

Summer

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Abstract

This is a short story written by me.

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Story

I shall always remember that summer – the one we first shared together – not least because it was the hottest we had experienced in all our nine years. It was a different kind of hot too. The dry, unmoving kind which makes you feel drained and parched, seeking some oasis of shade and water. The cloying kind which settles on top of the world like a blanket, relentlessly rendering everyone unbearably sleepy and sending them inside just to try and avoid it. The muggy kind which makes everything feel heavy and static and that always used to make me smile from then on and now fills me with sorrow and an inexplicable joy, because that is when everything began. I will always remember it: every single note in our three united songs of laughter that rose in the air, every jump and dancing step as we ran down the road towards the inviting blue sheet of sea that called us to it, every creak of dehydrated wood as we slowed on the little dock and finally came to a stop at its end, all of us grinning at the alluringly twinkling water.

We settled at the edge of the dock, content for now to merely sit here, our tired-with-running legs dangling into the cool clearness. We were all silent, still catching our collective breath, and I was watching the refracted rays of sunshine that dappled my feet in the water before you spoke.

“I’m so... happy...” Your face was turned upwards, up towards the sun, eyes shut and serene, and you were leaning back on your hands: the very picture of relaxed joy. I exchanged a look with Daisy; our identical sky-blue eyes met from either side of you and shared a small smile before drifting back to your face. Your eyes opened and exchanged looks with both of ours and I let myself stare at my feet again, the mixture of light and water a strangely intimate yet perfect harmony on my toes.

“I wish we could stay here forever,” I eventually sighed, more to myself than to anyone else. I felt you take my hand and looked up to see you holding Daisy’s too on the other side.

“We can,” you announced, voice full of light and optimism. “We will...”

You linked your little fingers with ours on either side. “I promise both of you that we will all stay together forever and ever.”

I smiled and we both promised too; with the words I felt my spirits lift like your voice, like the sunlight glinting off the water.

“Forever and ever.”

That night you and I lay in our twin beds, the usual thick duvets exchanged for cool white sheets in the heavy heat. I felt rather than heard you turning over in the next bed and turned over myself to face you. Like always, the sheet was pulled up to your ears and your blue eyes – exactly the same as mine – peered out at me from beneath it. In looks we were always identical – round blue eyes and tawny blonde waves of hair – but in personality we were quite different. You were never able to stand up for yourself very well. You always needed me and, since that summer, Luke by your side to give you life. Which is why I now wonder why I did what I did. What I am doing now.

“Do you think we really will stay together with Luke forever?”

I nodded. “Of course.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Summer

There was a short silence.

“Rosemary?” you asked, stifling a yawn.

“Yes?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too, Daisy.”

I find that I always remember my life best if I divide it into summers. The summer in which Daisy and I were five was the summer that we first learned to swim, our father supporting us in the water, our bellies turned up to the sun. The summer that we were nine was the first we spent with you. The summer when we were twelve was the year our father ran off with his work colleague and the summer that we were taught how to lie convincingly.

The summer we were fourteen was the year that you began to confuse me. Both of you.

I remember one day in that summer, when we were changing, getting ready to go meet Luke down at the dock. You were unusually silent, until you eventually seemed to give in to some need to speak.

“Rosy?”

“Yes?” I turned to find you staring at me, fingers fiddling seemingly absently with the light, lacy coverlet on your bed. “Daisy?”

“Umm...” You looked down at your fingers, seeming troubled. There was another moment before you looked up again. “What do you think of Luke? How do you see him?”

I thought about it for a moment. “I think you two are my best friends. You’re my sister too, and Luke is someone who understands us better than anyone else.”

“Oh...”

“Why do you ask?”

Summer

You gave me a darting look, your eyes rounded, before your gaze fell back onto the bedclothes. “No reason.”

“Don’t you like him?” I felt compelled to ask.

Your fingers stopped picking at the coverlet. “It’s not that.”

“What is it then?”

“Nothing really. I just wondered.”

Daisy acted oddly around you from then on. Already somewhat clumsy and fragile, she seemed to fall over and drop things more than usual. It seemed to me that some gale of confusion buffeted her and made her unstable. I had no idea what was going on, that she had fallen for you or that you were just as confused, but for other reasons.

The year that we were fifteen was the year that the dock was destroyed in a storm. We were all three distraught of course. That dock was important to us! It was where we had spent so much time together and where we had made that vital vow to stay together forever and ever. I wondered what would become of us, but then you two distracted me and gave me an answer.

“Rosy...” you began, but once I saw your hand in Luke’s, I needed no more explanation. The two of you had built your own dock, close to but not quite the original, built expressly for you two. I was left bobbing in the sea.

I got used to it. You-and-Daisy. Daisy-and-you. And me: Daisy’s twin and your friend, growing gradually accustomed to being a third wheel on a bike when we had always been a tricycle before.

But Daisy always needed me as well as you. She needed both of us to make her strong, it seemed.

In any case, I was not able to leave, so I adapted to a new kind of friendship.

So when you came to me alone in my sixteenth summer I was confused.

Summer

You knew how to beguile. “Don’t tell Daisy,” you whispered. “I just need to decide,” you told me. Then I understood and stupidly – *so* stupidly but not inexplicably – I agreed.

You really were amazing and you knew it. No one could resist you. Even the boys in the town were keen to impress you, desperate to be your friend. The girls watched you closely, being the jealous creatures they were. All the adults were full of “oh Luke, such a good boy, just lovely”. They all adored you. So did I. I had to admit it: I had fallen for you just like Daisy had. It is no wonder why I said yes to you to be honest.

I knew it was wrong. Always, I knew that. Yet somehow I just did not care, because the water and sun on my toes had seemed so right and you made everything seem brighter.

I never intended for things to go on so long and to go so badly wrong.

It was one of those nights when I had met Luke behind your back that I really began to consider calling it all off.

“Rosy, where have you been?” you asked as I pushed open the door to our room.

I crossed to the mirror and looked at myself, seeing you sitting on your bed in the reflection.

“Oh... you know how I like to go for walks on the waterfront... Especially when it’s as light as this...”

I nodded to the window, inventing quickly.

“Hmm...” You seemed unconvinced. I smoothed my hair and skirt and turned to face you, praying that the blush in my cheeks had subsided and that you would not mention Luke because that would overburden my already-limited acting abilities. You were looking at me carefully, considering.

“We’ve been twins for seventeen years Rosy. I can tell when you’re lying.”

I felt ice drop into my stomach, cold and ominous, and wondered if honest Iago had ever felt this nervous.

“Have you been meeting someone? A boy?”

I shrugged, treading carefully. However, when you grinned at me I knew that I had evaded you. For now, at least.

Summer

I also knew that I could never call it off.

We set up a pattern. During the day you belonged to Daisy and I was the spare. She was happy and suspected nothing, while I knew that you were still trying to decide. So I told myself not to mind you kissing her or the two of you disappearing together for hours on end because she was your girlfriend and when you have something even remotely good it makes no sense to complain about it. You do not complain about a sunny day just because of a little hay fever.

At night you were mine entirely. Daisy always thought I was off meeting various boys and covered for me as long as I was “being careful”. But of course we were – neither of us was stupid. Each night we would make our way westwards along the road towards the beach while the sun set and then lie on the sand for hours. Some nights we would betray Daisy properly, the waves crashing and the stars above our heads. The first time we got blood on the sand and neither of us really knew what we were doing. Still, the sea washed it away and the pain was not bad enough for us not to betray her again. And again.

I still knew it was wrong. I still did not care. You were too good, too bright, and every time we came together I was right back on the dock, half my life ago, with water and sun on my toes and wanting to spend the rest of my life that way.

We all went to university the following October. You went south to study biology, Luke east to study physics. I went north to study literature, staying near the coast because I could not bear being away from the sea for long periods of time.

We barely saw each other. You and I had grown apart, got different interests. Of course we were still sisters, still twins; we still kept in touch. Luke still had not decided. Every now and then he would appear at the door to my dorm and stay a night or two. Then the week after I would get the call from you to say that Luke had come to visit and wasn't it a lovely surprise? I always agreed, how lovely, and then got on with the work I had neglected while he was with me.

Summer

After uni you two moved in together. I should have expected it really. I had always thought that you would rather have Daisy anyway. She was the delicate one, the one with a greater sensitivity and beauty. I was the emotional one, the one whose mood would change at the smallest thing and whose temper was famous.

You had always told me that you liked it though. You liked my strange sense of humour and enigma. You told me that I was just as beautiful and you knew that no matter how bad my mood got I would still not tell Daisy because you still had such a hold over me.

I thought you had chosen her. Of course I did. But then you appeared on my doorstep one evening. "Daisy thinks I'm on a business trip," you told me.

I surrendered, only because I had forgotten how much I had missed you.

Only later did I realise that you still had not chosen.

Three years later, I got the call from you.

"Luke proposed!" Your voice was so happy and full of energy that I had to smile, had to congratulate you, had to discuss ideas for the wedding.

When I hung up later, I crumpled. I lay for hours on the carpet by the phone table, tears falling from my eyes. I should have expected it, but I had had no warning and it seemed so... final.

Hours later, when Daisy had gone to bed, the phone rang and it was you.

"I guess I've chosen."

"I suppose you have."

"Do you mind?"

I swallowed my feelings. "No. I'm happy for you two."

I *was* happy. I really was. Daisy was my twin; she deserved someone like you to make her happy. The sentiment was just bittersweet; that was all.

Summer

So now I stand under the canopy of white flowers in my bridesmaid's dress, watching you walk down the aisle towards us. I am sweating so much; it has become like a second skin under the muslin of my dress and it is not only because today is such a hot summer's day. It is also because I know that Luke still has not chosen. I can still feel where his lips moved over mine last night, where his fingers ghosted over my skin, his hot breath in my ear.

I do not know why I did it and I try not to let my false smile fall from my face as you take your place between me and Luke. When the minister asks if anyone has any reasons why this man and this woman should not be married I bite my tongue so hard tears jump to my eyes. I hope that everyone else thinks that I am just being sentimental and that somehow Luke has, in fact, finally made his decision.

But I do not miss it when his eyes flicker briefly to mine just before he says "I do" or when he holds me too close when we dance later. You are too happy to notice – everyone is talking about how healthy you look, how beautiful and blossoming – but I know that I cannot say no to your husband, because his light is spellbinding and we both know it.

After you two get married you move closer to me, still by the coast because I still need the sea, and get jobs in the next city just so that you can be near me. I wonder if it was your idea, but then Daisy tells me about how she had to persuade you.

I ask you about it later and you mutter something about how it "might be easier". It is the first time you have shown any guilt to me and you leave quickly that evening.

One day, months later, you come to see me, handing me a sonogram with a small shape like a kidney bean on it and with your face glowing even more than usual. I congratulate you and try not to think about the fact that I am six weeks late too.

Several weeks after that I am lying on the bathroom floor, still staring at the little blue line and choking on sobs, when you phone me.

"Rosy—" you begin, voice tense.

Summer

“Luke... This isn’t a good time—” I start to say.

“*Rosy*,” you say again. “It’s Daisy. She’s fallen down the stairs. The doctors are saying she’s miscarried.”

Later I am with you in the hospital, holding your hand. Luke has gone home to get some things and the dark night outside is full of rain.

“I’m sorry Daisy.” I really am.

“It’s okay,” you reassure me, smoothing my hair back from my face. “We can always try again.”

But you cannot try again. I am at home when I get the call from the police that makes my heart break with sorrow. You went swimming in the sea and the tide caught you. You were dead by the time they got there. They recite consoling words down the phone to me and I cannot help but wonder about this. Did you struggle against the tide as it took you away from us? Or perhaps you just let it take you? Perhaps willingly? You never were good with decisions, so maybe you let the sea make the choice for you this time. I will never know. It is over. You are over. I expect the pain but not this strange sense of relief. I know what I need to do. I get in the car and go back to Daisy.

You are curled up in bed when I get there, wide awake and crying. Ages pass before I can do it, but if I do not do it now I know that I never will.

“Daisy... I need to tell you something.”

I tell you everything. All of the last sixteen years, from the dock to here, everything that I have held in my heart for so long; everything is summarised in just a few short, very wet, minutes. I do not even know if I make much sense, but I need to say it. It is flooding out of me, the words like waves, and I am drowning in the past. When I finish I feel empty, like everything has been sucked out of me, and you look at me sadly.

“You kept all of this secret for so long?”

I nod. I cannot do anything else.

Summer

“Rosy...”

Suddenly your arms are around me, holding me close. I breathe in your comfortingly familiar, slightly floral, scent and hear you gently talking in my ear.

“I understand,” you are saying. “You never said anything... because Luke was so...” Your voice drifts off into nothingness like a whisper of a breeze.

“Luke?” I offer and feel you nod against my hair.

“Yes. Luke.” You pause. “Rosemary?”

“Yes?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too Daisy.”

We shall always remember that first summer. We will always remember you. I will keep our child and we will bring it up. We will always tell them about their father, that he was a good man, with a good heart like the golden sun, and that he always liked summer the best. After all, that is when everything began.

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