

“Final”

Summer storm

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15 years old

The sun shone down on the sand, illuminating it like a giant candle, which the waves came to blow out. All day we had been suffocated by the people laughing, running dogs, and crying children that seemed to be closing in around us. My ice cream trickled down my sticky hands, smushing into my hair as I wiped it off my face. My mother grabbed a wet paper towel, trying to get it off. My eyes fixed on the clouds in the distance. I had been watching them all day, monitoring their size, color, and proximity to myself.

“It’s not going away,” she said, “go in the water and wash off.”

I put on my life jacket, grabbed a boogie-board, and waited knee deep into the waves. Dunking under the water, I scrubbed the sticky residue from my face, then emerged. The water was crisp, cooling the aching burns from the blistering redness consuming my body. I remained there, moving in and out with the water as its waves crashed to shore, the two of us breathed as one. The hushing of the tide flooded my mind, hypnotizing me with its rhythm. I lost track of time. My mom signaled, holding up a sandwich, coercing me to come in. Trotting back to where she was, I nestled into a towel and looked back at the horizon. The clouds shifted, their army moving ever closer to where I was. Closing in, they were killing the bright blue sky, its body melting into hazy streaks of rain. The sun was strangled by gray condensation, its rays fighting to get out from behind the clouds. It was snuffed out, eclipsing the beach in darkness.

A white hot flash rolled down my body, everything slowed until all I could hear was the sound of my breath echoing within my chest. I dropped my sandwich, splattering peanut butter along the sand.

“Mom... I-I’m going to go back to the house.”

“Do you want me to come too?”

“No, I’m okay.”

We were staying with friends at their house a couple blocks from the beach. I ran to the street, throwing myself ahead with every step. A crash sounded in the distance as the street lengthened in front of me. My tunnel vision swirled as the asphalt pavement distorted. The habitual suburbia turned to a maze, each building fusing into one. The storm chased after me, its shadows nearly grabbing my legs. I ran faster. I saw my father's car down the street, a beacon of familiarity which I moved to.

I ran through the door at the back of the house which opened out into the laundry room. Squeezing between the washing machine and the wall behind it, I covered my head beneath a towel. The room was dark and musty, sounds from the washer vibrating throughout it. The heat radiating off the metal burned my leg, I draped the towel over my skin as a barrier. My heart slammed against my chest, trying to break itself from its cage. I felt invisible, powerless to the forces that I couldn't control, the effects that I had no choice but to let happen until the storm broke. But the storms always came back.

Weather always scared me. Ever since I was little, it had become a practice of shutting all the windows, closing the blinds, and sitting in the middle of the house with my fingers plugged in my ears. I didn't even really know why, maybe it was the noise, maybe it was the unruly nature of it, but regardless I avoided it at all costs.

As I grew so did the intensity of the weather. The news talked about “storms of the century” and every year there seemed to be a new record temperature. The routine patterns of nature turned erratic. Everyday I compulsively checked my forecast, surveilled the radar, refusing to go outside if there was a chance of bad weather. The progressively warming climate causes increasingly spontaneous weather patterns. I was afraid as though it were not caused by the repercussions of my actions and those before me, of the mindless decisions of generations. Whenever I shut my curtains, or drown out the sound of thunder with music, I can’t help but feel guilty, guilty because I recognize the part that I play and the joy that I have reaped from the unconscious choices I make everyday. I wanted to light a spark, start a wildfire of change, but I knew that this would be blown out or extinguished by another passing storm.