

The Sanctuary

The air was cold. The sand was still. The vast plain in front of me was shifting restlessly, as if mirroring my mind. The sun had set beneath the water, taking the day with it. The warmth had slipped under the cold black abyss, but the frigid air was the only thing keeping me alive. In the distance to my left a small light is shining, likely miles away, but seemingly within arms reach. To my right there is only destruction. The waves are not crashing, instead they softly stroke the sand. Yet, around me everything is crashing. I only see her face every time I close my eyes, no matter how hard I try to get rid of her all I see is her perfect half smile. The wind imposes it's cruel whine once again. The ocean and the wind working together to fill my mind with their impossible reality. The harsh metallic stairs behind me creak, but I know nobody would be coming down them. At the top of the stairs is his former house, which will forever remain uninhabited, a manifestation of cruelty. Those harsh metallic stairs will never be cherished again, the memories of this beach will be lost forever. This place once a sanctuary, now nothing more than a cruel burial ground to what was once four bright futures. Once again, I close my eyes, no longer is it her face I see, instead it is replaced by the dark pleading of eyes of a boy I once knew. The water has slowly rolled forward pushing me back into the rocks beneath the stairs. My time has come, but I refuse to accept it.

The sun beat down upon the four of us, leaving only the water as an escape from it's undeniable wrath. Today reminded me of how it once was, happy. The days before Luke only saw darkness, before Cam only saw smoke, before Ally only saw appearance, and of course before I only saw their flaws.

At the top of the stairs stood Mark, once the powerful patriarch of us all, now too exhausted to look Cam in the eyes. Mark is the father of Cam and Luke, and essentially an uncle to Ally and I. Mark saved us all, but now looking into his eyes, he simply does not have it in him to save anyone anymore. "Beautiful day huh?" Shouted down a voice with a thick Boston accent. A voice that used to take such pleasure in simply talking about his son's peewee hockey team. A voice that now sounded hollow, and forced. A voice that rang through my head, I know we will all reach that point one day. Some sooner, some later, but we all will. I shout back, "Yeah just how I remember it!" but, even as I say it now it feels like a lie. Ally says nothing, and looks disgusted I responded at all. Cam stands and wanders towards the water, he looks up to say something to his dad, but Mark is gone. Cam steps in and shivers, his adonis-like figure flexing

at the chill of the water. Ally is, of course, staring. Her eyes shining in the bright sunlight, as if the sun was frozen by their beauty. Cam is the oldest of us by three years, but he is far from the wisest. Cam spent his teenage years as the classic dumb jock in high school. He hated every second of it, constantly getting himself thrown off of any team he joined, all pleas for help. Mark listened. Mark moved him to Canada to play Junior Hockey, hoping to get a college scholarship out of it. Eventually Cam did, but one mistake led to another and he was expelled, leaving his father to pay for his mistakes. Ally and I decide to join Cam in the water, with Luke refusing to partake. Ally turns and sits with her boyfriend, her perfect smile, sinking into a somber frown.

The tide had come in too far to hang around on the beach any longer, so we began the old routine of piling inside Cam's car to go get lunch at a restaurant in town. I always took the front seat, the rest of the clan jamming in the back. However, Now, it was just the four of us, the rest of the "clan" moving on, forgetting the past. "El Cap-i-tans?" I asked Cam, he nodded quickly. "Glovebox please" Cam said. I passed him the bottle, and the mints. As always I hated myself for enabling him, but I could never say no. Three long swigs from the bottle, two mints, and the contents were safely back inside. Each year the sips grew longer, and Cam seemed less in control. Luke mumbled something unintelligible, which was the first thing he had said all day. There used to be a time when Luke would've cared, but that time was long gone now. No less than 3 years ago Luke was the happiest person I knew, constantly chatting the day away. His mother used to joke that he couldn't go 10 minutes without saying a word. But, that was when his mother's opinion mattered, and his father still cared. I didn't know it then but he was taking three pills a day simply to be himself. He's been dating Ally since they were both 8 years old, everyone assumes they will simply end up married. "Cam do you always have to drive like an ass" quipped Ally. She had an unpleasant look on her otherwise very pleasant face. Cam didn't respond, he had decided to tune her out years ago.

Lunch had come and went, mainly consisting of me discussing my recent success in school, and Cam nodding frequently. There was not too much to talk about anymore, at least Cam seemed to care. The sun was beginning to get lower and lower in the sky. We all went back into Cam's car, following the previous ritual. As I handed Cam the bottle a low voice from the back spoke, "Cam can you not try to kill us this time?" It was Luke, the first word he'd spoken in days. Cam just laughed, this time drinking until the bottle was completely empty, a truly dumbfounding amount. He tossed the bottle out the window, and mumbled something loosely

resembling, “so it speaks”. I offered to drive but Cam had already thrown it into reverse. “Stop trying to be a hero, we’ll be fine. Cam does it all the time” Sniped Ally. The voice that used to be velvet to my ears, was now nothing more than a shrill annoying whine.

I sat there silently, I simply admired Ally in the mirror, and she was staring right back at me. The tires screeched to a violent halt. Cam quickly pulled the car to the side of the road and began to violently vomit along the side of the road. Ally and I laughed, Luke got out to help him. I turned to Ally, but I was frozen by the beauty I had once seen. Her eyes shining as they did the day she said she would always love me, the day I left, the day we all pretend we have forgotten. “Don’t fucking touch me freak” Cam exclaimed. Luke had stopped listening to those kind of remarks, I hope. “They’re still doing that huh?” I asked Ally. “Yeah not too much has changed.” She replied. But, she had no idea how wrong she truly was. Cam climbed into the backseat angrily, handing me the keys. Luke was nowhere in sight. “Where is he?” Asked Ally aggressively. Cam replied softly, “I’m not sure... I yelled at him...then he was just gone. He hasn't done that in a long time.” “Should we find him?” I asked. “I guess” replied Cam. Ally and I got out of the car walking towards the thick rural brush, there was not too much civilization in sight. Town was only a twenty minute walk behind us, but knowing Luke he would never head back to town. We wandered the brush for about half an hour, until the sun to fall behind the cruel horizon. My last sunset in this sanctuary began to seem like it would be spent searching for a boy who had been lost long ago.

Ally and I searched together, mostly because of our mutual frustration with Cam, and his excruciatingly poor treatment of Luke. It hurt simply chatting with a girl who once begged me to stay, a girl who broke me a thousand times yet always made me come back. “He ran away like this the day you left you know?” Ally said somberly. “He never truly leaves, he just hides. Hides from all his problems.” There was a twinge of hatred in my voice. I felt bad for hating him as much as I did, but for some reason I felt he had abandoned me, I had treated him like a brother, and he had treated me like I didn’t matter to him. Deep down we both knew I did, but over time it felt less and less so. “You know after you left he told me what you had said about me?” said Ally quietly, as if revealing to me some great truth. I didn’t respond, eventually Ally said, “I felt the same way, I knew being here with him and Cam would just bring me down... but that doesn’t mean you can just leave, and come back and-and pretend it’s all okay again.” Her voice was beginning to break, her eyes once again screamed that she loved me. I replied, “I

regret leaving every day, but my parents—" Ally cut me off. "That was your choice, your parents would have done whatever you wanted." There was a lump in my throat, she was right. But, how do you tell your best friend that his girlfriend was in love with you. Especially, that you were 'destined to be with one another' according to her. "How are you and Luke" I asked, already knowing the answer. "It's been bad lately, but I know he cares about me." "Whatever" I responded.

Finally, we gave up and decided we should just drive back, he could find his own way home. We all climbed in, Ally and I in the front, Cam sprawled along the back. I turned the key and powered the car. As we began to leave Ally said to me, "Are you sure we should just leave?" Out of nothing more than frustration and exhaustion I muttered, "I don't care what happens to him, anymore." This was not true, but to an extent I had a right to say it. Before I left Luke had told me I was the reason he was like this, that somehow his depression was my fault. He told me I was dead to him, that his life was my fault. At that moment, he forced me from the only place I knew to be home. For that I will never forgive him.

The water tickled my feet, bringing me back to reality. A figure was approaching me to the right, I couldn't turn to face it. The figure spoke, "How could he do that? Chris?." It's voice stern, and matter-of-fact. I responded, "That wasn't my fault, if anything it was your fault for not caring for him." The figure responded, "Yeah and it's your fault he was like this at all." I was shouting, anger now pouring from me, "Fuck you Ally. Maybe you shouldn't have been a shitty girlfriend." We were two feet away, but I was still turned away from her. Her voice was prickled with hatred now too, "It's not my fault his best friend is a selfish asshole who only ever cared about himself. Needless to mention that his brother is an egomaniacal dick, who used to tell him to kill himself every day." Cam never knew the effect he had on his brother, he never knew his words meant that much to his younger brother. Tears were streaming down my face, I tried to face her, but I just couldn't. All I could muster was a low mumble, "I'm going to leave tomorrow morning." Ally did not reply. Finally I faced her, she was not crying. "He had said he was going to for weeks, I knew it was coming." There was no emotion in her voice. The water swallowed up our feet, we were face to face now, tears still pouring down my face. She leaned in, the ultimate final betrayal. I forced myself to turn away, I slowly staggered up the stairs leaving her alone on the beach. I know I love her, but I also know I can never return, all I ever bring along with me is suffering.

I sat alone in the empty house at the top of the steps. The house once belonging to Luke and Cam's family, now sitting vacant. Ally opened the door, and I couldn't help but blurt out, "I love you". But, it was not Ally who replied, instead Cam shouted back, "I hope not, kid." "Man, how'd you find me?" I asked. He did not reply, instead he sat down on the floor beside me. Tears began to fall down his face, "It's my fault I told him to do it...How could I say that to another person, let alone my own fucking brother." The sun was beginning to rise in the distance, my flight no less than two hours away. But, all I could see was the skinny blonde boy with dark eyes lying motionless along the side of the road. I walked to the edge of the railing staring out over the beautiful beach I would likely never see again. Every ounce of me wanted to throw myself off of that railing, to forget all of this, to live within my quickly fading memories once again. All I could remember of him now were the bad times, the times when his eyes no longer danced, and his words no longer carried any emotion. The sun was now part way above the horizon, but for me the sun would never rise again.