

## **This Summer**

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Cover by Julia Averbeck

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I sat among the dunes and looked over the ocean. The beach grass whispered beside me in the wind and the hollow, where I was in, still emitted the heat of the sun which had shown itself this morning. A sudden wind gust blew the hair into my face and I lifted my hand to push it back.

A hint of summer could be felt in the wind, although you didn't get the impression of a June day from the moving clouds overhead. The sound of rolling waves met my ear and the taste of salt was already burned into my tongue. I enjoyed the silence which was only disturbed by sea gulls or brave strollers at the beach. It was good to flee from my friends for a while, who were probably playing some idiotic game right now to kill time.

I wished that I had some company but I had to admit that I wouldn't have found peace then. The noise of the ocean and the whispering of the wind was balm for my oppressed nerves which had been stressed intensely over the last week. Slowly I leaned back onto the sand and watched the movement of the clouds above me. I didn't regret to go on vacation with my friends because I hadn't seen some of them for a long time but the relatively cool weather and the heavy rains often forced us to stay inside which meant a lot less private time for me.

To be in one place with a couple of people for a long time wasn't easy for me because I was more of a loner and needed space and time for myself. Like now, when I just lay in the dunes let my thoughts follow the clouds and indulged myself in daydreams.

After a while I sat up again to watch the ocean and see how the waves danced over the beach. I was hidden in my hollow because I had a high dune behind me and the grass in front of me concealed me from the beach. During my explorations when I escaped from the house at short notice I had found this place. It wasn't far apart but far enough to get my peace. I shivered and rubbed my hands over my bare arms when a cool breeze ran over them. The sun came through the clouds from time to time and my bare toes were buried in the sand which had been warmed up by it.

My friends decided to have vacations at the seaside and wanted to swim in the ocean and lie in the sun the whole day but when they saw a cloud in the sky or when the wind was freshening up they walked inside or went into the city to go shopping. I didn't care because the ocean was beautiful in every weather condition and all day long, well, maybe not in a storm which swirls you around constantly.

Gazing at the strollers, I had to laugh about the brave swimmers who didn't seem to care about the temperature of the water. I jerked up frightened when I heard a bark close to me and a dog appeared suddenly from the grass. He looked at me panting and I held my hand in front of him so he could sniff at it. Smiling I stroked his head and he dropped onto the sand beside me, watching a swallow which flew over the beach at breakneck speed.

"Where do you belong to?" I asked the dog while I caressed his chin but I only got a waggle of his tail as an answer. "Come on then", I said, stood up and brushed the sand from my skirt. "We are going to search your master." The dog didn't object to this and ran down to the ocean in front of me to rush into the waves. Laughing I stood at the beach and shielded my face with my hands when he came back and shook the water out of his coat. I patted his head and together we walked along the beach with the waves washing around my feet. With every step I had the feeling to be drawn into the ocean like I was following a silent call.

My gaze wandered over the beach in front of me and I spotted a young man who walked into my direction. Barking happily the dog ran to him, so I stopped and looked over to them. The master was found and that was everything I had to do in this case. I just wanted to turn around and walk away when someone called after me.

Turning around again I saw how the man approached me together with his dog. My gaze drifted down to his feet and I noted that he was barefoot as well. Then he stood in front of me and my eyes were glued to him because I had never seen someone like him. His looks stole my breath and I couldn't do anything else but stare at him. It wasn't only his appearance which attracted me even though he was looking very good, no, he had something about him I couldn't explain but it let my heart beat faster.

When I looked into his eyes, I saw the same feelings there, which I felt and surprised I, opened my mouth to say something but closed it again because I didn't know what to say. Under his gaze I really felt beautiful for the first time in my life. I knew of course that I wasn't bad looking but I never felt beautiful myself which changed abruptly around this man.

The barking of the dog, who circled us, startled us from our trance and he extended his hand towards me. "I'm Tom", he said and his orotund voice sent shivers down my spine. I took his hand and had the feeling of an electric shock hitting me but I didn't lower my eyes to see if it was really like this. "My name is Sarah", I heard my voice say and shook his hand smilingly.

He invited me to take a walk with him and contrary to my habit I agreed. We talked about a lot of things when we walked along the ocean but I couldn't remember most of it a short while later. I was just enchanted by Tom's presence and he seemed to feel the same. When it happened, I can't say but after a while he took my hand and I didn't withdraw it because it felt just right, like my hand was made for his.

I first noticed how late it already was when I got goose bumps all over my arms and when my feet turned cold. I said goodbye to Tom without knowing if I would see him again. My friends hadn't missed me until now, as I found out when I came back to our holiday home but I discovered happily that dinner was already ready. I hadn't noticed how hungry I was from the walk at the beach.

During dinner I was far away with my thoughts because I still had to think about Tom but afterwards my attention was directed to the game Twister. We laughed a lot and had fun, particularly when we crashed into each other because of our positions in the game. Exhausted and with a couple of bruises I went to bed. Afterwards I couldn't exactly remember the dreams I had this night but I think a dog and Tom appeared in them.

The next day I went into the city with my friends because we had to buy some groceries and we wanted to have a look around there. Tom was in the back of my head since I met him yesterday and controlled my thoughts. The window shopping distracted me but I had the feeling to see him everywhere, even though only from the corner of my eye and hear the happy barking of his dog. I told myself I was crazy because that couldn't be true and I pushed these thoughts away from me and enjoyed the sunny day which ended in a small cafe.

It slowly grew dark but I went down to the beach again and couldn't believe my eyes. There was Tom like he hadn't done anything else than waiting for me the whole day. I smiled at him but couldn't say a word and he didn't say anything either, just took my hand and guided me down to the water. Laughing we ran through the surge and his dog was running around us. After a while, we sat down in the sand exhausted and the wind from the ocean cooled my heated face. Tom put his arm around my shoulder and sighing I leaned into him and enjoyed his closeness. The dog warmed me from the other side and we watched the rising of the moon which seemed to be illuminated by the last rays of the sun.

We didn't talk a lot but the things Tom told me about himself strengthened the impression I already had of him. "I haven't felt something like this before", I admitted to him. I couldn't explain these feelings for him which had appeared so suddenly. "Me neither", he told me and looked into my eyes. He leaned over and kissed me tenderly on the lips. First I was surprised but then I responded to the kiss because I just knew it was right.

Tom brought me back to our garden gate and his looks and his goodbye kiss promised me that we would see each other again tomorrow. Like walking on air, I got back into the house because I had noticed just now how hungry I was. I didn't tell the others about Tom, why, I didn't know but I couldn't convince myself to tell them. For tomorrow the weather forecast was better and my friends decided to go swimming or at least to sunbath at the beach when the water got too cold for them, I thought smirking.

Actually, the weather was lovely and I let the sun shine onto my stomach but most of the time it was covered by my shirt. I wasn't a fanatic sun worshipper like the others because I already had enough experiences with sunburns and knew I would never really tan, even in full sun. I just got more freckles as soon as I got some sun onto my skin. With a good book in my hand I lay on my stomach on a towel and watched my friends over the edge of the book. Some of them lay on the beach next to me but the rest had the heart to go into the water and now they splashed about. They were probably just waist-high in the ocean but they had fun.

When I heard a familiar barking I looked up from under my sun hat and saw the dog that ran to me with a wagging tail. I stood up laughing and patted his head, whereupon he turned around and ran away some steps. My friends hadn't even looked up and so I picked up my stuff and followed the dog. Tom spotted me from a distance and came to meet me.

Before I could drop my things he hugged me and spun me through the air laughingly. Also laughing I had to lean against him for a while to catch my breath before he sat me down on the ground again. We looked for a hollow in the dunes, in which nobody could see us and lay down on our towels. I thought about introducing Tom to my friends but our shared moments were too precious to share them with others. My holiday would be over soon and I knew that we had to go separate ways afterwards.

Tom reached out for me and I put my head on his shoulder. He encircled me with his arms and held me tight as if he didn't want let me go. We watched the clouds above us, tried to guess their forms and enjoyed the closeness of each other.

"Are you real or just a dream?" Tom asked suddenly and I looked into his eyes smilingly. "I am real but what about you?" I asked back and pinched his arm playfully. After a short skirmish I lay beneath him but it didn't bother me. Normally I wasn't someone who liked to

be touched by other people but I couldn't get enough of Tom's touches and so I tilted my head for a kiss which he gave me willingly.

He turned to his side and I cuddled up to him again. The dog came back panting and let himself fall onto the sand for a short break after he shook the water out of his coat. I noticed that Tom's breaths got deeper and smiled when he fell asleep with me in his arms. My back rested against his chest and I could feel his body next to mine. I picked up my book and started to read again, feeling safe and secure at the same time.

My collywobbles told me that it was lunchtime which I could also see from the pages I had read. I turned around carefully and looked into Tom's open eyes. Before, I hadn't noticed that his eye colour changed like the ocean, from shining blue to a stormy blue green. He must have noticed my collywobbles because he stood up and helped me to my feet. We collected our things and walked hand in hand through the dunes with the dog running happily around us. I didn't know where Tom wanted to go to and so I just followed him.

He took me to his holiday home and placed me at the kitchen table while he started with the preparations for lunch. I was always impressed by a man who could cook, particularly because my cooking skills weren't that good, due to a lack of practice. While I looked around a bit, I spotted the typical holiday home décor which was mixed with Tom's personal belongings. The dog retreated back into his dog basket and followed everything we did with his eyes. He also hoped for some food for lunch.

The food was delicious. Tom waved aside my praises as I told him so and just smiled at me happily. We ate silently and looked at each other over the tabletop. When we came to our dessert – strawberries with cream – Tom couldn't stay in his place anymore and came towards me around the table. "You have some..."; he started but changed his mind and kissed the cream away from my chin. I smiled at him and put a strawberry into his mouth when he wanted to kiss me again. First he looked at me surprised but then started to chew and swallowed the fruit. Now we began to feed each other with strawberries and we discovered that the dog really loved cream. After that, we sat on the terrace with full stomachs and I must have fallen asleep because the sun was further to the west when I opened my eyes again. Tom had been beside me for the whole time, guarding my sleep. He was just happy to be close to me like I was when he was near me.

A glance at my watch told my how late it really was and that I had to go back for today. My friends hadn't asked where I went to and I was very thankful for that because I didn't want them to worry about me. Tom brought me back and I could see how difficult it was for him to let go of my hand because I felt the same. He kissed me gently on the lips and vanished into the starting twilight.

When I woke up the next morning, I became aware, how little time I had left with Tom. I decided to make the best of it and went to the beach before my friends even got out of their beds because I had the feeling Tom would be there. I took my breakfast with me and sat down on a bench in the dunes to enjoy the silence and the warmth of the sun on my back.

I felt him before I could see him. Silently he sat down beside me, put his arm around my shoulders and took a toast from me. His dog was also very silent today when we ate our toasts in silence. "It's not much time left", I heard Tom whisper between two bites and the lump in my throat only allowed me to nod. When we finished eating a strange tension was between us which discharged suddenly when Tom turned to me and took my hands in his.

"I will marry soon." The words rushed out of him and I could see that he was relieved, that he had finally said them. "But these days with you weren't just a last adventure before my marriage", he added quickly and still wanted to say more but I cut him off tenderly. "I know", I whispered and leaned forward to kiss him. Tom knew what I wanted to tell him with that because I had been surprised by these feelings, too. It was love on first sight between us and that couldn't be changed by anything now.

“My fiancé is great and I really like her but I don’t feel the same for her as I do for you“, he explained helplessly and I could see tears in his eyes. I also felt tears stinging in my eyes and touched his face gingerly. Tom placed my hand on his face and closed his eyes for a moment. “My Dad wanted me to marry her. He thought it would be a good relationship for me and also for our company and so I agreed. I stopped believing that I would find real love after all the disappointments I had.” I looked at him sadly. “You are going to marry her, right? You have to do it.” He nodded and then hid his face because his tears started to flow. I stroked his back and felt his sobs inside my body.

After a while he calmed down again and I handed him a tissue to blow his nose. The dog ran over to him, put his head on Tom’s knee and looked at him out of big eyes. Tom stroked his head and sighed quietly. At the moment there was nothing else to say and therefore we got up and walked along the beach hand in hand, lost in our own thoughts but still so close together. Silently we decided to forget about our conversation for the days we still had together and to enjoy the time until reality caught up with us again.

Time flew by and the days we still had together got fewer. Sometimes I thought I was dreaming because everything was so perfect but I always had these thoughts in my head which preyed on my mind. I felt like I would go crazy when I thought about him marrying another woman but I knew Tom quite well now to know that he had a distinct sense of honour and wouldn’t break a promise. The pain would come, I knew it would but I wouldn’t let it affect me now and spoil my precious time with him.

It was just incredible. We talked for hours, walked along the beach and Tom cooked for us. No minute passed in which he didn’t want to touch or kiss me but we didn’t go further on this road because we knew we couldn’t go back then. It was a calm time which passed without much commotion. Sometimes my friends moaned jokingly that I neglected them but they didn’t hinder me to go and see Tom, about which I was very thankful.

Somehow I felt more mature now than before. Maybe it was because I really cared for someone else for the first time and he cared for me. I couldn’t describe this feeling better and I have often tried, believe me. Tom had struck a chord in me that hadn’t been touched by someone else before and I simply felt different.

Then the horrible day of parting came. For the last time we met early in the morning down at the beach. My things were already packed, so I would have enough time to say goodbye to Tom. There he was, staring at the ocean, absorbed in thoughts but the dog noticed my presence and ran over to me, barking loudly.

Smilingly I bent over him and stroked his head, trying to avoid having his tongue in my face. When I looked up again, Tom was beside me and took me into his arms like he didn’t want to let me go again. I held on tight as well and couldn’t suppress my sobs, although I had sworn myself that I wouldn’t cry. Then I just let go and tears streamed down my face while I held onto Tom. I could feel his body shaking as well and I thought I felt the wetness of his tears in my hair but I was never sure of that afterwards.

Without letting go of each other we sat down on the sand and tried to calm down again. The wind dried the tears on my face and the weather had adapted to our mood. Grey storm clouds raced over the sky and the waves got higher through the wind. I started to shiver because I had forgotten my jacket but Tom was there to warm me. For the last time we revelled in the closeness of each other, absorbed each others smell and tried our best to remember the others face.

After what felt like an eternity Tom looked at me seriously. “Can you take the dog?” he asked quietly. “Why?” I wanted to know surprised because I knew how much he loved the dog. “My fiancé is allergic to dogs and I want to give him to someone who loves him and will take good care of him. I knew nobody better than you for it.” Touched I nodded and hugged

the dog to me. Now I saw that Tom had already brought all of the dog's belongings along and had written down all important things I needed to know. "What is his name by the way?" I had just remembered that I hadn't asked Tom about the dog's name before. "His name is Einstein." "Hello, Einstein", I murmured and hugged the dog again.

We both knew it was time to bid farewell now. We faced each other on the beach and gazed into the face of the other. I hugged Tom and pressed a last kiss on his lips which mirrored our feelings clearly. We released each other and just our hands were still clasped together. "When destiny wants it, we will see each other again" he said and I knew how much he wanted his words to be true because I wanted the same. "I will look for you. Don't forget me", I almost shouted because only our fingertips touched now. He turned to me one last time and I saw the love in his gaze. "I won't."

Then he went away and I stood there and couldn't move. Einstein sat silently beside me. It seemed like he knew exactly what was happening and he didn't try to catch up with Tom. After a while he whined silently and I woke up from my numbness. I turned around and walked back to my friends.

And this is how the summer, in which I met Tom and found my true love ended. Einstein banished most of my sorrows which I felt because of the parting with Tom but sometimes I had melancholy moments. But then I remembered Tom's words and thought of his feelings for me and I felt better again.

When destiny wants it, we will see each other again.

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