

The Visitor

I open my eyes, and confusion immediately washes over me.

I push myself into a sitting position, the grass soft under my palms. I'm maybe a metre from the bank of a pond, the aquamarine piercing in the sea of greens and browns surrounding it. On the opposite bank, trees stand tall, roots occasionally breaking through the ground, sweet smelling flowers peppering the earth around them. Faintly, I hear the chirping of birds. I feel the warmth of the summer sun on my skin.

I run my hand through long hair, catching on a few tangles. Didn't I brush my hair today? I try to think back, but quickly realize I have no memory of the morning at all. Pulling my knees to my chest, I look across the pond, trying to remember.

"Only you could look so melancholy surrounded by beautiful nature, Bethany."

I bolt upright, my thoughts interrupted by a distinct voice. Turning my head I see a familiar face walking over to me with a bright smile, full of life, long dark hair we both inherited done in a neat braid.

Without an explanation I falter, rooted to the spot, in sheer awe of this person.

"Are you just going to stand there gawking or am I going to get my hug?" She laughs. My face stretching into a grin, I break out of my trance, rushing over, and enveloping her in a hug.

"Maria, how are you? We haven't seen each other in forever!" I say, pulling back to get a good look at her. Emotion flickers across her face, one that I wouldn't have detected had I not known her so well as it was quickly replaced with an easy smile.

"I've been just fine. Better than fine actually. The police force keeps me busy, but I wouldn't have it any other way. "

"You couldn't function properly unless you had three deadlines all slated for the same day so I'm not surprised," I laugh. "

“Works for me. Now, walk with me! We haven’t been at the pond since we were girls!” I remember now, we’d spend entire afternoons here. Some of my happiest memories were made here, although I could’ve sworn this forest had been turned into a farm. I was almost positive.

“You alright Bethany?” My cousin asks, concerned.

“Sorry, lost in thought. A walk sounds good.” I reply.

Maria doesn’t look convinced but lets the topic drop. “You’re in college now right?”

“That’s right. I’m finishing up year one of culinary school, and it’s going well.” Being a chef had been my dream as cooking had always been a natural talent of mine.

Maria responds, but my attention has been dragged to the pond, for what should have been reflections of towering trees in the water, looked instead like a bustling city street.

I stagger back a few steps, rubbing my hands over my eyes. Am I hallucinating? Am I going insane?

“Bethany?” She sounds worried.

“I-” I try to say, but I’m interrupted by the piercing wail of a siren. I double over clamping my hands over my ears, eyes wildly looking for the source. When it passes, I look to Maria. “What was that?”

She smiles sadly at me. “An ambulance siren, Beth. The one you’re in.”

“An ambulance?”

“You were dying Bethany. You were hit by a drunk driver when you were walking home.” She places a comforting hand on my shoulder.

“I...” A million thoughts race through my mind but I can voice none.

“I was supposed to bring you to the next plane once your mortal body relinquished hold of your soul.” I have a sudden recollection of me at her funeral, holding on to my aunt as we cried. “But the paramedics are reviving you! It’s not your time yet. ”

“Would you like me to tell your mother anything? When I wake up?”

Maria looks at me sadly. “I would like to say I love her, that I want her to stay strong, but there is no point, you’re not going to remember any of this.”

My eyes widen. “What?” The forest around us already dissolving into a black abyss.

Maria smiles wistfully, “Goodbye, Beth. Make the most of your time. ”

I am barely able to get out the word “Goodbye,” before my vision goes black.

When my eyes open again, I see the white wall of the hospital room, memories of a conversation by a pond fading fast from my consciousness.