THE DEEP SLEEP COLLECTION

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DEDICATION

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THE GIRL AND THE LIGHTHOUSE

The rain pounded on the old tin sheet that wedged between two crooked trees, slowly being pushed farther and farther down the trunks, scraping away bark from the core. The girl sat beneath the sheet, crying. She’d been in this place before, not this location, the trees, rocks, and the tin sheet were all new. But the feeling that turned her stomach was all too familiar. The mud began to pool in divots that perforated the forest floor, and the rain was only growing more merciless. But she paid it no mind, for her mind was somewhere else. It was still back there, she could still hear the voice in her head telling her that she wasn’t enough, that somehow, this was all her fault. She could barely even remember what their faces looked like, they had never taken the effort to turn them in her direction after all, but it was her fault. She wasn’t enough - but she did everything she could - but still, it wasn’t enough. They would never notice; they would never pay her any mind. It had been like that for years, ever since the novelty of having a child wore off and the responsibility sunk in, they had decided it wasn't for them.

Around the girl, fog began to gather, quickly making it difficult to see anything that wasn’t in her immediate vicinity. She looked up and wiped the tears from her eyes, but that made the way no clearer. The rain now pooled around her feet, soaking into her shoes and socks. Her pants and the bottom of her shirt were soaked and the rest of her was damp at best. It was June, the rainiest month of one of the rainiest years in decades. The sky had been dimming and the ground was dank for months at a time, and that was not scheduled to change any time soon.

Covered in mud, she pushed herself to her feet and tried to wipe the mud from her hands onto her pants, to little avail. Every bit of her body was already coated in it; her hands, face, shirt, it had even matted into her hair. There was so much that she hadn’t even noted the amalgamations of scratches, scrapes and bruises she had accumulated. She tugged her foot, splashing mud in every direction as her shoe broke the surface, then she planted it down in front of her. Tugging her other foot, planting it down. Then again, and again until she stood away from the tin sheet, and in the middle of the clearing. She couldn’t remember from which way she came, but at this point, it didn’t matter where she went. She picked a direction and began to move forward, step by step as the rain pounded down and the grime only built up.

The trees and debris became dense, but there was still enough clearance for her to make her way through, until a massive fallen tree blocked her way forward, so she continued around it, then another and another. It almost seemed as though they were lining her way forward, guiding her down the trail, leading her to the emerald city. She knew this wasn’t true of course, but it was a pleasant thought to think that there may be some plan, some order to the chaos that had corrupted her life. After navigating the maze of fallen trees, bushes, and massive rocks, she had lost all sense of direction, and emerged on the other end. The trees had begun to thin out and the ground had become more solid. That's when she saw it, it beamed through the swaying limbs of the rocking trees, refracted through the endless stream of rain drops that pelted the ground and the tree canopy. A light, like the closet that led to the white glowing snows of Narnia, leading her farther and farther down the rabbit’s hole to wonderland. It was as bright as the sun on a warm summer day, and as pure as the freshly fallen nighttime snow, untouched by man or any other creature that walks of the earth.

But then it disappeared, leaving everything that was illuminated by its glow to darkness. The girl froze, unable to see the path before her. She began sinking into the mud, it enveloped her feet, then started up to her ankles. Her she’s became heavy with mire, she heaved her foot up, unable to unstick it. She tried her other foot to no avail, then she pulled harder and harder. Until finally, the light flashed back on, showing her the way. She grabbed the limb of a nearby tree and tugged repeatedly, until one of her feet broke free, then the other soon after. Then she began to move forward, being sure not to stop to avoid getting stuck in the mud somewhere where she may not be able to break free. Then the light flicked off, but this time she didn't stop, she moved forward one step at a time, using her hands to feel in front of her, hobbling around trees and tripping over rocks and stumps. Until she collapsed, something had caught her foot, and a violent pain shot up from her ankle. Then the light flashed back on, and she could see the root that had caused her to trip. She quickly pushed herself up, her hands sinking into the mud, she ripped her hands from the puddle to avoid getting stuck. She curled back to her feet, putting all of her weight on her good foot and stumbled over the root, limping toward the light.

The trees slowly started to thin, she could still not see the source of the light yet, but she could now see that it wasn't flickering on and off, it was rotating. So she continued to push forward as the light shone onto her, then left her in darkness along with the occasional flashes of lightning, crashes of thunder and the drumroll of the rain pounding the forest roof and the sub-solid forest floor. Then finally, she emerged from the thicket to an ethereal haven. A lighthouse atop a sheer cliff that jutted out like an arrow pointing toward the ocean, with the waves crashing in the cliff edge, shooting up and hanging in the sky like a glimmering blue blanket being beaten over a railing to rid it of any dust or impurities that lay within it. And it did shed. A light hazy mist fell from the wave and filled the air, with the light shimmering off of every inch. The lighthouse itself was no less majestic, a clean red and white pylon with a healthy and graceful garden that seemed immune to the beating down of the rain, encircling the whole building. Finally, a bright, warm guiding light that revolved again and again, shining its light on everything that existed around it, to top it all off.

She continued to press forward toward the heavy, wooden door at the base of the lighthouse. Stepping up to the stone path, releasing her feet from the mud and allowing her to ascend the steps to the door with ease. She placed both her hands on the door lever and pulled; the door slowly creaked open and she stepped inside, closing the door behind her. The floor was a dark, rustic hard wood with pale, cream-colored walls and roof. A faded red and gray rug spanned much of the floor and countless paintings or grand ships, smaller boats, and other ocean scenes along with various pieces of fishing equipment and traps. At the back of the room, a staircase curved up the wall to the second floor with a thick, carved railing that was fixed to each step by large beams on each step.

The old wood of the lighthouse creaked and moaned with the wind and rain, but no sound came from the inside. The lighthouse was empty, but not abandoned. It was obvious that someone still took care of it, watched over it and maintained it; there was not a speck of dust nor a spider’s web to be found anywhere. She began forward with her eyes set on the stairs, until she arrived at their base. Grabbing the railing in one hand, with her other on the wall, she slowly began to ascend the steps, each one whining more than the last.

The second floor was no less mystical than the first, and just as well kept; and yet, still empty. The floor consisted of a hallway that spanned its length; three rooms, one to her left and two to the right and a steep staircase at the end, with a glowing halo that illuminated it, as if some holy figure was guiding her to climb it and reach the top. Without influence from her mind, her body began to drift toward the staircase, passing all the trinkets and artwork that lined the walls of the hall. She grabbed the railing once again, and began to climb, step by step getting closer and closer to the source that showered her in light. But as she began to reach the top, a new aspect was added to the mystery. A sound; a sweet sound. A low, melodic hum. She didn’t recognize the song, but it was an exceedingly pleasant one. Her hands reached the threshold of the ladder, as she pulled herself up onto the platform and she rose to her feet. There was a large cylinder made of glass panes that contained the rotating light, with metal reinforcements to hold the panels together and a door on the other end. Then at that moment, the humming began to shift, and gain form, until it had actualized into words.

*My dear, my dear. Where taken thee, to earth or the tide?*

*My dear, my dear, why had thou gone beyond horizon’s line.*

*When shared my love, from my heart; a sailor's love is true.*

*When opened up my home to thee; this sailor’s love was you.*

*But now, thou gone, unto the earth. Like all that came before.*

*But now, the memories remain, and I can not close that door.*

*My one last wish, to hear you sing, but all that’s left in time,*

*Upon the earth and ocean’s breeze, is dust and dirt and grime.*

*My dear, my dear. Where taken thee, to earth or the tide?*

*My dear, my dear, why had thou gone beyond horizon’s line.*

*When shared my love, from my heart; a sailor's love is true.*

*When opened up my home to thee; this sailor’s love was you.*

*This sailor’s love was you…*

The man sat on the other side of the light. The girl could not make out any image of the man. His form was distorted by the glass and obscured by the light, but the song was pure. “That’s a pretty song.”

The man jumped to his feet, clearly startled by the girl’s presence. “What are you doing here, girl?”

“Coming in from the rain. I didn’t know anyone lived here.”

“I prefer it that way. You’re filthy, girl. What were you doing, rolling in the mud?”

“Pretty much.” She took a step around the light’s case. Then slowly took another.

The man stepped in the opposite direction, being sure to keep his distance from her. “There’s a bathroom on the second floor. You can wash up there and wait for this storm to pass. But you leave as soon as it’s stopped. And you leave me alone.”

“I like to be alone sometimes. Sometimes other people are hard to be around. But being alone all the time would be lonely. And boring. Why do you want to be alone?”

“That’s not your matter. I told you not to bother me.”

“It’s a small building. If you want to be alone, there’s little space to hide.”

“I’m not hiding from anything. I simply don’t want you to bother me.”

“The storm doesn’t seem like it’s going to stop any time soon. Talking may help to pass the time.”

“I don’t wish to pass the time. I’m fine where I am. But you do not belong here.”

“Maybe I do.”

“No, you don’t. Now leave me be.”

“Fine.” She slowly turned around, watching her step on the warped, narrow deck, and took each step slowly back down the stairs from where she came.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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