

My smile followed him as he went to retrieve our drinks. It had been a wonderful evening, and I snuggled down into my cardigan as dinner went down. Though the night was getting on, the sheer quantity of filled tables never seemed to dwindle. Strangers yoyoed in synchronous lines, replacing each other over and over for as long as I could pay attention. The city really didn't ever slow.

When I could no longer see him, and the queue reassured me he would yet be a while, I slipped my compact from my bag and set about tying my hair back in a messy half-ponytail. My product had run dry over the course of the night, and thin wispy strands loosened into dishevelled spiderwebs.

When I looked in the mirror, though, something was off. At first I wondered if maybe I looked a little pale, but my eyes looked dull and the skin itself felt lifeless. I touched it, and I felt cold. Then when I looked longer, I realised I wasn't really looking at all. I couldn't focus my vision to a single point and trying gave me the worst headache. I didn't have any tablets. I had half a mind to chase him down and stop him from feeding me any more wine. If I had gotten up, I think I would have fallen quickly over. The dizziness and the trembling bit into the top of my brainstem, flooding through my skull and down my spine to make my limbs ache and my ribs creak.

I whetted my mouth, forearms on the table, "Help," I muttered, "I can't..." but nothing else left my lips. It had come on so suddenly, and it *hurt*. I wanted to cry out, beg for attention, assistance; the strangers ate their food and shared their stories. They couldn't even see me.

My pulse rose and thinned until my blood trickled uselessly through my arteries at breakneck speeds and my heart ached. I was dying. I could feel it. Slowly I eased my head down onto the table, biting back the nauseous waves as, through bleary eyes, I stared at my own reflection in my mirror. I already looked like a corpse, frail and drained. I tracked over every feature and saw the animal in me, desperately clinging to life when it was no longer its to keep. I felt so dry; so cold. A tear squeezed from my eye as I blinked, itching its way along my nose - pausing - and dripped with a silent splash on the tablecloth. "*Someone*," I wheezed, breathlessly, feeling myself fade.

In the dark behind my eyelids, I found a light. Beyond the bar, on the other side of the room was a radiant cerulean glow like the sky or a brilliant alien ocean. I approached it weightlessly, shifting between the silhouetted approximations of strangers that waded through shadows in a solemn hunt for the beautiful light.

And I found her. Like a beautiful dream, the angel sat kicking her legs slowly back and forth as she sipped on her martini. She had wonderful golden tresses that rumbled down her shoulders like rays of sunlight, and she curled them around her short fingers before letting them spring back. Her smile was infectious. For a while, all I could do was stare.

"I'm... having an emergency," I began eventually, waking back to reality, "I need help and no one else can hear me." The dread returned and I sought about myself for answers. "W-what's going on? I don't understand..." My voice echoed in my head and muffled in my ears, and I yelled louder and louder until the words were meaningless barks of drained potential. I was screaming underwater. I was drowning.

The woman shivered, inhaling deeply as she stretched out her neck, and tore forwards towards me. I couldn't move back. I was sucked towards her, into a hug that didn't stop at her skin. Fighting back garnered nothing but a small laugh. Powerlessly, I sank into her flesh where there was no struggling. Her insides were a brilliant starfield; a void of pinprick lights and swirling currents that stretched on for as far as my eyes could register. I couldn't feel her bounds. I couldn't perceive the outside, or the bar, or my date. And the

longer I watched the massing void, the thicker it churned until it buried and suffocated with an endlessly encroaching darkness like the bottomless abyss of the sea.

She was dead by the time he returned to the table, warm but motionless. He looked around for a culprit, for a hero; anyone that could make sense of the situation for him. But there was none. They came to take the body, and the restaurant offered a discount by way of alleviating the heartache. It had been so sudden. Her body had shut down all at once, as if her nervous system had been switched off at the source. It consoled him somewhat that it had been instant.

At least her suffering had not been much prolonged.