

# *The Deep Blue Sea*

He looks out over the frigid, November waves of Lake Michigan as he thinks to himself, “If God is everything, and I am a part of everything, am I a part of God? And if God is free to be anything, and I am a part of God, why am I anything but free?”

He grew up by these shores, and for the three decades he has lived on this earth, these shores have had a special place in his heart. Often, on dreary, gray days like this, he can be found sitting on a fallen tree trunk that lies on the small stretch of isolated beach. Hours will usually pass before he chooses to leave for the warmth of his house just a few miles away.

Today is no different in that respect. He has already been here for an hour or so, silently staring out at the gently moving water in front of him. But, unlike most days like this, today he is not alone. It seems a curious explorer has happened upon this stretch of sand. Only, the explorer has not come to stare and she has not come to contemplate either.

His concentration is broken by the sound of the click of a camera as he takes his devoted eyes off of the rolling waters of the lake and looks toward the source of the sound.

“You looked so peaceful,” she says with a smile. “I hope you don’t mind me snapping a picture.”

One of the nice things about taking pictures outside is that you rarely have to worry about whether or not there is enough light. As long as the sun is out, it will always be light enough—even on an overcast and foggy day like today.

“Sometimes the calmest waters have the strongest undercurrents just beneath the surface,” he gently responds, sensing a look of wisdom in her prying eyes. “Peace hasn’t visited me for quite a while now.”

Like most Novembers in the Great Lakes region, a light snow has already fallen on the land. Far from being frozen, however, the lake is easily the warmest object in the area, and because of this, it has modified the otherwise chilly air.

“Then what was that placid look on your face, if not one of peace?” she asks as she lowers her camera to her side and indulges in the stranger’s honesty.

“Perhaps ... surrender,” he tells her with a sad look.

There is no snow on the 30-foot width of damp, cold beach. Only the trees of the forest that lies just beyond the reach of high tide provide a surface cool enough to sustain its white coating. Yet, with the relatively warmer air creeping in from the lake, the snow that does rest on the many bare branches of the trees is on the verge of melting nonetheless. Tiny icicles dangle in the still, misty air as the occasional drop of water falls from their frozen tips to the earth below.

“Are peace and surrender all that different?” she asks, putting the lens cap back on her camera to prevent any water from condensing on the glass.

“Peace brings hopefulness,” he tells the girl, glancing over at her. “While surrender

brings hopelessness... So I'd say there's difference."

The girl knows all too well what he is saying. A subtle look of compassion comes over her face as she surveys the rolling waters of the lake for a few seconds. Amazingly, despite any detectable wind to howl past her head or rattle the branches of the trees, the motion of the gentle waves generates no sound. An eerie, but soothing silence hangs in the air as she moves close enough to the man to notice he is writing something in a small notebook. "Is that what you're writing about—hopelessness?" she asks.

Comforted by the sincerity in the girl's voice, the man can tell she is very familiar with what is troubling him. "Perhaps it's hopefulness about hopelessness," he responds.

"Emotions are funny like that," she says in a soft, nurturing voice. "We all experience them in the same way, yet arrive at them through different paths... So why is it you've come to feel so hopeless? If you don't mind me asking."

The man pauses for a moment, not sure what to tell the girl. After all, he is not entirely sure himself as to the source of his gloomy feelings. But in the end, not having anything else to say either, he decides to just verbalize the long string of thoughts that have been passing through his mind. "I never wanted life to be like this—so complicated, that is," he begins. "When I was little, I used to spend my summers on a stretch of beach just like this up the shore a ways... I would swim until my muscles felt like they were going to give out and then I'd lie on the sand and relax for a while... There I would rest as the sound of the waves sang to me while the summer sun and light breeze gently dried me... Then, around three o'clock or so, I would walk up to the house with my body still fatigued from the swim... The sand that was stuck to me from lying on the beach gradually flaked off as I walked up the steps to my home. And by the time I reached the top of the bank that overlooked the lake, I had just enough energy to go inside and I watch my favorite afternoon cartoons as I rested on the couch... There I would gradually fall asleep without a care in the world as the wind softly whistled through the screens of the front windows," he says reminiscently as he turns to the girl and pauses for a moment. "Everything was so simple back then," he insists. "Where have those worry-free days gone?"

Lost in the mood of the story, the girl's thoughts slowly return to the present. Having an appreciation for the serenity of nature as well, she deeply relates to the scene the man has painted in her mind. "Sounds like you had a very fond childhood," she sincerely comments. "Does that place still exist?"

"Yes, but my family no longer lives there," the man answers, looking over at her. "So in reality, I guess it doesn't exist."

She thinks quietly to herself for a moment. There is more to the story than the man has told, she feels. Places come and go, yet most people aren't as attached to them as he seems to be. "Is it the place, or the freedom you miss?" she asks, demonstrating an intimate understanding of the true meaning behind the story.

Surprised by the girl's quick and clear apprehension, he grins ever so slightly as he gently nods his head. "A little bit of both I suppose," he tells her. "I most certainly miss the freedom, but I also miss the place because of how it represents the freedom."

"And that's why you're here?" she wisely asks. "Because of its similarity?"

He smiles at her forwardness. She is, of course, correct in her presumption, and she knows it. That is why there is no reason to verify it as he instead asks, “So what brings you here on this dreary day?”

“I guess I have trouble letting go of beautiful places, as well,” she says as she approaches the fallen tree trunk he is sitting on and leans up against it.

Looking at her as she moves closer, he notices for the first time that she has a slight limp.

“I grew up in the mountains out west,” she continues, getting comfortable while periodically gazing at the serene setting around her. “And I got so used to being with nature, that when my parents moved me here to the city, I felt completely lost... So, instead of doing what most city folks do, I imagine, I spend my days taking pictures of places that remind me of the connection I once had with the earth.”

“Beautiful—yes, but it’s also cold and damp out here,” he says. “Surely there are other places that are a little more hospitable to take pictures of.”

“There are no other places where the elements come together quite so nicely,” she explains, turning her gaze to the frigid lake. “The sun peeks through the clouds and taints them with its light as they blend with the fog that blankets the lake on its way to meet the slushy sand... In fact, I consider myself lucky to have stumbled across such a place, because it’s rare that their connection is so clearly revealed.”

The man takes a moment to look out upon the lake with new eyes. She is right after all. As a faint ring of light circles the dull, white sun through the overcast, it’s hard to tell just where fire meets air and air meets water.

“I’ve spent hours both boiling and freezing to capture scenes like this,” she adds after a pause. “And I have the scars to prove it... Some years back, I walked for miles through the snow just for one picture of the sunrise... It turned out great, but not before I got frostbite on my toes.”

He nods ever so slightly as he begins to understand. “Is that where your limp comes from?” he politely asks.

The girl glances down at her feet and smiles at his forwardness before returning her gaze to him. “You should see the picture!” she chuckles.

Surprised someone would go to such great lengths to capture an image, the man expresses the first thought that enters his mind. “It must be very beautiful,” he states honestly. “I’d be curious to see it.”

The girl appreciates his sincerity. Most people, she believes, pretend to be interested in her photographs so they don’t appear to be rude. But in this particular case, the man’s interest seems genuine. “Perhaps we’ll meet here again someday,” she speculates. “And I’ll be sure to have it with me... Then maybe you’ll show me what you’ve been writing.”

The man nods his head slightly as he makes casual eye contact with her. “I’m not having much luck with my pen today,” he replies. “But perhaps I’ll have something for you the next time you come around.”

“It’s a deal,” she gladly confirms, stepping backwards as she speaks.

The man will sit on the fallen tree trunk for yet another hour, but as the light of day starts to dim with the coming of dusk, the girl gradually disappears into the fog as their chance meeting

ends just as quickly as it began.

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The fog remains late into the night as the man leans toward his ill brother in bed. “I met an interesting person today,” he explains. “A photographer who’s dedicated her life to capturing beautiful images on film.”

Usually, after spending the day by the lake, the man can be found sitting in the modest, second-story bedroom of his only sibling. For years, his older brother has been suffering from the affects of a devastating disease, and for years, the man has kept his last surviving family member company into the early hours of the morning.

“I can’t blame anyone for doing that,” his brother softly replies. “Life can bring with it such pain and suffering, and focusing on the few things that are beautiful seems like the only thing that’s worthwhile most of the time.”

Tonight is a good night for his brother—he is not in as much pain as he usually is. Most times, the dialog is very limited and the man’s activities center on helping his brother as much as possible near the end of his life.

Thankful for the relative relief that has visited his brother, the man uses this opportunity to indulge himself in conversation. “What beauty have you managed to find in this world?” he asks his brother. “If you can still remember a better time.”

“Remembering the beauty isn’t the problem,” his brother responses. “It’s forgetting it that is.”

This puzzles the man as he leans back in the chair that rests beside the side of the bed. “What do you mean?” he asks after a brief moment of silence.

His brother stares up at the slanted ceiling of his room as the shadows cast from the gently swaying flame of a single candle dance across its surface. “It’s not the pain of my disease that has afflicted me the most over the years—it’s the beauty of my memories that has,” he explains. “More often than not, it’s been that tree outside my window that’s tortured me the most... It’s not so bad in the winter, but during the warm months—when my window’s open—all I hear at night is the sound of the leaves rustling in the wind.”

“I thought you liked that sound,” the man questions in confusion.

“I do,” his brother affirms. “Especially at night when it feels as though the leaves are whispering little secrets to me that no one else can hear.”

“Then what’s the problem?” the man presses, still not able to understand what his brother is getting at.

“It’s a very beautiful sound indeed,” his brother tells him. “But it’s a very lonely sound as well, for though it can be the most beautiful backdrop to a precious moment one day, it can also be the most empty sound that can fall upon one’s ears the next when they suddenly find themselves alone with nothing but their sweet song to serve as a permanent reminder of every night I spent falling in love beneath its limbs.”

Far from the warm months of summer and early autumn, the only sound that can be heard in between the conversation of the two brothers is the sound of the now leafless tree softly scraping up against his closed window. In fact, the ghostly sound of the bare branches outside almost seems to ring throughout the dimly lit room as if to urge his brother to let go of the past in the same way nature has let go of summer.

“After all, how could they go on singing that same beautiful song when so much has changed?” his brother sadly adds. “How could they go on dancing after she went away? Did they not realize the painful reminders that they brought as they whispered into the night? Did they not realize those precious moments have passed and there’s no cause for such beautiful songs anymore? It just seems so disrespectful that such painful reminders of what used to be, or what could have been can haunt such sacred memories.”

“It’s not your fault she left,” the man tells his brother after a brief pause.

“It doesn’t matter whose fault it is ... she’s still gone,” his brother bitterly replies.

The man looks over at the bedroom window to his left. He easily recalls the nights in which it was open and the trees still had their leaves, but even he can see how the scene that lies just beyond glass cannot be expected to remain the same as time slowly passes. “Well ... they’re gone now,” the man states, looking back toward his brother. “But if the sound of the leaves bothered you so much, why didn’t you just ask me to close the window?”

“Because painful memories are better than no memories at all,” his brother honestly explains, pausing for a moment. “These days I need something to hang on to, I guess, and the leaves reminded me of the only thing in my life that’s worth hanging on to.”

Seeing how much the memory of his brother’s one true love torments him, the man boldly states the obvious. “Why don’t you just let go of her like the tree has let go of its leaves?” he gently asks. “There are more important things to consider now.”

“You’re one to talk,” his brother chuckles.

But the man is perplexed as his brother grins on. “What makes you say that?” he asks in confusion.

“Where were you when you met the photographer today?” his brother questions. “You were at the lake ... right?”

Not sure where his brother is going with this, the man answers truthfully, “Yeah.”

“The deep blue sea,” his brother embellishes. “Remember when you used to call it that—when you were little?”

“I remember,” the man nostalgically replies.

“Why do you keep going back?” his brother curiously presses. “Why don’t you let go?”

Finally, the man understands what his brother is getting at. Years have been spent sitting by the lakeside and he never realized what he was truly doing. The deep blue sea is to him what the sound of the leaves is to his brother.

“I guess the lake reminds me of how peaceful life can be,” the man insists. “Growing up with mom and dad by the shore was so simple compared to now. All that mattered back then was my deep blue sea and the endless muses that seemed to blow in with the tide.”

“But then things changed,” his brother adds. “You grew up and decided you wanted more... Suddenly, the deep blue sea wasn’t enough ... right?”

“In so many words ... yes,” the man admits.

Having brought the conversation this far, his brother pauses for several seconds to face the inevitable truth. “When I die, my true self will live on, I imagine, but my body will decay,” he states. “So what does that tell you?”

The man remains quiet, looking at his brother with soft eyes as he catches a whiff of the lone candle’s apple-cinnamon scent in the deafening silence of the room.

“It tells me that the soul desperately clings to things it ultimately cannot have,” his brother points out. “Things that bring with them both beauty and pain. And when the soul finally figures out what’s really going on, it does what it should have done from the very beginning—it lets go. And that’s when we die.”

Still not speaking, the man takes a few seconds to think about what his dying brother has said. After all, his brother is right he quickly concludes. Nothing is permanent in the universe and humans do have a tendency to avoid change more than any other creature on Earth. But, could something as simple as attachment be responsible for his feelings of hopelessness he thinks to himself?

Seconds pass, and the man isn’t able to consider this long before his helpless brother speaks out. “Could you cover my feet with the blanket? My toes are freezing.”

The man quietly complies as his brother lightly moans.

“I just want this to be over,” his brother insists as he shifts his weight from one side of his body to the other. “I don’t want to be tired anymore and I’m sick of being so cold all the time... I just want to be warm and at peace.”

The sudden shift in his brother’s demeanor indicates that the relentless pain is starting to return.

“I should have died a long time ago if it weren’t for her,” his brother says with desperation, growing more tired by the minute. “The memory of her has become a vicious ghost that stalks me on a daily basis... Every day finds me thinking more and more about her.”

The man powerlessly looks on. He has never seen his brother like this before. The memory of his one true love is emotionally devastating him. It keeps him up at night, and it keeps him from truly letting go of this life and moving on to the next.

But, as tired as his brother may be as the clock approaches three o’clock in the morning, he does not sleep as he instead chooses to continue talking. “If only I knew what has become of her,” he follows up, looking over at the flicking candlelight. “Then maybe I could bring myself to blow that flame out... Then ... maybe ... I could finally have some peace.”

A delicate calm blankets the night as his brother quietly closes his eyes. And in the brief moment of silence that follows, the man can truly start to see just how much his brother is suffering. Bedridden for many months now, it seems his brother’s mind and spirit has been confined to a moment in time that can never again be repeated.

“Only bad things happen at this time of the morning, I’ve found,” his brother concludes as he opens his eyes and looks mournfully at the fog outside. “Thinking back to when I was a

child, the only time I was ever up this late was when something was terribly wrong... And quite appropriately, the fog has remained to hide the world outside my window from me as if it were trying to ease my pain... Or maybe it's just trying to hide *me* from the waxing and waning of the moon... I don't know, little brother—nothing lasts forever in this world, yet we can't seem to find a way to enjoy that which we love without trying to hold on to it.”

Looking at his brother with compassionate eyes, the man softly states the valuable lesson he has learned from tonight's visit. “So much love is denied and so much beauty is destroyed, all so that we may possess a piece of that which we love and find most beautiful.”



The girl casually moves along the same stretch of moist beach that she did yesterday. Only, unlike yesterday, this morning is a sunny one—the sky is blue as can be and the snow-covered trees seem to glow under its rays.

It is unusually warm for this late in November as well. Certainly above freezing as some melting snow drips from the surrounding trees, the girl cannot remember a day this month that has been quite so pleasant. In fact, if it were not for her quest to reunite with the man from yesterday, she could very easily get lost in the many photographs that are to be had in the area.

But, as she approaches the same fallen tree trunk as yesterday, the man is nowhere to be found. She does realize, of course, that the man never promised if and when he would return to the lakeside, but something told her he would be here nonetheless.

Slightly disappointed, the girl briefly considers abandoning the beach for the day. Only, just as she turns to head home, something manages to catch her attention from the corner of her eye. She quickly turns back toward the fallen tree trunk and notices a piece of paper moving in the gentle breeze.

The unusually clear day lets her see better than ever as she moves curiously closer to the tree trunk. Yet, it isn't until she is within 10 feet of the paper that she can tell it is from a small notebook similar to the one the man was using the other day.

With her camera in one hand as it dangles from its neck strap, she quickly grabs the sheet of paper that is impaled on a small branch with the other. "I finally found my peace and freedom," it reads. "It's attachment that robs us of our happiness... The only things we can possess are the things that are outside ourselves. Take the beauty of the world in and let it become a part of you so that you can become a part it. That way, you'll never need to hold on to it again."

Contemplating the message behind the words as a gentle wind blows past her head, the girl looks up, only to notice some footprints in the sand leading to the lake. There, meeting the water's edge, the impressions in the sand abruptly disappear.

Confused by the mysterious prints, she reads on in the soothing calm of the day. "These are the words I was trying so hard to find yesterday," it states.

### The Deep Blue Sea-

As I sink into the deep blue sea  
 Gentle waves flow over me  
 As I sink into the deep blue sea  
 Peaceful dreams wash over me  
 And I know, now I know  
 The water surrounds me and I'll be alone no more

And I won't cry  
I won't cry  
No, I won't cry  
I won't cry  
I'll always be  
Forever and ever a part of the deep blue sea...

The girl is shocked by what she has gradually come to realize. "Did he really give himself to the sea?" she thinks to herself.

Looking down at her frostbit foot, she immediately understands. "And so you have found your peace and freedom," she gently whispers. "And so you have."

Having learned a valuable lesson, she reaches into her coat pocket and pulls out the picture she had promised to show the man. Up until this moment, she would have never even considered giving up such a precious item, but now, she understands why she must.

The girl sadly looks out over the gentle waves of the lake for a moment or two, and with a newly found confidence, she pierces her beloved picture on the same branch that held the man's final message.

The remainder of her day is spent walking among the serene beauty of the lakeshore. No photographs are taken this time, however. It seems in a genuine effort to no longer collect images of all the wonderful sights she has seen in this world, the girl has left her camera behind with the picture as well.