friendly terms however they never brought up the night in the lighthouse. Aris was hoping he would. Aris began to think that the night was simply her imagination, a fiction she made up.

The day she was meant to leave, Aris woke up and spent breakfast with Josh and Julia, making sure to thank them for their generous hosting. She then walked over to the shop and found Ben waiting for her at the door of the shop. It was an oddly familiar scene; she did not think too much of it though.

Ben gave her a small smile and walked a couple steps forward to meet her. Aris noticed a box in his hand. The color of the box similar to the freshly painted walls of the shop.

“Aris,” Ben didn’t say her name often, “I care about you.” He said as he handed her the box

“Then tell me to stay” She told him hoping that he would.

Ben smiled sadly and shook his head no. Aris gave him a similar expression and turned around to leave.

She walked a couple feet before turning back around,

“My train doesn’t leave for another two hours, if you change your mind, I’ll be waiting for my bus at the fourth platform.”

Aris turned back around and started her walk to the station.

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There was five minutes left until her train would pull, then she would get on and this summer would become part of a past. She held the blue box tightly in her hand

People were bustling all around her rushing to their respective trains. Aris kept her eyes out for a certain blonde haired someone, hoping he would come, hoping he would change his mind and tell her to stay with him.

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Aris boarded her bus at exactly 1:15pm.

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After reuniting with her parents and letting them know that Josh and Julia were doing well, Aris entered her bedroom and carefully placed her luggage on the floor near the bed. The little blue box however, she held onto. She walked across the room over to her windowsill and opened the box. Inside was a handmade beaded bracelet with a handwritten note attached.

“For Aris, who makes the lighthouse shine -Ben”

Aris smiled sadly, picked up the bracelet with the note and placed it on her windowsill, right next to the other four nearly identical ones each with their own note containing Ben’s handwriting.

June 2008

“Josh could really use your help” Aris’s mother had told her.

Aris agreed with her mother as she walked toward North Light Shop, Uncle Josh could use the help. She passed through the badly painted burgundy door and made her way to the backroom where someone with short blonde hair was standing.

Ben gave her a charming smile as soon as he noticed Aris standing in the doorway. She could not tell how genuine it was. Her instinct told her that part of it was, her head told her otherwise.

Looking at her slightly coyly, He introduced himself, “I’m Ben,”

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The End