

TO FLOAT AGAIN

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Sometimes I feel as though the sky surrounding me has plummeted down with the sole purpose of ending my world. Crashing and shattering into a symphony of chaos as the shards break through the crust. The craters formed are so deep that I can't do anything but spiral down into their depths. Sometimes I feel as though I am the one falling. The anxiety creeps up from behind, preparing to push. It smiles, its big, toothy grin. Sometimes I wish the world would just stop. Stop moving, stop rotating, stop tilting. Instead, I run, jump, and leap in the hopes of something better.

Something more.

The sun had barely risen, and I was already waiting at our spot where the sea met the sand. It was peaceful until I could hear the slightly aggressive sound of feet slapping. Marge appeared through the morning mist, her hair unkempt, her wetsuit only half-zipped. She jogged the last few metres before coming to an abrupt halt.

"You're early," she started. You could hear her breath coming out rushed and ragged, as if her lungs were trying to keep pace with her thoughts.

"You're predictable," I smirked.

Marge had a tendency to run just on time, and I had a tendency to run early; combined, we were never late.

She grinned, choosing ignorance. "Oh my, it is a peaceful day," she said, staring out towards the sea.

"If that is your definition of peaceful. I would be afraid to discover your version of chaos."

I felt her eyes roll as she waded out towards the white topped waves, leaving the safety of our spot. Peeling off my hoodie, I followed. There was beauty in the brutality of a dawn swim. The cold bite. That icy slap of reality. Proof I hadn't fallen yet.

Evidence I could float.

Together we swam past the pontoon, our hands slicing through the water like knives. We swam out and left towards the bay over, our kicks found their rhythm beating in time with the crash of the waves. The sea created a symphony of peculiarity, both ancient and endless. In its vastness, I found the impossibility of falling, a strange calm. Marge met our destination first. Lying on her back, eyes closed, water lapping against the curves muted by her wetsuit. I joined her, allowing the tide to bob us mindlessly like driftwood.

"See, a peaceful day." The gravel of her voice was barely audible over the hiss of the sea.

"Mmh"

"Like floating in a sea of nothing," she continued.

"Maybe that's what I need," I murmured. "Nothing." It was a whisper in the shape of a scream. Blurring the lines between what I had said and what I had meant.

Her eyes opened. "Not nothing. Just... less. Less noise. Less pretending."

This time I didn't answer, but she already knew.

Knew that I was near the edge.

I lifted my head, sinking to my feet. The beach was starting to stir. The presence of a few early walkers and gulls circling overhead like lazy sentries added personality to the blank canvas of the morning. We grabbed our towels and dried off in silence, the kind that should've been easy between old friends.

"Cafe?"

"Huh?" Confusion tore at my features

"I said 'cafe?'" Marge's chuckle wafted through the air, its joy was corrosive.

"Oh uhhh, sure."

We waddled barefoot along the path, our wetsuits half-dried and clinging in weird places, hair tangled from the salt and wind. The cafe was already buzzing, warm light spilled out over the windowsills, splashing on the pavement. Locals filled the tables, some in suits and others in hoodies, yet all sipping their flat whites religiously.

Inside, the barista spotted us and lit up. "The mermaids return!"

Marge grinned, "One hot chocolate, two banana muffins and oh, a flat white for Little Miss Depresso over here."

The barista gave me a knowing look. "Rough week?"

Something like that

We found a seat by the window. The silence resumed as I peeled off the wrapper of my muffin before I dunked a piece in my coffee. I could feel Marge's eyes glaring at me expectantly, questioningly.

"I can't believe you still drink hot chocolates," I answered.

"Seriously, Becca, you can't just..."

I could hear it, the concern mixed with the anger swirling in the air. It was my turn to glare, my move to play. I paused before restarting.

"I dreamt of falling again," I said.

Marge looked up.

"Not the tripping kind. Just... falling endlessly. Like gravity forgot where down was."

She nodded. Her movements slow out of fear of frightening me into silence.

"I feel like I am only just able to stand my ground each day. Like I'm just waiting for the last thing to push me over."

She took a sip of her hot chocolate. "You know what helped me last year? After the whole mess with my Dad?"

I nodded. She didn't talk about it much, but I remembered how hollow she looked for weeks.

“Ocean swimming,” she said. “Every morning. Even when it was raining. Especially then.”

“What is wrong with us?” I cut in, my head buried in my hands.

She laughed. “Nothing, maybe everything, who knows, who cares. I think we like the clarity. Cold water makes you forget things. You can’t panic about bills or breakups or grief when your whole body’s trying not to freeze.”

“Noted,” I said, sipping the last of my flat white. “So I should just keep jumping into freezing water until I figure out my life?”

Her features softened. “Not exactly. But it’s a reminder, right? That your body can handle more than your brain thinks. That you can survive the fall, even when it hurts.”

Even when it hurts.

I stared out the window. A toddler was chasing a seagull, laughing like the world had never been anything but kind. The sky had brightened into a softer grey. The café continued to hum with clinks of cutlery and murmurs of quiet conversation.

“What if this is it?” I asked. “What if we’re always on the edge of breaking?”

“Then we glow while we crack,” she said, smiling sadly. “Like stained glass in sunlight. Like lightning splitting the sky.”

I closed my eyes, and when I opened them, the world was still there. Still spinning. Still imperfect. But I no longer felt like I was only falling. I felt like I was starting to float.

I felt like I could rise.