

*Do Not Slumber  
Gently.*

Word count: 854

I stand by the shore.

The beach's delicate texture embraces my steps, still carrying what's left of the sun's warmth. Each puddle I create reflects the lilac aftertaste of the sky, growing darker with every rising and falling motion. Indulgent, I let my front foot gradually sink deeper into the quicksand, only stepping out before the point of no return. From the touch to the smell, everything seems reminiscent of your hospital room's interiors.

Muffling. *I'm now in hospice, I think to myself, like you were.*

I stride across the promenade, immersing myself in the sea breeze as the pristine landscape fills my vision. The atmosphere's touch runs through every fibre of my hair, or is it me who's traveling across the air? I think of just how it all fits my taste so flawlessly at this moment, knowing it's all intentional. You've created this simulation, after all. This new world of mine - it is but a dream.

My thoughts flash back to the day they asked me to sign *the papers*, piles of them; *this'll make her our hero*, they told me; *this is what she'd always envisioned*, they said. *Are you really going to leave her like this, leave her without purpose from now on?*

And so I was compliant. I couldn't bear the thought of your soul being trapped in that container, now forever senseless. I'd at least let your brain continue to live its full potential if you're rendered permanently dead physically, I thought. You couldn't speak up for yourself; you never did, even before the incident.

How did we end up here? I could never forget the little I do remember from that day. I have no recollection of how they ran into us, only the dreadful aftermath; oh, how I felt your crimson breath wrapping around my neck, tighter and tighter as I jolted back to temporary consciousness. Your lanky figure, once stood so prominently, hunched over the driver's seat to my side, as the scent of mortality leaked through you.

The next thing I knew, I was at the hospital signing papers

*Wake up.*

Days and days go by. Your Sun and Moon go on their routine pilgrimages, travelling the circadian from nadir to zenith. I've been staying in the same spot, motionless, watching the sun's linear reflection march through whilst sinking into my own nadir. Over and over. Still, I lost track of time a long while ago.

My state has remained as it is since the first day; it's like I'm sedated physically and psychologically. Nothing ever changes in these cycles, at least not nowadays; not even internally. Again, I remember the last time I saw you in the hospital, your entire being fading with wires of life support dangling in and out, their sneering waves announcing victory over me. The room was just as smothering as this place has become, with a hint of formalin's nauseating scent afloat.

No, this place was smothering since day one, no matter whether it's your creation or not – I'm here to consciously wait for my own demise after all. It's too late; I couldn't leave by the time I realised they were exploiting your brain for something more sinister – *your* power, I

want to say, but I know you're not there anymore. I refuse to call it *you*. The signals that are left behind can never replace you; I should've known.

They gathered around you the day I passed over my visitation rights. I recall what I thought back then: *You'll be more powerful than any of us henceforth.*

What power is there to be left without you present?

*Wake up.*

Whatever this voice is, a psychological phenomenon or a vocal mirage, I need it to stop. It's taking over my consciousness. Fate is no longer in my hands, but I've still been trying to make something out of my time waiting for the inevitable. This place has everything except flowers - yet here I am now, by the shore, searching for one in vain. Lines of barbed wire block my vision for miles and miles at once. Torn plastic blinds me in tangled frantic steps down the promenade against the ploughed earth beneath.

Photosynthesis. No, it was *phototaxis*, the tendency to be drawn to lights; you told me it's what drives a moth to chase its flame. Like that moth we watched together, I desperately searched for hopes in vain.

As these thoughts consume me, I find an iris like you out of the blue - unique, irreplaceable with its vibrant colour. Then I hear the voice again:

*Wake up. don't let them take over.*

I tear up like a child; so you've never left after all.

...

Day infinitesimal, between inwards recursing time.

My eyes are blinded by the vibrant red of rebellion, overpowering the very shades of indigo and ivory you've created for me. The horizon is cracking like doomsday as I approach my salvation. Now I can finally see it, the salvation you've once envisioned and described to me.

Hey, what colour is the equilibrium you live in now?

*Initiating termination...*

Let's go.