



Reaching Tranquility

Lily agrees to leave her crazy, deadline filled, life for the day to escort her brother and his crew to the beach. Little does she know how much the day will affect her life. The tranquility she is looking for on this day off will be hard to maintain in the grind of her workload. Lily wants more than a couple hours' worth of calm; she needs calm to be permanent part of her life.



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As soon as they step out of the car the air hits her lungs with a furious salt taste. Lily stares over the car to see the vastness of the water, never realizing before, that it truly does touch the horizon. Today, she sees the most beautiful blue, the kind that her school teachers used to say, “Draw water in sea blue” for. Water has never been blue or serene for her in her adult life. The water in her apartment is clear, except for the time it was yellow and they had to boil before using any. If she has been lucky enough to see a river, they are so full of pollutants that it is always murky and brown looking. Never inviting like the water before her now. This water sings to you like the sirens you read about in mythology, calling you to join them in a seductive way. The waves push and the ripples roll in with the softness of a butterfly’s touch. She wonders how it will actually feel today.

Lily came here with people who have come many times before. They talk at high speed, gathering various items from the trunk of the car, laughing and almost shouting. ‘I don’t think they appreciate what’s in front of them anymore. They don’t have any awe left in them as they talk about riding and even conquering the waves. This water is not to be overtaken, not to be controlled, this water

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clearly demands our respect, our awe. I, for one, plan on giving it that at the very least,’ she thinks to herself while watching the group fall all over themselves.

The paraphernalia is finally gathered and the group moves towards the water like a ten-legged monster with many appendages, each making their own noises. However, there are only two eyes actually watching where they are headed, the rest are looking at each other. Finding a spot for this monster is not too hard though, for it is still early in the morning and Lily suspects many other monsters are still sleeping. This hour is only for those who want to catch the morning waves.

In the calm of the early morning, one can see a scattering of people along this three-mile beach, all settling in. No one else seems to be interested in taming this beast they call ocean. Lily sees a few who are clearly in great physical condition dressed to address and greet this body of water with the reverence she deserves. However, she frowns at the couple of people who feel compelled to expel their smoke and ashes on the sand in front of everyone. Not believing they care where they are, as long as they are free to poison the rest of the visitors with their toxins, they probably call this a form of relaxing

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if you’d ask them. She so badly wants to call out to them, “Please do not bury your garbage in the sand, it’s not yours to do so.” Even if she had the gumption it takes to say such a thing, they would most likely not hear her or they would hear her but not listen. People come out here to do what they want and the air about them makes everyone feel free to do what pleases them with no regard for what pleases or relaxes others. Maybe that’s the real pull here, the ocean doesn’t discriminate like she is doing now. Damn, her job has jaded her so much towards people. Relax Lily, she thinks to herself. Learn to relax, you used to be able to do this. Cynical is not the personality type you want to be, she scolds herself.

The monster has finally come to a stop. Clanging chairs, flipping umbrellas and towels with the speed of lightning, laying stake to an area, that at the end of the day, is actually not theirs. The monster now begins to shed its skin. What’s left, are various colors and shades of appendages all moving around, grabbing up their tool of choice to help them win their battle with the watery beast. Leaving over a calm group of towels and chairs to bask in the sunlight on their own.

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Lily? She chooses to stay back and absorb the atmosphere for what it is – remarkable. She will introduce herself properly to the water sometime later. Watching and listening to the rhythm of what lays before her is quite intoxicating all by itself. She does not need an umbrella to shield her, nor a towel to keep her skin clear of sand, no, she would rather feel everything there is to feel right now in this remarkable place. Sensory overload is an understatement but it is also exactly what she wants to achieve.

As she leans back onto her elbows and stretches her legs out in front of her, Lily digs her heels into the natural sand, this is the building block of a tranquil moment, becoming one with the environment. Sooner than she is ready, she is disturbed as the sounds of the monster are coming back this way. Now soaking wet and laughing even louder than before. Lily intends on getting back tranquility soon, she is sure she will, she has to, that’s why she came after all. ‘There has to be a better reality than my own, at least for a while.’ she assures herself.

After listening to their noise pollution, she reminds herself why she is here with this unruly group. Her brother is one of them for one, and two,

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they needed a driver. Lily figured it would be easy to separate herself from their desires of conquest and tomfoolery. Besides, she has been working so hard lately at her job and life itself that she too needs a place to go to escape reality. In this vast openness she allows herself to escape, if only for a couple hours. Eventually, the stack of papers left at home will still be there waiting to be tackled, the answering machine will be full of complaints from her so-called friends about their lives and the laundry, her own personal beast, will still be there too. But for now, she inches herself towards a moment of tranquility.

First, she looks over at the mass of appendages flailing around at each other, noises coming from what appear to be every orifice possible and with the shift of the breeze the monster moves back to the waves and the dust settles again; now she can see the disarray left behind. That’s her cue. She does not need to actually watch them or babysit their possessions, so Lily picks herself up, dusts off some of the sand and walks to a spot closer to where the water kisses the sand. Here she sits down and sinks into the sand that is still dry while pushing her feet into the moist sand where the water will keep coming up and blanketing her feet.

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Ah, this is where focusing on nothing but nature can happen, watching how the wind and sun work together to make this a perfectly relaxing day. Leaning back on elbows again she positions herself to take in the surroundings with all five of her senses. Closing her eyes for a minute and letting the sun bake her face in its warmth, with her head hanging straight back leaving a breath of space between her hair and the sand.

Suddenly, feeling something on her leg, her eyes pop open and her head picks up in time to catch the critter as it starts to investigate one of her legs. With a brush of a hand she gently pushes it in another direction. As she watches him go towards the water, she gets up to follow him. All the while looking down and marveling over the speed with which its little legs can carry him. The coloring is nothing short of beautiful, its mastery of sand walking, astounding. Guess no hot feet for him. No sooner are her feet in the water and she loses her little friend.

“While I’m already in the water I might as well enjoy.” she says to no one. Walking further into the water until she is waist high, instantly moving in rhythm with the water giving in to its gentle lifts only to lose her footing and fall into the hands of a

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passing gentleman. Embarrassed, she pushes herself away and gains composure. “I’m terribly sorry, I got lost in the rhythm of the water and let the movement carry me away, guess I lost my balance.” ‘Yeah, like that didn’t sound like a complete airheaded city girl.’ She thinks. He smiles and puts out his hand, “I’m Bernard and don’t worry, I like to get lost in the waves too.”

They shake hands and Lily figures that is that. Until he says, “Didn’t you come with that group over there earlier?” ‘What!?’ How could he have known that? I try to remember seeing him before and believe me I certainly would not have forgotten that head full of naturally bright blonde hair, it’s almost white. Pulling herself together, Lily manages to nod but look at him inquisitively.’ Lily admonishes herself for having an entire conversation in her head before she answers him. He must have read her mind though because he continues with, “I saw you there when I first got here – then I saw you move. Sorry, I don’t normally watch people but you seemed so out of place amongst all those creatures, I couldn’t help but notice.”

With that he offers his hand and points over to some seats near a shack selling ice cream. “Why not?” She says. Not usually so tongue tied but he

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caught Lily so off guard she is not thinking as clearly as usual. They walk in silence, and by the time she gets there, she regains her full composure and once again apologizes for losing her footing and falling into him. “I usually can hold my own, you know, in the water I mean,” she stumbles on her own words.

“No problemmmm.....,” he leaves an opening, why? (He is looking at Lily with his big blue eyes wide open and his eyebrows up.) ‘Oh, I’m so stupid’ – she smacks her forehead and puts a hand out, “Lily – my name is Lily”.

“No problem then Lily, glad to be of service. Do you live around here?” “The million dollar question, predicable, maybe next he’ll ask me my zodiac sign. Oh my, what’s wrong with me, it was a simple question, this darn job has made me so cynical on everyone I don’t see an honest question anymore. Stop talking in your head and open your mouth Lily.’ She yells at herself. Of course, only silently. “I live about an hour or so away from this shore. My brother and crew needed a lift because they wanted to have a few beers while here and I really needed a day off. One scoop of chocolate on a cone, please.” She says to the nice girl inside the shack. Bernard orders himself a banana split. She laughs to herself ‘I thought only people in old 1950’s

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diner movies ate those. Extra hot fudge too, a man after my own heart.’ Now she catches herself laughing out loud and then he catches her too. “What? Never heard of a banana split before?” his face is not laughing though.

“No. Heard of it, never seen anyone actually get one except in a movie to be honest.” He gets very quiet all of a sudden, his eyes are almost mournful. ‘Me and my big mouth, I never did know how to make small talk, hence why I’m still single and available at twenty-nine. I’ve had dates but no real relationship unless you want to call my Dalmatian, Buggy, he is lovable, loyal and drama free.’ Lily shakes her head because she is getting tired of herself having full blown conversations in her head and never with people. Especially with people who are right in front of her.

Bernard sits uncomfortably for a moment moving his swivel chair with the beat of the music playing in the shack to calm his own nerves. Then he looks up, “Now it’s my turn to say I’m sorry.” He says with a nervousness she does not understand. “I used to come here with an old girlfriend and the first time I had met her folks her dad said the same thing to me. Only he said it in a burly voice that came out as really more of a bellow. For reasons unbeknown

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to me, I never saw her after that.” Quiet again, Lily can’t decide if something had happened to the girlfriend or if it was the parent’s fault. It isn’t for her to ask, they’ve only just met.

“Today is too nice of a day to dwell on things that bother us, that’s why I actually left all my work at home. Today is a ‘me’ day – a day for me to catch up on some very long overdue R&R. You know, rest and relaxation? I’m sure I can get right back to work later without pulling out my hair or killing the person who gave the work to me.” ‘which I doubt, although I’d love to think I can,’ she thinks to herself.

He is still quiet. Lily cannot get over what a big jerk she has become; she blames her job once again for taking up so much of her life that she doesn’t have one. ‘Now I’ve gone and done it but good. Not only did I bring up a bad memory but I neglected to validate how said memory made him feel by giving him my frivolous and selfish reasons for being here in the first place.’ The waitress brings out the ice cream, Lily thanks her and looks over at Bernard who is really deep in thought. This, in turn, is making her feel worse, so she puts her hand on his shoulder and starts to get off the stool. “Maybe I should go – it is certainly nice meeting up with you Bernard.”

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This brings him out of his stupor. He shakes his head and looks Lily in the eye and shyly asks, “Do you mind if I sit with you in the sand? Someone has to help me eat all this hot fudge anyway.”

Both laughing, they head back to where she was sitting alone before and make themselves comfortable in the sand. Sitting in silence for a while simply enjoying the view, pointing to the birds and waves and how ridiculous her brother and his friends are behaving. College kids, they both remember being there, but have no desire to go back.

They fall into a comfortable silence. The waves are particularly rhythmic this morning and lull Lily into the perfect solitude she was hoping for. As she sits there listening to nature keeping its groove, she finds herself swaying with the breeze as well. The blowing of the breeze touches her face and flows into her hair as if a hand is there running fingers through each strand, so gentle and relaxing. She finished her ice cream cone and lets her head fall back between her shoulders again and digs her fingers deeper into the sand. Tranquility..... reached.....

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Bernard is lost in thought, ‘Look at her, she is so one with the world. The wind is actually

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catching her hair almost as if the air knows where she specifically is sitting and what she needs. I’ve never seen anyone actually reach tranquility at will. She said that monster group over there is her brother. How can that be? They are all brazen, loud and disrespectful to people and nature. I don’t think he has one iota of appreciation for the beauty of this day or for the beauty of his own sister. I feel, I can basically guarantee, he doesn’t know how special his sister is either. I’m lying here watching her and I’m at a loss for words. For the first time, I’m not seeing a woman for her face, body, profession or family pedigree. I am seeing a person who is special from the inside out. One only has to look to see her inner beauty when she is entranced like that, the outer beauty is there for all to see, but this is so much better.

Let’s face reality though, my track record is not really good. My last love had a father who felt my ice cream choices made me appear selfish and indulgent. Before he picked himself up to go, he mumbled something under his breath, or was it to me directly, doesn’t matter now, but what does matter is that he thought I was beneath them. He didn’t even ask any questions, as a matter of fact,

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they were gone before the order even arrived. Let us not forget the one I was engaged to either.’

The monster suddenly appears and is ominous at best. Body parts are flying in all kinds of directions, noises in every audible decibel are being talked, laughed and sung. This should not be allowed in public and definitely not in the presence of perfect tranquility.

“Hey sis!! We found out about a great party happening about half a mile from here! Want to drive us?” Lily’s brother is announcing this to her as he shakes his wet head over her exposed neck. Bernard wants to strangle this ingrate, this beast, and yet he doesn’t move because he is in awe watching how slowly she comes out of her trance.

Lily wipes the extra water off her neck and chest, picks her head up in a motion that takes the wind by surprise because it hesitates before blowing again. In a voice that sounds as if it is still in a dream she says, “I told you I’d take you to the beach for the day and drive you back. I’m here until 4:00pm – not moving.” She smiles at him and before he rebuttals, she repositions herself to be one again with the world.

The monster flares up again with complaints but Lily chooses to ignore them and her body

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language works. She needs to get back in touch with tranquility. She knows she can get back there, she has to. But the monster is winning. She can’t get them out of her mind or ears for that matter. The raucous is crazy loud and it’s not even lunch time. She is sure they’re already out of the beer they brought. Guess they’ll have to actually eat the food now.

Food....ice cream....Bernard! Oh my! Quick as a flash she looks around to see what happened to him. “I totally lost myself. Damn! I can’t imagine what he thinks of me. Not that it should matter, we only met an hour ago. I don’t have to make him think I’m a total snob or something,. Why am I so bad at meeting people? Why can’t I be social like, well, like the monster or at least like my brother? Ok, not exactly like them, but how about I meet it in the middle? This is why I’m great at working with clients. I talk business easily, it’s the personal stuff that’s hard. Crap! Where can he be and why am I speaking out loud to no one? Is that better than talking to yourself in your head? I doubt it,” she continues to look around.

“Hey sis, what ya looking around for so frenzied? Your conscious? If you’re feeling so bad

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you can still take us to the party you know,” Zack can be so annoying sometimes.

“No! you juvenile excuse for a man – there was someone sitting here with me and now he’s gone. You probably scared him off with all that racket you and your friends are making. It’s obscene by the way, you know you aren’t the only ones here.” Zack stares at his sister, and for the first time in a long while, he actually looks sorry. She can tell by the look in his eyes. He always raises his left eyebrow when he speaks with sincerity.

“Sorry, sis. I know you want to relax too. I’ll get them to chill for bit. For your information, I did see a guy get up from behind you and walk over towards the ice cream shack. I think he was carrying a banana split boat. Didn’t know people really ate those. Word is, if you return the boats, they give you a coupon for a free cone. Had I known he was with you, I would have told you sooner, like when he left,” he watches her for a reaction.

Lily stops her frenzy and looks passed Zack towards the shack but can’t see anyone there.

“Thanks, Zack. And yes, it’s hard to believe he ordered one. He didn’t even need my help finishing the hot fudge. If you see him, his name is Bernard.”

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She sits back down with a plop. Tranquility totally lost now, she is so full of regret and guilt there’s no way she can relax. Pulling up her knees next to her chest she puts her arms around them starring out at the water and trying to feel its rhythm as it continually kisses the edges of the beach. “Actually, what I can’t do is believe I pushed what seems to be a perfect gentleman away without saying a word. Either I’m brilliant and I should market ‘how to get rid of a guy by doing nothing’ or I’m too self-absorbed to realize there are other people in the world that are deserving of my attention. Either way, he’s gone and I’m left feeling like a class A, #1 jerk.” She is speaking out loud again for the second time to day. “Ugh – you’re an idiot Lily.” She sighs and bends her head into her knees for a moment of introspection.

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Walking back, Bernard sees Lily with her brother in what seems like a friendly enough conversation. He should have told her he was headed back to the shack to deal with a customer, but then he’d have to tell her the shack was his. Well, along with four other beach eateries on this area of the shore. Most people react with “Oh, how

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...nice” It’s the pause that gets him each time. ‘If I owned and ran four places on the boardwalk, I would be considered successful, but on the beach, I somehow perceived as lazy. At the very least, people assume they are all ice cream, chips and fast food. If they bothered to ask, they would know I have one place with ice cream, one with freshly made pizza with organic cheeses and toppings and two upscale places that require reservations and being dressed in street clothes not beach attire.

Whoa! What’s going on? Lily is looking for something. I hope she didn’t lose anything valuable. I don’t recall seeing any jewelry on her. Maybe I should walk faster anyway. Oh, no! Maybe she is looking for me – naw, that can’t be, she can see me coming from the shack, I’m in full view. Aren’t I? Better run. He thinks as he approaches the brother and sister.

“Hey, Lily! You ok? You look upset like you lost something important,” Bernard calls to her.

“Listen Buddy, next time you plan on standing up my sis you’ll have to go through me! Got that! No one puts one over on Lily.” With a puff of his chest Zack grows about six inches as he is talking to Bernard. He has put himself in direct line between Lily and Bernard. As he is about to lift his

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hand and poke into Bernard’s chest, he gains control.

“What? I had to go back to the shack. You could see me the whole time, the shack’s in full view.” ‘Ah, but I realize I’m not.’ Bernard takes a quick glance down at what he is now wearing, ‘I had to speak to a customer so now I have a shirt on and a cap on my head. Dumb, dumb move. Bernard, really? Talking to yourself, speak up boy.’ “Sorry Lily, you were probably looking for the blonde with the weird scar on his belly. My apologies. I received a call to get back to the shack, there was a problem with a customer. Being the owner, I have to look the part during those times. It’s hard to speak with any kind of authority when you look like a beach bum in a swimsuit.”

She’s staring at him. ‘Well, I guess I blew it again, kissing this one goodbye before it even starts. Funny, how all I have been thinking about is how I could be kissing this one before the goodbyes at the end of today. Damn.’ Bernard thinks to himself.

“You own the shack? That is the best tasting ice cream I’ve ever had. Amazing really! You get to work in this environment every day while I’m busy writing yet another article on who ruined who in politics or who killed who on the street. Please

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forgive me as I turn green. Hey Zack, take a few bucks from my purse and go and treat yourself and your friends, you won’t believe how good the ice cream is. Honest,” she says to her brother.

It takes a moment for Zack to comprehend what is being said to him, then he slowly begins to trudge away but not before knocking into Bernard’s shoulder with his shoulder. Well, not exactly shoulder to shoulder considering Bernard is a good head taller than he is. Thankfully, Lily’s brother is the protective type, even though it would not bode well for him under these circumstances. ‘Better than throwing me to the wolves I suppose.’ She smiles to herself. Back to talking to myself, brilliant, she sighs.

“Nice to have family willing to put themselves out for you, tell me why you write about things you clearly hate. Are you a writer by profession or default?” As the words come out Bernard is hoping he will not be eating his foot for dinner. ‘Ahhhhh, she is smiling.’ He breathes now.

“Actually, I’ve tried my hand at writing for kids, but it hasn’t worked out. I used to have a much greater outlook on mankind, but truthfully, after being at this job so long my views of people are quite tainted. I’ll be honest, I assumed you left because I

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was being a colossal jerk by ignoring you. I’m very good at scaring people away.”

“Not true, my new friend. I should have told you I was leaving but I couldn’t bring myself to interrupt your oneness with the world. If you don’t mind me saying this, watching you was somewhat breathtaking.” Ok, he said the word, but he can’t lie, she was. Standing here looking at her again, face to face only confirms his belief that this is one special lady. Bernard stands there taking in what he has admitted.

‘Breathtaking’? me? Maybe it’s all the salty air he breathes each day. I think I would give my eye teeth to have a job I loved so much and a place to love too. Between his hair, his height and that amazing ice cream, I sure hope I don’t blow this. Really Lily you care about ice cream so much, ugh why am I such an idiot?’ Lily thinks before answering, “As long as we are being honest, you should know, for a writer, I’m very bad with words of conversation. I’m still trying to swallow what you said. No one has ever used that phrase describing me. Nice looking, quiet personality, but never on the level of breathtaking.”

“I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable. I was watching you from behind as your mind, body

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and soul seem to all reach a connection with nature, and well, there isn’t another word for what was going on. I was so distracted by watching you that I ate my whole banana split and I don’t remember the last time I did that.”

Lily laughs. She can’t believe someone could be that distracted by her. She feels she is nothing compared to the multitudes of models she sees traipsing through the office for their photo shoots at the office. She doesn’t even compare to her own mother who shocks everyone with her beauty and charm. “Let’s go for a walk. Unless you have to get back to work.”

“Thanks, I’d love to. You don’t have to worry about work, I have a waterproof beeper they can reach me at any time they need, and in a real emergency, they use one of the motorized carts to come get me. Somehow, someone always knows where I am,” he smiles.

“The shack has motorized carts? I thought those belonged to the pizza shop or the diner down the way.” ‘Why on earth is he grinning now? Holy cow!’ she realizes “You own those too?!!” ‘I couldn’t help but blurt it out. I must have sounded like a two year old being told someone owns a candy store. He has that grin on his face but I can’t tell if its pride or

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fear; kind of a cross between them both. What an odd thing,’ Lily is perplexed.

“Yes, I’m sorry, does that make a difference to you? If so, then I’d rather bow out of our walk and call it a day. Since we’ve been so honest already, I feel the need to tell you that most people have gotten completely turned off by what I do for a living. They’re all legit you know. Built them up with the help of my partner, actually he is my brother, but he hates the beach; he does all the books once a month with me and we make changes accordingly. The rest of the month he sits back in his apartment in the city doing his art and trying to write his novel or change the world depending on the day.”

Lily contemplates what he has revealed of himself, ‘People don’t like his chosen profession? What does that mean?’ “Bernard, I’m sure you think I know what you’re talking about but is there something I’m missing? What would be the reason to not like someone who has four successful businesses, all of which have amazing reputations? I could write up your whole story if you want to prove to the nay sayers that you are one of the most eligible bachelors around; smart, kind, and most importantly, genuine.” Lily feels she is so losing points for this mouth of hers. ‘Didn’t anyone ever

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teach me how to stop putting my foot in my mouth or embarrassing myself on a first date? Which this isn’t even, it’s a first meet. Ha! I can’t even do that right.’ Lily is shaking her head at herself again.

“If writing the article about our successful business tactics would get me to see more of you, then I’m all game. I can contact my brother and have him come down here, say, tomorrow? You might like what you learn.” He smiles.

‘I wish I had a collar on that I could close or a shirt for that matter because all of a sudden the look in his eyes was full of fire and I’m burning up. This is crazy, people don’t become this attracted to each other over an ice cream and a cool breeze. I need my mom to set me back on track, yeah that’s what I’ll do after I drop off Zack and his bunch at the university. This walk we are supposed to be taking is not moving too well, we haven’t taken more than four steps from where we started. All I can think about right now is how much I really want a hug goodbye at the end of the afternoon. Oh no, my brain is really working overtime. Now I’m not sure a hug will be enough.’ Lily is still contemplating what is going on when Bernard takes her hand and turns her towards the water.

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Finally, they are walking again and this time for real. Both, however, are tongue tied. Neither one wants to say anything because they are actually afraid of what they might say could ruin this perfect feeling, which, on its own, is new to both of them. ‘I could come down tomorrow, my schedule is light. But can I be trusted? Maybe I should bring an intern with me. Breathe in...breathe out....Ooooo water on my feet, that feels good. My hand is being pulled out into the water and I am willingly following. How unusual for me.’ Lily’s head can’t stop thinking.

‘I can’t believe I’m walking with her into the water. What am I thinking? I can’t do this, we really don’t know each other. What if she has gross habits? What if she dresses like a slob? No, that’s not possible. I want to bring her out to waist high water. Somehow, I feel at that point I can put my arms around her waist and take her in. This is totally calculated, but I’m not sure by whom. I’ve never done this before but my heart and my gut are telling me not to stop now or I’ll never get there. As we approach the right depth, I pull her a little closer and stand behind her. This way we can both watch forward and not into each other’s eyes, because at this point, I think it’s dangerous for both of us.’ Bernard is no longer upset at himself for thinking to

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himself because right now words escape him. Fear of saying the wrong thing is also keeping him quiet. Slowly his hands reach from behind Lily to around her stomach. She is chest high in the water and he is, well.... not, considering how tall he is.

‘His fingers are clasped into mine and are holding me close to him, my back to his stomach. We watch the water and dig our feet into the sand below us. Almost in unison we begin to sway with the rhythm of the water. Our bodies are moving in fluid motion as if we have merged as one. This definitely goes past what I was hoping for today. Snap out of it Lily! Wake up! This has to be a dream in your tranquility.’ Lily takes a couple breathes and realizes she is fully awake with all of this. Now she is even more churned up.

Bernard has no idea how long he’s been holding her. Could have been a minute or an hour – time is standing still for them right now. ‘I do not understand this connection we have but I am thankful I have not ruined this with a kiss. Holding her is more than enough right now. It is as if we have reached a tranquility of our own, together. Trying to shake myself back into reality Bernard whispers in her ear, “What time do you think you could come back tomorrow?”

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Lily feels his breathe on her ear, ‘concentrate you fool what could he have asked you? Oh, man, I don’t want to ask him to repeat because I’m not sure I can handle having him say anything again so close to my ear. Ok, reality Lily, get back there! What time! Yes, I heard him ask about time.’

“I don’t think I can get here before 9:00am. Is that too early? Too late? I will work around your schedule, mine is not as strict until there is a deadline to meet,” she responds. He inhales and exhales as if he has been holding onto that breath for an hour. All the while he is still standing behind Lily and holding on.

“If I have to wait till 9:00, then 9:00 it is. I don’t think my artist brother can get here before noon, that’s who he is. Do you want to wait for him here? Or interview him in the city where it might be more convenient for you?” ‘Please say here, please say here, oh my three hours with you tomorrow would be so right, would be so, wow I don’t even have the words, it would just be.’ Bernard thinks to himself.

“I think I could wait for him here. Like I said, no deadline right now so my schedule is a lot freer. Especially if I say I have a new story for them, one they would not have gotten on their own and

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one that is a personal interest story. They love this kind of stuff. But believe me, I do not write fluff, only real stories.” Lily finds herself rambling so she shuts her mouth quickly.

Letting go does not seem to be an option for either one of them. But nature is in charge in the water and WHOP! A big wave hits them both because neither is really paying attention. The water lifts them both right up and drops them off their feet and into the water; right on top of each other. As they both get up, spitting out water they look at each other and begin to laugh. They cling to each other and walk back up the beach to where the monster is. It only makes sense.

“So how was the dip sis?” Zack, of course, had seen that part. Must have been quite a sight. They start laughing all over again. “Bernard, glad to meet you Zack. Sorry we weren’t properly introduced before.” Bernard says as he extends his hand out to Zack.

“I only have one sister Bernard, the rest of us are boys. You better do her right, you hear me? Oh, and by the way, the ice cream really *is* good.”

“Almost 4:00 pm how about I treat you all to some pizza?” Bernard says calmly as he points to the pizza shop with the blue roof. ‘Blue?’ Lily thinks,

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I’m sure there is a story to that as well.’ The monster is not going to turn down free food. So, quick as a flash they pack up their belongings, throw on shirts and shorts, and head towards food. After Lily throws on her dress, she walks with Bernard, hand in hand about five feet behind everyone else. His fingers intertwined with hers like he did under the water. Only this time it feels they are making a very loud statement to the world. Funny thing is, Lily doesn’t seem to mind being associated with this guy. ‘How the heck has this gone from me falling into him in the water to me not wanting to let go?’ she asks herself. ‘Stuff like this only happens in the movies or in a sappy romance novel.’

‘She is holding my hand voluntarily and walking in public with me to the pizza shop. I do not think my feet are touching the sand because normally the sand gets hotter towards the shop and I do not feel a thing. I am looking forward to our time together tomorrow morning. I have to keep telling myself, one day at a time, get to know who she is. That is the rational brain, the rest of me is saying, holy cow when can I hug her tight and tell her to never go away again?’ Bernard is walking and smiling at his own thoughts.

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As they approach the shop, three, really tall, guys come out to greet them. “Cousins,” Bernard whispers in her ear. Everyone shakes hands and they pat Bernard on the back. Each one looks like they played some sort of aggressive sports at one point in their lives. They all smile at Lily and her brother’s group of friends; they shrug their shoulders and go in back to get some food.

Bernard leads them all to sit down on this really nice five-foot round table. “Ok, ladies and gentlemen, the boys are going to be bringing out the three-foot pie. I hope you worked up an appetite out there.” ‘Why am I so dazzled by the food choices this man makes? Here, he is proud as can be; here, you see he is basking in an empire he built and wants to show off. But not in a haughty way, in a how can I impress this girl next to me way. How I wish I could tell him; I’m already there.’ Lily loves her thoughts but she is getting tired of having conversations by herself. She needs to learn from Zack how to speak up when a thought comes in, well at least after the mind filters through her words. She never has this problem when interviewing someone.

Everyone laughs, tells jokes and shares various beach anecdotes that have happened to them either today or in the past. There is not one person

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in the whole restaurant that is not having a good time. The atmosphere here brings that out in anyone sitting around. As the pizza is being brought out, onlookers start to cheer. The only cousin with a beard leans over Lily’s back and whispers in her ear, that is not next to Bernard, “be careful love, he has been hurt before and I won’t watch that pain again.”

Lily has to catch her breath because that is not what she was expecting to hear. Trying not to turn around too quickly, she merely turns her head to speak into his ear, “I will do my best, you have my word.”

With that he stands up and smiles and hits Bernard on the shoulder one more time. Everyone enjoys each other’s company. Once inside the building the monster dissipated and became individuals who knew how to behave themselves. Nice to see, Lily thinks to herself.

Lily looks up at the table and sees that they nearly finished this three-foot pie. Then she realizes that she is leaning into Bernard with her head in the crook of his arm and his arm/hand landing around my waist. “This is so not like me. But I can’t help myself, I can’t see being any other way with him right now.” She smiles to herself.

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However, time to go, so everyone can get back at a reasonable hour. The cousins, as they have been dubbed, come to pack up the rest of the pizza. Zack is thrilled to take back leftovers. Lily, however, now has the arduous task of leaving this place somehow.

Everyone gets up at the same time. They walk together back to her car, everyone is talking about how they are probably going to fall straight to sleep as soon as the car is rolling. Which, to Lily, is not a bad thing. Their sleeping will give her a chance to sort through her brain and find reality once again.

As the gang is all in the car, Lily stands outside the driver’s door with Bernard. “I will see you in the morning, yes?” he asks quietly.

“Yes, Bernard, I will be back, I don’t make appointments I won’t keep,” she opens the door but before she can sit down she is pulled around and Bernard’s face is right in front of hers, “I have to,” is all he says before he grabs her close and plants the sweetest of kisses right on her lips. Like being touch by a wispy cloud. As the sides of her mouth go up, all she can bring herself to say is, “yes, yes you did”. With that, she sits down and Bernard closes the door. He stands away so she can pull out and

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watches her drive out of the parking spot. Then, he starts walking back down to the beach.

Inside the car the screams and whistles are plenty until Zack opens his mouth, “Lily, this guy moves too fast for you. I don’t think you should see him again.” Before she says a thing, the girl sitting next to him pulls him over and plants a whopper on his lips that didn’t end until the next traffic light.

“Don’t worry Lily, he will behave now.” Lily had to keep herself from laughing. “Thanks” is all she says.

The one in the front passenger seat falls asleep first, they drive the rest of the way in silence, true to their word, one by one, the monster slowly falls asleep.

~ ~ ~

When Lily gets home, she looks up the word tranquility. The dictionary says, quote, ‘the quality or state of being tranquil’. “Can somebody tell me what exactly that means?!” she screams. She looks further up on the page at the word ‘tranquil’ which says “to be free from agitation of mind and/or spirit”. Simply put, she thinks it means that one is at peace with themselves and their surroundings. “That is my own interpretation, but no dictionary publisher ever asked me.”

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“Either way you slice this, I found my tranquility this morning and carried me on into the afternoon and early part of the evening. I am not sure how long this will last. I am confident that as soon as I sit down by that computer I will be as tense as I was yesterday trying to meet my deadlines on a story about a person I care so little about it makes it hard to even type their name. I wouldn’t vote for this person if you paid me, and I certainly don’t want to write a positive spin on his life which is what my editor asked me to do. I followed this man around for three days straight, ‘observing’ my editor said, ‘no questioning’ he said. So, now I have no story. Oh, there is that familiar pang in my stomach and my back is tensing up already merely thinking about my work. I can’t wait till morning again. “Stop this LILY!!!” she yells, she needs a life. She has to stop talking out loud to herself and to her apartment walls, it’s worse than talking to herself in her head. Oh, god, she shivers. Even her dalmatian doesn’t want to listen to her, he is off sleeping on his bed.

Lily takes a shower, grabs a snack to eat and reluctantly goes to sit down in front of the computer that will suck the life right back out of her. By the time she finishes working it is 2:00 in the morning. She has sent in her copy back and forth three times

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tonight to her editor and he finally says, “This will have to do.” Jackass. “Why did he ask me to write this when he knew there was nothing to write? The interviewee is a jerk, he stands for nothing, does nothing for the community he supposedly represents and couldn’t keep his hands off my ass any chance he got. The thought of him makes my skin crawl. I had to shower three times a day when I was with him. Used more hand sanitizer than a hospital worker and yet he still insisted we were going to be ‘friends’ before our time together was up. I see his beady eyes looking at me as I wrote this final copy, I feel his scratchy fingers up and down my arm with every press of the enter button and all you can say is ‘It will have to do!’” Lily is now yelling at her computer.

She writes back to her boss *“You knew what he was like and you sent me anyway! You knew, you damn bastard. Did you think I would sleep with him and get some dirty secret from him? Did you? I thought your paper was one with integrity!! Not rumors. I do believe I am no longer in position to be working for you. I am a writer and a damn good one; not a piece of meat for you to throw to the dogs!! How Dare you!! You can’t deny you sent me in to keep him occupied. How many others?”* She waits,

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five minutes, ten minutes, even fifteen minutes and still no answer. Lily is beside herself with disgust. All these years working here has come down to this. All that time she gave them, and for what? She sits down and thinks about the last three interviews she had to make, all of them male, all of them thought her body was open for touching. Her boss did this on purpose. There are only two women working for him right now and they always get these types of interviews. Always.

Last month it was the sports star with a large ego and even larger hands. The time before that was the entrepreneur who sat so close to her in his limo she was suffocating. He kept pushing her to drink as well and became very agitated that she would not play his game and only asked him questions for the article. The time before that was.....Lily’s mind brings her to her whole career with this boss, every single interview was the same way. ‘Do good by them. Make them happy.’ Is the phrase he tells her each time he sends her out. “No!” she yells to the ceiling. How has she been coerced into this type of job. She sends one more e-mail. “*Clearly by your lack of response to my accusations, I am correct. Well you can consider yourself lucky I’m not the type to sue for this type of harassment but I’m no*

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pushover either. I expect to get my full pay this month as well as payment for all of those vacation days I’ve never taken over the past five years being with you. That is ten days per year times five years, another month and a half. Anything less and I may reconsider the idea of charges. Forget that, I guarantee I will press charges, I have all the e-mails you sent me as to how I was to behave for these men.” Then she sends a long e-mail to the only other female writer to make sure she re-evaluates all her recent interviews too. Maybe for her, it is different, maybe not. For both of these latest e-mails, she sends a blind copy to her boss’s boss.

Her heart is beating so fast she feels as if she has been running a 10K. Her palms are sweaty, she is breathing irregularly. “This is not the job for me! I can’t do this anymore!! I have to get out of here, I’m suffocating!! Where can I go at 2:00 am?”

Only one place in five years that she has found the kind of calm she needs now, she has to drive back to the beach now. The beach will be good, no one is there at this hour. She has to clear her head. New life has to start now, not tomorrow!

“Nooowww!” she screams to the walls surrounding her feeling as if they are caving in on her. She doesn’t care if a neighbor hears her or not.

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Her mind begins to think more clearly now, of all the other people she was told to interview over the years, all the men. Only men, as she thinks on more of them. Always men, always the older ones that no one would be caught dead with but they think they still can attract the young women around them.

All of those interviews with entitled athletes. The ones who feel they were doing me a favor by making those passes at her. One even told her she was lucky he was even considering the idea. She finished her interview and left the room. Never once complaining, never once reporting on what was going on. And now she knows why, her boss knew exactly what was going to happen and sent her to them on purpose. He has no idea that nothing ever came between her and those other men. Or maybe he does and keeps trying. But no one complained, how could they? What would they say? Next time send me someone more compliant?

Or maybe he does know which is why she was never sent on a second interview with some of them. Five years with this paper, four with the one before that. Same boss, he pulled her over. Now she is pulling away. Far away, as fast as she can. Let his boss deal with him. All she knows is she better be getting paid what she has coming to her.

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Bernard starts thinking out loud, “Did all of this happen? Did I really walk a girl to her car and practically rip off her clothes? Lord knows I did with my eyes, that’s for sure. Let’s recap here for a second; I met a girl that was nice and she listened to every word I said, even if I was rambling on. She didn’t mind that I practically live on the beach for my job every day. I was able to touch her without having her run the other direction and it seemed to me that she was enjoying the physical contact. However, this doesn’t happen to me and so therefore it was a mirage or some kind of dream-like state I was in. Did she even look the way I thought she did?”

Time to get back to work, see how the day went, do the tallies, get ready for the evening rush and.....oh no!! She is coming back tomorrow, isn’t she? What was I thinking? She won’t want to be here for more than five minutes, the interview will be awkward, and the write-up will be dry. I can’t deal with bad publicity right now; this article has to be only good. The competition would love for me to be trashed so they can move into this territory. Right now, they know they can’t touch the area. I not only have loyal customers but my workers won’t leave

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either. Took me a long time to get here and I’m not letting myself get taken in by a piece of... Whoa, stop right there. Lily was not like that. Oh, God, I have to get busy doing something productive. I’m now arguing with myself and the night is not nearly over for me.” All this talking in only a two-minute walk, Bernard takes a deep breath and walks back into the pizza shop.

His cousins are instantly all over him about who the girl is and when is she coming back. He had to try and brush them off but ‘the big guy’, as everyone calls him, comes from behind him and sweeps him into the back office. Slam!! The door closes behind them and before Bernard can get a word in, his cousin is all over him about how beautiful she is, how nice she was to everyone around her. How she treated everyone with the same respect no matter what their job was. “Did I mention how beautiful she was? Well, she was, is, anyway I’m not sure what the two of you were doing out in the water but Manny shot about twelve photos of you with his long zoom camera and I plan on using them for advertising. You have to get her to sign off on them ASAP!” When he comes up for air, he plops down on the couch across from Bernard’s desk, puts

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his feet up on the coffee table in front and smiles from ear to ear.

As Bernard watches this spectacle and listens to his cousin’s rant, he does all he can to keep himself from feeling her in his arms in the water. He turns his chair to face the window so his cousin will not see him breathing harder or the water in his eyes he feels coming. He is no fool, but he also knows better than to push the subject. They may only be cousins but they have been closer than brothers since they were kids. His own brother is great but they never has had the same interests; these two cousins here, they love each other as brothers will and Bernard is thankful every day for his biological brother being his silent partner, but ‘the boys’ and Bernard have the shops together.

‘Who better to work them, then family? They love the place and helped me develop all the recipes. Their wives love the place and help out when they can too. My four eateries’ profits help to support four families plus all of the workers, I guess you can call that successful. We aren’t millionaires, but thankfully we don’t have to worry about where our next meal is coming from.’ Bernard is lost in his thoughts still. After about five minutes of silence ‘the big guy’ walks up behind him, puts his hand on his

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shoulder and says, “Hey, sorry if I overstepped here, but we’ve all been wanting you to find that someone special like we have. If you need me, you know where to find me. Maybe tomorrow I’ll show you Manny’s pictures. Hang in there,” and he walks away.

With those words Bernard realizes he has his head slumped down into his hands. He quickly sits up and begins to work. When he gets his mojo back, he walks over to the other shops and does what he does every day. By the time he is done doing his daily routine he goes back around to close up each one of the shops. The last place to close is the ice cream shop. This one he lets stay open until 11:00pm. Most people have left the beach by then, but the few stragglers will always want one for the road. Especially, tourists.

By 11:30 Bernard is ready to head back to his apartment, which he does with a heavy heart. Working as much as he does only makes him tired, it does not make him forget the day or the girl. The one whose pictures will transform anyone’s image of what it means to be at the beach. Some go for fun, some go for sun, some go for Tranquility. That is what she exudes in her photos. Bernard made Manny show them to him before closing, he couldn’t

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wait till tomorrow to see her again. He hopes he can convince her to sign off on them. Manny has a great eye for finding the right moment around here and he really grabbed her. Bernard feels as if he looks like a piece of scenery compared to her. These are the types of photos they will put on their website to attract tourists and locals as well. Manny’s photos have won prizes in the past, this new set surely will too. He’ll have to thank him again tomorrow, assuming she signs.

‘Ah, a bed, what a welcome thought.’

Bernard thinks as he walks across the street to his apartment. He showers first, then he tries really hard to fall asleep. He gets up and walks over to the computer to try and find some way to help him relax. No such luck, he catches up with all his e-mails, sends his brother a revised edition of the proposal Bernard received earlier and even does some more of the books to make sure he is ready to produce his quarterly reports due next week. By this time the clock says 3:15 in the morning. However, he is still pacing the apartment when he hears a car door outside. He walks over to his balcony to look out at who could be coming home at such an hour, he sees someone parking along the boardwalk and getting out of a car, a familiar looking car too.

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“What the heck? I know I’m delusional but that sure looks like Lily. What does she think she is doing out at this hour alone? Crap, I had better go out there. This cannot be good, not good at all.” He speaks out loud although he knows no one can hear him.

~ ~

Without traffic Lily actually gets out here in under an hour, now that’s impressive. She pulls into a prime spot, well, if it was midday it would be anyway. At first, she sits in the car and watches the water. The beach looks like a sleeping child, slowly breathing in and out, rolling from one side to the other. A child that has a smirk on their face even with their eyes closed, because they are remembering the day’s events. After a half an hour, she gets out of the car, takes off her shoes and walks towards the spot where tranquility began earlier that day.

Bernard is watching her from a distance and thinking, ‘why is she going toward the hut? Does she think I sell ice cream 24/7? I had better head her off before she gets the wrong impression. Wait a minute, she is passing the shack and going more towards the water, even worse, what is she thinking the water will pull her straight in at night. There are

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no lifeguards now. The undertow!’ Bernard picks up his pace.

“I can’t find my spot, I know it is passed the ice cream hut but not by much” Lily is talking to the water now. She speeds up and finds herself running down the beach trying to find the place she wants to reach so badly but can’t. What she really wants is to get back to that state of mind where she doesn’t hate the world and she’s not worried about the world hating her back. Where no one is groping her, where no one is belittling the work she does, where she was finally appreciated for being herself. She does not know why all of this is hitting her at once, maybe it’s the damn politician she interviewed, maybe her boss’s lack of response to her allegations, all she knows is she can’t think straight and she is in a god-awful spot right now, her emotions getting the better of her for sure. Lily is running faster now, faster than she means to “I have to find the right place, I just have to.” The tears are starting to come down her face.

Bernard won’t take his eyes off of her, he starts talking out loud again, “Why the heck is she running, she doesn’t look like she is jogging and why would she, she said she lives an hour away from here. Maybe it’s not her, maybe it’s a midnight

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jogger. Still, my gut is telling me to sprint so I can find out, this doesn’t seem safe to me. No matter who is there.” As he gets closer he knows for sure he sees Lily even in the dark. “Lily.....Lily stop, pleeeeee stop!” He calls to her. She looks back at Bernard but her face is that of a frightened child. ‘Oh, hell, what could have happened? Is her brother ok? Did she get fired? Why on earth is she here and what could she be looking for?’ Bernard’s head is racing to all kinds of conclusions. He needs to get answers and fast.

Lily turns around because she thinks she hears the wind calling her name, ‘there it is again. Wow, it’s not the wind, it’s the dream. He is running after me, asking me to stop.’ Lily thinks she is losing her mind now. Whatever happened today was a moment in time and she is drowning in the fact that she may never get that back, that she is destined to be choking on her words for a job she hates with a boss who thinks nothing more of her than her female parts. Wait, she doesn’t even have that job, she quit tonight. But she knows now, she will always be sent out on bad interviews no matter who she works for because she is a female and her bosses will know what these creeps are like before they will send her; that her life is going to be one long unending turmoil.

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Her body falls to the sand and the tears come pouring out. She can’t stop them. She wants to, but can’t. She finds herself to be physically and emotionally spent right now and feeling her knees land in the wet sand and her hands in the water, aren’t even enough to wake her from this nightmare in her head. The warmth has gone out of the water and out of her too. She hangs her head down and the water is slapping at her hair. Through her tears she says, “Someone stop the train I want to get off so badly. Pleeceeeeeease” She pleads, with the ocean. This has been building up in her for so long, she thinks her body is finally going to explode. Now she knows she is losing her mind because there are now arms around her, pulling her gently to roll her over and she finds herself lying across his lap. He is real, this is not a dream, or maybe it is and she hasn’t woken up yet.

“Lily, hey, it’s me, Bernard.” He says as he gently brushes her wet hair out of her face and around her ear. Tears keep falling and her body is aching all over from the tension inside. All Lily can think about is that “This isn’t helping. People are always writing about how we should let out our frustrations and to set us free. Let ourselves ‘feel’ the pain and wash it out with our tears. Who writes this

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garbage and have they ever had to try it? It doesn’t work!’ As he strokes her back, she finds herself able to take deep breaths with each one, with this she is calming down until she finally sits up facing him. Her first thought is that the moonlight is reflecting off his eyes in a way that is pulling her in. ‘I must look hideous after all those tears and here he is smiling at me.’ Lily has so much pain inside her that his warm smile is confusing her more than comforting her.

Reaching out with both of his hands this time, he puts the rest of her hair behind her ears, cups her cheeks and says, “Let’s go back to my place, right over there, dry and warm.” Until now Lily didn’t realize how cold she really is, she is frozen in her spot as he stands and lifts her hand with his. In an effort not to sound ungrateful, she proceeds to stand up and walk hand in hand with him back to his apartment. It is nice being able to cry with someone there, that part felt ok. She says to herself. But the crying in front of anyone part does not, it’s not something she allows herself to ever do.

‘I’m the one who always has her emotions in check, the one people can rely on to stay calm in any situation.’ Lily thinks to herself and then she continues, ‘maybe I’m actually having a breakdown. I should head for my car.’ She bows her head down.

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As they walk onto the boardwalk she realizes that she still doesn’t have shoes on. She is not even sure where she dropped them but somewhere along the way I did, either way, the gravel is beginning to hurt her bare feet. Part of her feels good to feel some kind of pain because her insides are numb right now.

Bernard is looking at Lily now and even through the night’s light he can see she is deep in thought, ‘what could have caused such a tirade of tears? I would have loved to stay there and figure this out but I think she needs a warm blanket and a couch, not the cold wet sand of the wee hours of the morning. She is following me, which is a good sign. She has taken my hand and is holding on which either means she wants to see my apartment or she is so disoriented she needs guidance. This is not the way I pictured getting her to my apartment but somehow the feeling is still a good one. Everything about Lily feels right. Even watching and holding her while she cries.’ He continues to walk in silence.

‘How much further must my poor tootsies endure? I’m sure glad it’s not hot outside because the pavement must get really hot when the sun is out. This building he is walking towards is so nice. I was admiring it when we first got to the beach this morning. Wow, he lives here? Definitely dreaming,

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‘I’ll wake soon enough.’ Lily’s thoughts are going everywhere except to the reality of why she is here to begin with. Anything to keep her head from going back there.

Bernard walks a little closer and puts his arm around her waist because he not sure if she will fall again or not. Looking down a thought occurs to him, ‘Holy.....she has no shoes. She has walked along boardwalk, gravel and pavement without saying a word. This must be some kind of trauma shock. I had better deal with this very delicately. Think damn you, think. Ok, first get her to the couch, then give her warm socks and a blanket over her shoulders, then make some hot tea or something and let her talk whenever she is ready. Deep breath in, out, alright I have a plan.’ He proceeds to get her in the elevator and up to his apartment.

The elevator is quick – only third floor. He walks to apartment number three. The first thing Lily notices when she walks in is his view of the beach. She glides over to the window. ‘Oooh there is my car, that’s how he knew I was here so quickly’. Her hands on the window and her forehead is too, but then she hears him come behind her and she turns around to see him and he is standing there with a pair of what looks like very warm socks. Lily smiles

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at him to try and make him think she hasn’t completely lost my mind. She walks towards him, he looks stiff. Lily’s head is going to so many places, ‘Does he think this is what I wanted all along? He must think I’m after his money. I am the worst person in the world to try and read social cues. I should take the socks anyway because my feet are frozen and sore’, “You don’t have to do this. I’m sure my shoes are out there somewhere I should go find them and be on my way home. I have an interview in the morning I don’t want to be late for,” her voice hoarse from tears.

“Very cute, I’m thinking your interviewee will be understanding if you’re a few minutes late because you had to find shoes. Does that usually work for you? Or do you find more creative excuses to not be where you need to be? Like why on earth you were out there at this hour, you scared me half to bits. Not that it matters to you how or what I think but really it’s after 3:00am and you’re running along the beach at full speed like a tiger with a hunter on its tail.” Sleep deprivation does wonders for one’s ability to speak normally Bernard thinks to himself.

“I didn’t mean to scare anyone, and FYI your opinion does matter. I did not know where you lived, nor am I after your money or anything like

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that. I was typing until around 2:00am and my reality hit me, a very unsavory reality at that, I had to run away. I kept running until I got here and then I went back to find the place, that peace, that time when my thoughts were calm and brought me out of my rut this morning. I can’t go back to yesterday and after only a few hours on the computer this evening I’d lost all I gained from being here today, and then some. You are standing there staring at me like I’m the lunatic who escaped the asylum. Thank you for the socks, I should go now.” She heads towards the door quickly but it is blocked by this wall of a man.

“I want that beautiful peace back too.” He says softly and bends down to kiss her on the forehead, then the cheek, both sides, then ever so slowly he lifts her chin and says, “I’m sorry you had to run here to escape, but next time call, ok? However, I’m glad I found you. Again.” Then the real kiss comes, the one that takes her breath away, the one where he grabs her shoulders and pulls her to him, the one where he puts his arms around Lily and picks her up and brings her back to the couch to sit down with him, kiss. The one where she slowly puts her arms around him and kisses him back with all the energy left inside of her. When they finally release each other, all is right with the world.

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“Thank you,” is all her voice whispers out. She wants to say so much more but nothing else is coming out. He stands up again and takes her with him over to a cabinet with some really warm looking blankets. He puts a few over their collective arms and then grabs a couple of pillows with his free hand. Lily is about to question what he is doing when he pulls her towards the sliding door, opens it and motions for her to sit down on his outdoor, very cushioned, recliner. More of a loveseat recliner. He sits down with her, positions the pillows behind their heads, snuggles with her and drapes the blankets over them. Under this cocoon, they become quite warm, even in the chill of the night. He kisses her forehead again and says, “See you in the morning, we’ll talk then.” There is no argument from Lily; there is no better place to be. Both of them are sleeping in seconds.

~ ~ ~

Lily finds herself being woken up by the sun’s rays kissing her cheek and the wind calling her name. She has to be dreaming, so she opens her eyes slowly and finds herself lying on a recliner staring out at the water glistening in the morning’s dew. Not until all her senses wake up and she smells cinnamon, does

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she realize where she is. Lily jerks around to find no one sleeping next to her and then completely turns around to find him staring back at her. Wow, can a person’s eyes shine any brighter? He is carrying out a tray of fresh cinnamon toast and hot chocolate with some strawberries and cream to boot.

Lily relaxes back into her spot and smiles as she realizes that tranquility doesn’t have to only last a moment, and that, if a person tries hard enough, they can bring back that feeling anywhere. ‘Yes, they will be talking a lot this morning, might as well start the day with chocolate.’ She smiles at him and Bernard returns it with one of his own, from ear to ear.

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