

THE WHISPER OF MOONLIGHT MIST

SLEEPY seaside towns rested for no one. The nightlife almost never stopped, even when the elderly stepped out of their houses to complain, and local officers threatened to take the perpetrators into custody. Midnight, though, was when silence fell over the town and mist canvassed the dark.

Away from the town center, tucked away near the shore, sat a little blue house. A house where Jacob Kim lived out his days as a quiet man. After the trauma of the war, it seemed only fair that Jacob spend the rest of his life where no one could reach him.

Jacob looked out of his window, at the sea foam gathered by the rocks like soda fizz, and at the lonely seagull perched on his bird feeder. He brought his cup of chamomile tea to his lips and took a long sip, his eyes flitted over to the moon that had peeked out from behind the thick mist.

He liked midnight, when the town was so quiet the only thing he could hear was the gentle splash of waves against the rocks, and the occasional hum of a dragonfly. *Perfect*, he thought, as a small crash drew him out of his mind.

Jacob lifted himself out of his chair, limping to his room to retrieve his metal bat. He knew the town was safe, hardly ever any crimes, but it never hurt to be careful. He reached the door and peeked out the window.

Nothing. Just the view of the docks in the distance, and two seagulls gathered by the bread he had thrown out in the morning. Jacob let out a sigh of relief he didn't realize he had been holding in, he closed the door and shuffled back inside.

Jacob frowned, his tea had gone cold. He gripped his cup and began his journey to the kitchen, but he stopped to gaze at the pictures on the walls. He remembered them, dusty remnants of the past. He shoved his tea in the microwave and waited, his foot tapped against the floor.

The timer beeped and Jacob made his way back to the living room, back to his spot next to the window. His hand drifted to a picture on the table, he remembered the day it was taken, clear as day. He remembered his mother sitting him down to tell him that the boy Jacob has his arm around wasn't real, simply a figment of his imagination.

Jacob knew otherwise.

He remembered quietly telling his mother she was wrong, and receiving a pitiful gaze in return. *She just didn't understand*, he thought, and narrowed his eyes on the shore. He squinted, something glimmered like pearls underneath the moonlight, as it wasn't there before.

It was a boy.

There, clear as day, sat a boy by the shoreline. His legs were crossed and his dainty feet dug into the sand, his silky hair was the color of a dove. Jacob wanted to talk to him, to let him know that he was there, but he didn't. Instead, he dimmed the lights and watched the boy from the confines of his house.

The boy did nothing, beside sitting and observing. Jacob yawned and gazed at the clock on the wall. Two A.M. He took another look at the walls, painted a drab green, the only interesting thing about them were the paintings. He remembered his life before the war, a life of careful brush strokes and golden frames.

After a while, Jacob felt his eyes begin to droop, and begrudgingly, retired to his bedroom for the night.

coy

Jacob liked his routine, he was used to it, after all. He knew his by heart, down to the finest details. Wake up, make breakfast, check the shore for anything suspicious, feed the birds, and read for the rest of the day.

I wonder if anything good has washed up today. Jacob thought, as he stepped out onto his porch. His eyes scanned the beach, looking for anything interesting. As he walked along the shore, he thought about the boy from the night before, how he wished he could see him again, if only for a minute.

After making his rounds, Jacob rubbed his temples, *it'll be a slow day.*

His feet sank into the sand, as he walked back to his house. His eyes caught something, something shiny. He knelt down and pulled the object out of the sand, a silver bracelet. He tucked it into his pocket and disappeared behind the door.

Mondays were always different, because Monday was the one day of the week when Jacob had to smile awkwardly and accept Mr. Adams' bag of groceries left on his doorstep. Jacob trudged to the door and held the paper bag in his arms, *I'll have to thank him later.* Jacob chucked, knowing that 'later' meant weeks.

The rest of Jacob's day was spent reading and gazing longingly out the the window, Jacob had never wished to see a certain person more than he did that day. He didn't know why, there was just something about the way the boy's blouse flowed in the wind and the way his hair remained Jacob of a winter's sunrise made him want to dig through his closet to find his painting set.

He's different. Jacob mused, the boy set himself apart from the other residents of the down, whether it was his youth or his free spirit. Jacob made the silent decision to keep a close eye on the shore that night.

coy

Jacob found himself intently watching the shore again, but a cup of mint tea replaced his chamomile. He knew it was a long shot, that the boy was probably just passing through, but he had hope, and that seemed like enough to carry him through the night.

Jacob took a sip of his tea, and his chest tightened as a familiar figure made his way to the rocks. Jacob nearly spilled his drink, as he set his cup down and moved closer to the window.

The boy was back again.

He wore a flowery tunic, its bright reds and greens stood out against the sandy beach. His hair shined brighter than the night before, and Jacob noticed that the mist had cleared and the moon was full.

Jacob's lips curled into a smile, *so it wasn't a dream after all.* He watched the boy for the rest of the night, only stopping to refill his cup of tea.

Jacob felt different, better—like an electrical current had rushed through him. That next day, Jacob left the comfort of his home to pick up the art supplies he so longed for, paying for them with the meager amount of cash he had stashed away.

The next night, Jacob was ready, ready to hold a paintbrush in his hands after so long. The boy appeared again, in a loose t-shirt and acid-washed jeans. Jacob felt his heart swell as he gripped his paintbrush and began to paint.

He was hesitant at first, it felt like returning to school after a long summer. But after a while, it felt like he had never stopped. His fingers flew across the canvas, dipping his round brush into the palette of bright colors.

He felt like a madman, creating his masterpiece during the witching hours of the night, but it felt like the hole in his heart had been filled—like he was whole again. The world made sense for a while.

Jacob emerged from his little blue house the next day, nearly blinded by the afternoon sun. He walked to Mr. Adams' house, painting tucked under his arm. He knocked on the door, half expecting an answer.

He greeted with a warm smile and an invitation to come in, “Jacob, what brings you here?” Mr. Adams asked, his eyes drifted to the painting in Jacob’s arms.

Jacob smiled, “it’s for you, a thank you for all you’ve done for me.” He said, and handed the painting to Mr. Adams.

The grey-haired man took the painting gingerly, “it’s beautiful, did you paint it yourself?”

Jacob nodded, “it was only a few days ago that I regained inspiration to paint again, after not being able to for so many years.”

“You’re truly talented, Jacob.” Mr Adams murmured, as he inspected the illustration of a boy beneath the moonlight. “Even during my time in the army, you’re one of the first artistic veterans I’ve come across. However did you think of the idea?”

“Don’t tell anyone else about this,” Jacob began, “I began to see a boy by the shore.” He said, “and after that day, everything has made sense, seeing him gave me inspiration I never knew I had.”

Mr. Adams paused, “Jacob—nobody has come to the shore in days.”

Jacob shook his head and chuckled softly, “I should get going, it was nice seeing you.”

“It was nice seeing you, too, thank you for the painting.”

“You’re welcome.”

coy

After that day, Jacob waited for the boy to come back, but he never did. He figured the boy was, like he thought, just another soul passing through the town. He wished he could have seen him one last time, to thank him for breathing inspiration into him that he never knew he had.

Jacob didn’t know if the boy was another figment of his imagination, but he didn’t care. After that night, he always made sure to keep the silver bracelet by the doorstep—just in case the boy’s lonely soul happened to pass through again.