

She was beautiful. That was simply what it came down to. You could be poetic, long-winded, passionate or devoted- but she was beautiful. Perhaps it was her figure, strong and graceful. From slender ankles and dainty fingers to the curves of her thighs and middle. It made her magnetic. Or perhaps it was her eyes. Powerful and unwavering, but with a kindness and deeper understanding. With an electric gaze, she understood you. Yes- maybe this was it. After all, everyone wants to feel understood. But maybe it was her lips. Held set and unspeaking, but with a faint quirk to the corners. It was as if she knew something you didn't- a piece of hope she kept stored away. One could only long to be let in on what she held so close- that secret hope that gave light to her eyes and kindness to her lips. And perhaps, that's what it was. The desire to know, the desire to be a part of that quiet world that was hers.

In the summer, the sunshine would cast rays that cascaded over her features and the folds of her dress. She was like a blazing torch, with the kindest eyes you'd ever seen. On days like these, he'd often wondered if she was also firey to the touch. Or maybe she evaded the licking flames of sunlight, and felt more like the winter. In the winter, the world seemed to still with her. Like maybe it finally managed to find the peace that she encompassed. The sky would become overcast with snow clouds, and illuminated her in soft blues and shadow. Sometimes it became quite bitter, and she looked so, so cold. If she was though, she never seemed to mind. It was as if the world moved around her, absorbing the life she seemed to offer it. Perhaps, it was these things.

After days, weeks, months- he'd had time to memorise these things. If you knew where to look, she was there. She was always there. She stood amongst the people with her summer dress and unwavering gaze. He would often sit and watch her from afar, admiring all she was and all she might be. Maybe she was a mother. Maybe she was somebody's daughter. Maybe

she was another lonely traveller watching life go by- perhaps. But he had never seen someone make lonely look so beautiful.

He had never talked to her. He wanted to though. He wanted her to hear of how beautiful she was. How the sun set fire to her features and the winter cooled her touch. How time seemed to stop for only her. But most of all, he just wanted to listen to her. He wondered what she might sound like, how her mouth might form her sentences. Maybe she was clear as a bell, with profound ideas and things to share. Or maybe she was really soft, with secret thoughts and careful words. Yes, maybe that was it. Though most of the time, he simply wanted her to look at him. A gentle glance, a brief connection. To have those eyes of hope directed at him, if only for a moment. She never did, though.

Sunday, the museum would be closing. Years of art relocated, and a padlock on the front door. He enjoyed the museum, with its open spaces and high ceilings. It's grand windows that flooded light and hard floors that captured echoes. Indeed, he would miss it. But most of all, he would miss her. Without this mutual place of meeting, how would he see her again? Over the past weeks, he had settled that he would not. And while passers mourned the loss of the building they loved so much, he mourned the loss of something that was never his.

As he got up off the bench to leave for the last time, he could only wonder where she would go now. He wondered if she would miss this place as much as him. As the silence of the near-empty museum surrounded them, he sent one last lingering gaze to where she stood. Hoping, wishing by some miracle her eyes would flicker to his. Except, they did not. He strolled out then, soft footsteps leaving traces of some of the last echoes.

Only, she did see him.

She had seen him the day before, and the day before that. For months she had watched him in quiet contemplation, admiring all that he was and had. She had seen how he looked at her- like she hung the stars. But what were stars compared to such life? Oh, the *life* he carried. The power in his stance, the emotion in his eyes. How he conversed with those around him in gentle kindness. How the sun heated his skin and the winter painted his cheeks pink. How he held a world of hopes and longings. What were faint stars, to life such as this? And when he looked at her, in that way that was only his, sometimes she felt like he gave some of it to her. And sometimes she wanted to feel the sunshine, wanted to feel the cold. Sometimes she wanted to truly live.

As she watched him walk away, she felt what she supposed was remorse at losing the only person who ever truly took notice of her. Who made her feel more than a dusty relic. She didn't say anything to him though. She couldn't, really. That was the price of forever, after all. A bittersweet silence danced with a stone-filled gaze. For she had fallen in love with life. But he had fallen in love with eternity.