

## Protect Me from what I Want

“Yes, yes, yes!” you squealed with delight, placing loose fingertips against the tightness of your lips.

I cocked a gentle smile as I stared at the citrus in your eyes, pulling off the freckles from your skin, rubbing them gently together in my hands, so desperately clinging to the perfect maps that had once tainted your face. I watched your eyelashes as they softly went *thwap* against your cheekbones, your dramatic eyes blooming wildly with passion as you gazed at my face, holding my hands tightly, with the ring pressed in between our palms.

The dull blue paint on the apartment’s bedroom walls matched the grey sky outside, intrinsically withholding the cold temperatures, but I felt warm against your skin, and I felt faultless as you accepted everything that I was offering you.

“The thing that I’m most excited about,” you whispered, tracing your finger against the creases in my palms, “is to share. To share everything with you.” Your voice was soft and quiet. You ran your hands through the spine of my hair, touching every piece as you dove through while your eyes were bent forward. I couldn’t imagine life without you. I didn’t want to.

All of the days after that tumbled towards me quickly, driving relentlessly forward, allowing no room for mistakes. I relived that morning every moment that I could because it was the only instance that didn’t make me feel awful for what I was going to do to you.

Nights were always empty when I sat out on the sidewalk, cars rushing quickly through the streets, all of the electric colors mimicking the dramatic shadows cast by streetlights overhead of me, helping me find my way. I'd sit quietly, thinking of the stories that I wanted to make sense of but could never describe through words like I hoped. Instead, I watched objectively as moths fluttered slowly into traffic, then exploded into a thousand tiny heartbeats, leaving me with nothing but lifeless silence and graceful engines. Most of the time, I understood how they felt. Other times, I couldn't feel at all.

"Are you excited?" You let the words quickly fall off your lips. You were much shorter than me, so even though you sat right by me, your head was still tilted upward, waiting for my response.

I smiled and jokingly ruffled your hair as you swatted at me, shouting out, "Hey! Stop that!" You pretended to pout but then took it back, deciding to pucker kisses at me instead.

The car ride was extensive and monotonous, but you tried your best to make up for it with light conversation and jokes.

"Honey," you said when we pulled into the parking lot.

"Yes?" I asked.

"I love you. So much." You replied, genuinely expressing yourself.

"Thanks, I love you too," I said, honestly being truthful, but still feeling like a complete liar.

And with that, you jumped out of the car, slamming shut the door, and gathering as much from the dusty backseat and aged trunk as you could hold. Shortly behind you I followed, the

rest of our baggage in tow, as we arrived in front of the cabin that we'd be staying in that weekend.

As usual, night seemed to rush to my side faithfully, leaving me feeling more distant from you than ever. I hated this lie that I thought I was living. I knew that there was nothing wrong, but still, I always felt like it wasn't making sense.

We sat around the campfire, wood burning fiercely with embers glancing at me fervently, ashes falling gently on my shoulders. You sat there bundled, your hoodie fitting loosely on you, two sizes too big, your shorts and bare legs peeking out from beneath the pile of fabric. I observed you as you laughed long and hard at jokes from the rest of our friends gathered with us, turning to me every so often to tap my leg as if you were trying to include me.

A few hours had passed when I whispered in your ear, "I'm going to go for a walk." You nodded back at me, giving me a kiss of acknowledgment, and then returned to the conversation. I rested my hand against your shoulder, resolving that this would be the last time I touched you. It was so damn impersonal, but I knew that I couldn't do this anymore.

You could never be mine.

I paced quickly down to the beach, only to stop abruptly at the shoreline letting the waves engulf my sinking shoes.

*"You are like the ocean, the water," I thought, continuing, "and I'm like the sand. I am only thousands of particles and castaways. I could never be unified. Never be unified like you."*

I watched the depth in front of me, so mysterious and calm while yet still being terrifying and exciting.

For the last time, I allowed myself to return to that day when I asked you to share everything with me. You so willingly obliged with all of your heart, leaving me confused and more alone than ever. Why did I feel this way? I'd only ever loved you for the last two years we'd been together, and asking you to marry me only seemed right. But I did it, and after, I felt like unraveled ribbon, soft but unmanageable. I was no longer whole.

I'd realized that you were strong, and you always were, and that I could never be as strong as you. So I left. I found a bus that night and just left, realizing that it probably tore you apart, leaving you terrified and hurt; but I had complete faith that you would love again, because you had always been free; you were always tough and beautiful, and I, well I was only ever a moth, fleeting into traffic, letting a thousand tiny heartbeats pulse into the summer air, leaving nothing behind but the simple, soft, sound waves that followed.