

Paradise

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Paradise

by [daydreaming_everyday](#)

Summary

She stands at the shoreline, where the water and sand connect. When bystanding people walk by, they see a girl, hair covering her face, but a small smile curled on her lips. They would guess she would be enjoying the view. The sun was angled just enough so the water would still sparkle. Pastel pink, orange, and lilac highlights were blended into the sky, soft clouds scattered across it. It was beautiful.

What they don't see are the tears rolling down her freckled cheeks.

Whenever Zoe gets sad or overwhelmed, she walked to a nearby beach.

Notes

This is my gift for the DEH Summer Gift Exchange (hosted by @sincerely-us) on Tumblr for @itstrulyastrangerthing! I had a lot of fun messing around with this prompt! I really hope you enjoy and happy summer!

She stands at the shoreline, where the water and sand connect. When bystanding people walk by, they see a girl, hair covering her face, but a small smile curled on her lips. They would guess she would be enjoying the view. The sun was angled just enough so the water would still sparkle. Pastel pink, orange, and lilac highlights were blended into the sky, soft clouds scattered across it. It was beautiful.

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Zoe found the beach when she was fifteen. She knew it existed all her life, her mother must've driven past it millions of times one their way to school. Zoe never knew it was a paradise though.

It was a night when Connor and Zoe got into an argument. Connor roared at his sister, spating multiple threats and comments. Zoe shouted back as loud as she could, tired of Connor and her parents not listening to her. Her screams were so powerful she could feel her inner core rumble. Cynthia broke them up. She wrapped a compassionate arm around Connor, pulling him away from the battlefield they could 'talk it out.'

She tended to Connor first. *Connor was always first*. Zoe could be wounded, bleeding out, and Cynthia would still nurture Connor first.

Out of annoyance, Zoe bolted out the door.

She hadn't walked very far when she found paradise.

The beach was empty, as it would be on a weeknight. The water was almost still, slow gentle waves washing up the shore. The sand looked fluffy, untouched almost.

The peace was calling her name.

Zoe trudged through the sand. She shivers as a gust of chilly breeze brushes past her. Zoe slips off her converse, her feet sinking into the softness of the cool evening sand.

Once she reaches the shore, she waits. A tide came crashing into the sand, frigid water wrapping around her bare ankles. She closes her eyes. Every ounce of anger she had kept inside seeps out of her body.

Zoe stays at the beach that night for hours, watching the sunset. Her parents never came looking for their invisible daughter. When the stars become visible in the night sky, Zoe knows she has to go back home. When she arrives, the house is dark and empty. She ignores whatever pity she feels as she goes up the stairs to her room.

The visits to the beach slowly became more frequent. It became a safeplace for Zoe. It was a place where the world would disappear, even if it was only for a couple minutes.

It was the home she never had. The soft winds would always greet her when she arrived. The sand would support her when she wanted to fall, and the small waves washed away her worries. Something her real family wouldn't do for her.

Some days she would stroll around. If her eye caught anything, she would pick it up. It was mostly trash, but if she was lucky, she'd find different types of interesting rocks, brittle shells, and bright colored sea glass.

Some days she sat on the sand, staring into the deep blue water. Sometimes she would angrily kick rocks into the water. Sometimes she would just weep. Sometimes her mind just trailed to different places, staying into her own world.

Some days she'd see happy families. She would give them a weak smile. It would hurt to see another family happy when her's was slowly tearing at the seams.

When Connor took his life, Zoe knew where she wanted to be.

"This is an important family event Zoe," Larry explained to Zoe when she asked to leave, as if Connor's death was a planned family trip.

Zoe knew Larry could care less if she walked out the door. It was more for Cynthia, who was weeping at the dinner table as a funeral home employee was helping them make arrangements for the funeral.

Zoe slumped in her chair, looking at the window. She couldn't block out Cynthia's loud sobs and Larry's questions about the price to bury their son. She couldn't stand to be in this house any longer, with her parents. With the reminder of her brother. Her eyes began to become glassy with overwhelmed tears.

"I'm getting fresh air," Zoe swallowed, finally standing up.

Zoe ignored her parents' protests as she closed the door behind her. She took her time walking, kicking a pebble across the road.

She stares at the tide with a blank expression.

For years she wished Connor would go away. It was a death wish. Now he was gone.

Zoe ignores the guilt creeping onto her. There was no way she was going to feel guilty for wishing he was gone. Not after everything he's put her through

A wave splashes her legs as she decides she's not going to continue to pretend to mourn him.

There was a period when she stopped going to the beach, when Evan walked into her life .

She only went three times.

The first was when she stormed out of her living room, papers crumbling in her hands. She sat on the sand as she read through the emails millions of times. None of the emails made sense. She couldn't believe that Connor said any of this. Until she realizes that maybe she doesn't want to believe.

The second is when Evan kissed her for the first time. She didn't understand why he did it, and was annoyed with him. A small part of her felt delighted. She blamed Evan's actions on grief.

The third was the night before the Connor Memorial Assembly. She took Evan with her this time though.

"Are you scared for tomorrow?" She asks him as they sit on the tide.

Evan's eyes widened, "Um... would it be bad if I said yes?"

Zoe shakes her head. They continued to stare at the glistening water.

"I would too. Be scared of talking in front of the school."

Evan nods quickly.

"My mom is obsessed with the Connor Project," Zoe explains, "she's obsessed with you."

Evan scratches the back of his head uncomfortably, chuckling nervously, "She's awesome."

"She likes you being around," Zoe explains, "it's like you bring Connor with you everywhere you go. But... not how we remember him..."

How she remembers Connor is her wrathful brother who only caused destruction. Evan brought a different story. A story that showed another side to Connor. A side Zoe wished she knew. It made Zoe want to forgive Connor.

"... but better."

The night Evan confesses that he lied, she ran out the door.

Zoe naturally sprints to the beach.

Her lungs and legs burn when she arrives.

When she reaches the shore, she collapses onto her hands and knees. A harsh sob escapes her dry throat. Warm, heavy tears spill out her eyes.

Rage ignited inside her. She couldn't stand the thought of Evan or Connor. She was starting to forgive her brother. She began to believe he was a good person.

Zoe didn't know what to believe anymore.

“Zoe!”

Larry and Cynthia rush to their daughter's side.

“We'd been looking everywhere for you...” Cynthia trails off when she sees her eyes puffy and red.

“Zoe?” Larry rests a hand on her back.

Zoe shoves her face into Larry's polyester shirt, beginning to sob violently. Larry and Cynthia exchange worried glances.

All of the pain over the years comes falling through bullet's onto Larry's shirt.

“Oh Zoe!” Cynthia wraps her arms around her daughter.

Zoe flinches away, “Oh my god what am I doing?”

She stands up, brushing the sand off her jeans. She hadn't had her parents comfort for years, and they now only did it because Connor wasn't there.

She begins to let out a watery laugh. *Fucking Connor*. He was gone, but he was still ruling her life.

“Zoe, what the hell?” Larry finally says, grabbing her shoulders.

“You are only doing this because Connor isn't here,” Zoe giggles, tears ripping out of her eyes.

“Of course we aren't-” Cynthia begins, but Zoe interrupts her.

“Really? Where was this comfort all these years?”

Zoe couldn’t stop laughing. Her chest tightened, her lungs feeling deflated.

“When Connor had an outburst, you never checked if I was okay!” Zoe shouted, “and it hurt, okay? I hurt! I hurt so, so much...”

Zoe trembled. She doesn’t dare to look at Larry or Cynthia.

When she does, Zoe is not surprised to see Cynthia crying. What surprised her? Larry had a tear dripping down his face.

“Honey... I...” Cynthia sniffled, “I’m so sorry... you have to feel that way.”

“Zoe... I know we aren’t the best parents,” Larry begins.

Understatement of the year is what Zoe wants to say. Instead, she listens to him.

“... Connor was...”

“Problematic?”

“Well, I was going to say ‘different,’” Larry continues, “but... he took all of our attention. He was-”

“More important, I know, I’ve heard this conversation a million times,” Zoe says, wiping her checks.

She recalls when Larry and Cynthia never showed up to her band concerts and school events like award ceremonies. And it was all because of Connor needing to be watched by Cynthia in order for him to not kill himself. It was all because Connor needed to be disciplined by Larry and he had to watch him to make sure he never snuck out. It was all about Connor.

Larry stays silent. He knows she’s true. All they can hear is the swooshing of the tides and Cynthia’s shaky breaths.

“... that doesn’t make you any less,” Larry continues, “and we want to try again as parents. Start over, but only if you let us Zoe.”

Zoe contemplated her decision. This could be what she wanted for years. A normal family, a normal life. Parents who actually cared enough about their daughter. Zoe finally nods. She feels their arms wrap around her pulling her into a hug. She relaxes in their embrace, beginning to feel exhausted, yet accomplished. This is all she craved for years. Now it was all sinking in...

A wave interrupted the unsuspecting family. They all yelped as their clothes soaked up the cold water. Zoe laughs with her parents for the first time in years. It was all she ever dreamed of.

One Year Later

Zoe is in a state of nirvana. She keeps her eyes closed as the wind blows through her hair. She was relaxed. She was balanced.

“Hey.”

The small gentle voice startled her. She quickly opens her eyes and turns around. Evan stood awkwardly behind her.

She gives him a small smile, “Hey.”

He stands a couple feet away from her, a heavy tension in between them. Zoe pats the sand next to her, motioning him to sit by her. Evan kicks his shoes off,

“How are you?” Evan breaks the silence.

Zoe shrugs, “Good.”

“You graduate soon, right?”

Zoe nods, “In two weeks.”

“Wow,” Evan sighs, “so um... how’s being a senior?”

“Busy.”

Evan notes, “I remember that.”

The conversation stops for a moment.

“How’s being a freshman?” Zoe asks.

Evan’s eyebrow rises with confusion. Then his eyes widened, realizing what she said.

“Oh! Well I actually decided to take a year off...”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, try to save some money, get a job. I have been taking some classes at the community college though so I’ll have credits to transfer.”

“That’s smart.”

“Yeah, we’ll see,” Evan mutters. Zoe arches an eyebrow.

“In the meantime though I can get you a friends and family discount at *Pottery Barn* if you're looking for... overpriced home decor.”

Zoe exchanges a giggle, “You know, not at the moment.”

“Well if you change your mind, I’m only working there for a few more months so the window of opportunity is closing fast,” Evan smiled at her.

They are silent for a while. The sound of sloshing water filled their ears. The sun radiated a wave of heat onto them, filling when with warmth.

“I can see why you like it so much here,” Evan comments.

“I’ve always imagined you and Connor here,” Zoe blurts out, “even though... obviously.”

Evan audibly winces, and Zoe worries she’s struck a chord.

“I’ve actually been meaning to ask...” Evan begins to ask, “why didn’t your parents... why didn’t you tell everyone about who really wrote Connor’s note?”

Zoe turns her direction to the water, and thinks. Without Evan’s note, she may have not have gained a better relationship with her parents. Without Evan’s note, the Connor Memorial Orchard would have not opened. The Connor Project would have never saved thousands of people across the world who were losing hope.

Without the note, Zoe may have not learned to forgive. Not only Evan, but her brother and parents.

“Everyone needed it for something,” Zoe says, hushed.

“That doesn’t make it okay.”

“It saved my parents. It saved me.”

Evan stays silent. Without thought, Zoe grabs his hand, fiddling it until it finally fits right in hers. Evan blushes.

“Um... over the fall I found this yearbook thing my class made in eighth grade. Most people did collages of their friends, but Connor’s was a list of his ten favorite books. I’ve been trying to read them all,” Evan states, “I know it’s not the same as knowing him but... I don’t know, it’s...”

“Something,” Zoe finishes his sentence.

She rests her head on his shoulder and sighs, “It’s been hard... it’s been a hard year.”

“I know,” Evan agrees, wrapping his arm around her, “I’ve been wanting to call you for a long time. I didn’t really know what I would say but then... I just decided to call you anyways.”

Zoe remembers seeing his contact (she can't explain why she never deleted it) show up on her phone while having a picnic with her parents. She excused herself and answered. It was relieving to hear

"I'm happy you did."

"I wish we could've met now," Evan admits, "Today. For the first time."

"Me too."

Zoe looks up at him, staring into his eyes. When her eyes trail down to his lips, she holds her breath, already knowing what's going to happen. Their lips crash. A wave of euphoria washes over them. All the good memories of their relationship flooded into her mind. Their loving kisses, the few dates they had, everything.

"Um... I should go," Zoe says, breaking apart.

"Oh! Of course!."

Zoe stands up, "It's just... finals are coming up."

Evan nods, "No, no, no totally."

Zoe gives him another smile as she begins to trail away. It did feel reliving to kiss him again. The past year, she grew to miss his presence. It became a struggle to forget him, and to forget whatever they ignited.

Eventually she decided she couldn't forget Evan, or even Connor. You could only move on.

Before Zoe leaves, she looks around the beach one more time. It was just like she found it. Soft sand, shimmering water, tame winds, and one pastel colored sky.

She almost wants to thank the paradise.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!