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High Tide

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Author Bio

Anika Jensen is a first year who plans to major in English with a writing concentration and minor in Civil War era studies.

High Tide

Anika N. Jensen

The kiss wasn't unlike the very first had been. The alcohol hid behind his teeth and crept between his lips until she could taste it on her own: small drops of sin that pooled on her tongue and leaked down her throat. He had big hands, long and lean, and they held the back of her neck comfortably, not threatening, but a show of affection. She held her breath.

"That's enough."

He was at least eight shots in, had maybe found a rum and coke before she had driven him home.

"You should try to sleep."

Two sheepish green beads squinted at her in her pajamas, and a crooked grin began to spread like a ribbon in a breeze.

He held her even closer, wrapping her up in his heavy body, a sweaty blanket on a humid summer night. Tonight, there was no window that she could open to let the breeze in, only his smothering heat.

She rolled back onto her side, grateful for a few wide breaths, and tried to shut him out. She had loved him that morning, when he ate pancakes across from her and let her have his coffee, and that evening when they stood at the edge of the shoreline and waited to see how low they would sink into the sand with the tide rolling over them and pulling back, rolling over and pulling back again.

He rolled over now and pulled her back, his pores dripping with Jagermeister that stuck to her skin like ticks. He held his mouth close to her ear and whispered.

"No," she told him. "Not tonight."

"For me," he begged, a knowing grin plastered to his face. He tightened his grip around her waist, the back of her neck.

"Not tonight," she repeated. "Another time."

"But you won't do it another time." He hiccupped and rolled on top of her, his knees pinning her to the mattress.

She stared, denying him with all features of her face and all parts of her body. "Not tonight."

He was light, and she could push him off if she wanted to, could slam him onto the floor and tell him to fuck off because he had crossed a

big red boundary line.

But she was at his house in a dumpy beach town, and he could afford gas more easily than she could.

“You never do this for me,” he whined, his bristly chin buried in her neck.

“Get off.” She shuddered. He had paid for breakfast.

He had paid for everything from the beginning, a form of his conquest disguised as an act of affection or cheesy romance, and he could afford it like he could afford to service his ‘98 Le Sabre.

When he showed her a silver necklace on Valentine’s Day, she begged him to take it back.

“I can’t pay for that,” she said, overwhelmed.

“You don’t have to.” He smiled and kissed her, and a hand crept low on her back.

He had paid for everything, and now he wanted compensation.

“It’ll take two minutes,” he whispered in her ear. His hot breath made her shudder, but she remained still. She could not hear the breaking of the waves anymore.

Like most young adults he was afraid to say “sex” when it was really happening, so he was sly and implied it with his mouth, his hands. She valued words, but he hardly used them, only whispered dirty euphemisms that slithered into her brain and poisoned her until she could not move to push him down. He was skinny, and on any other day she could have him on the ground in one hit, but she was in love with him, too. She remained still, for his grasp tightened with movement like a Chinese finger trap.

She had only seen him so bare once before, though she had stood before him many times, vulnerable and cold. His skin stuck to hers, dripping sweat where it didn’t belong, and his breathing grew heavier, hotter.

A month ago she lay beside him with a panic attack lodged in her throat, struggling to breathe while he held her. Tonight, her breath was silent and smooth.

He kissed her neck and fell off of her, satisfied, and was already asleep when she sat up again. Her body ached, her head most of all. In silence she changed her clothes and cleaned herself up, tying back her hair which had fallen too far into her eyes. She left the room to wash her hands and found a blank face in the mirror across from her, a sheet of five months of poems that had been erased in one night, leaving smudges. Her eyes had no color, they had simply drained. Her lips were pale and cracked.

She waited a minute, drank a glass of water, and went back to the room to lie next to him.

He didn’t know what had happened the next morning, had blacked out and only remembered good feelings. They ate breakfast in silence.

She met some friends that afternoon while he napped, and they tossed rocks into the ocean, talking about their plans to go clubbing that night and complaining about traffic. They talked about boys.

She laughed a little when she told them about her night, convinced that they might understand if it was humorous.

“He was so drunk,” she said and cast a stone into the sea. Her breath caught before she released it, and she felt dizzy for a moment. “He started doing that thing where he sings in German.”

Her friends giggled, but they stared at her, making sure she smiled when she looked back at them.

She did not go back to his house that night. He called late, suspecting something was wrong, finally reading into her body and the silence she inflicted upon him.

“Did I do something?”

He didn’t speak when she told him, and she thought he may have cried. He promised her that he would listen, that he would respond to “no” every time, that he would never drink in front of her. She hung up, not satisfied but able to live with herself again. She still trembled from the inside out that night, and she slept.

One month later she would descend the stairs in her friend’s house and find him with a bandana tied around his head and a drink in his hand.

In another six she would do it all over again, only this time he didn’t know her favorite color.