

A prayer for the ones lost at sea

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Once upon a time there was a girl who lived by the sea. Her world was a million miles bigger than the tiny piece of land she called home. She travelled often but only through the pages of the books she read and reread time and again. There were no bounds and limits for her yearning soul and she ventured far and away on the paper wings of bubbling words. Every morning, when the sun woke up, she bathed her feet in the broken foam of the waves and smiled as it tickled her skin. Not a day passed that the sun did not wake up with a glowing grin. This was a land that was not very fond of gloomy weather.

One day something most extraordinary happened-her land never greeted the fleeting dawn. With the mighty sun held captive by unknown powers, a terrible fog spread over her world like a thick, dark mantle of tar. For long hours that seemed to stretch into the dark eternity, Aya walked the shores, searching avidly for the lost warmth of the sun. Suddenly, something that resembled a lightening of fire pierced the merciless mists and out came the outlines of a grand, tall ship. Her sails were as red as the blood of a dragon from the Eastern lands. A big white sky lark, the herald of hope, graced her wooden body. Like a blind giant, incapable to navigate its way through the unforgiving darkness, the ship found safe harbor in Aya's land.

On the next morning, Aya found him on the shore. The very spot that she considered the core of her world had been invaded by an outlander. His name was Marek and he came off the ship. He was kneeling in the clear, shallow waters, whispering something inaudible to her sea. The foam that caressed her feet every morning was wrapped lovingly around his strong legs like a tamed wild animal. Used to detecting the slightest sounds of nature, the boy heard the dance of the sand flakes, trailing giggling behind her featherlight footsteps and raised his eyes to meet hers. Aya felt like a spear had pierced her armor. How unsettling it was this notion that she stood revealed before his unfamiliar sight and how dared these treacherous lips long to set some words free not just in a greeting but to weave a song of her templed heart. Unhappy that the young man neglected her royal presence, the sea swooshed in wrinkled furry and threw a mighty wave at him. The sharp edge of a broken sea shell cut through the skin of his palm, buried in the wet sand. A little red streak wiggled its way through the blue waters. Aya rushed to him, took out a leaf of

seaweed and wrapped it gently over the cut. When she touched his palm, he could swear he felt the earth move beneath feet. Left behind, armor of her fears lay still on the sand.

The day came when the tyranny of the wretched darkness was brought to an end. The sun graced the blue horizon once again and bathed the languished world in sacred warmth. Aya had been oblivious to the elements for the spark of love had dawned upon her heart. The captain gave orders for a sudden departure – it was time for the Skylark to head for worlds that beckoned to be discovered. Marek could not even say his goodbyes to her. “Love!?”-had grumpily said the stern-faced captain, “it won’t save your soul when the storm is upon you! Get a move on!” The boy kept written in his eyes all the things he would tell her and they all nestled under the wings of one sentence: “Wait for me”. But now, as he left the harbor with a heavy heart, these words were held captives in the stormy sea of his eyes. When Aya saw the bright dragon’s blood splash over the violet distance of the horizon, she felt the pieces of her heart spill in the sand.

From that day on, every morning Aya greeted the silver dawn with drops of glimmering hope in her eyes and saw off the sunset with leaves that had shed off her sadness. She waited and waited and memories sprinkled her heart like cherry blossoms. Once, at the dusk of day, the wind came to the shore and sat next to her. Her tears had soaked the edges of his mantle for too long. He traced her gentle face, brushing off the drops that sparkled in her eyelashes like the morning dew on flowers. “You have much to tell him”, he said, “but your words fail to go beyond the horizon. I can take them further.” He told her to come back tomorrow at dusk and bring along paper lanterns. On each she was to write something and the Wind pledged to take them out to sea.

When tomorrow came, Aya found the Wind waiting on the shore. In the small velvet hours of the dusk, her whole world laid hushed under the weight of her hopes. She lit the white lanterns one by one and offered them to the indigo sky. The flames that burned inside she ignited with a spark that had shed off her heart. Kneeling in a royal bow before her gentle frame, the Wind caressed the ends of her hair with his transparent fingers and rose up. He picked up the lanterns, raised them in the sky and their flames painted a path of light over the darkening waters. “Fly my paper

words with all the strength you can bare”, whispered the girl. “Fly them across the seas until they land on the white wings of the Skylark”.

For many a day, the purple flame of the lanterns flew tirelessly across the indigo skies of faraway lands much like a faithful pilgrim on a journey to his holy site. The paper words of love drew wondrous paths in the stars over the sleeping seas. At times tired from the long journey, they curled up on the wings of migrating birds. Warmed up by dreams of the Southern sun, they fell asleep. Purple drops of words rained upon the birds’ soft feathers while the lanterns slept. Then blue marine winds and red giants of the deserts picked them up and cradled them in their arms. They danced them away as if they were guests to a royal ball and set them back upon their sacred path.

One day the Skylark came across a frightening storm. The dark sky frowned in warning, caging up the last rays of the afternoon sun. Like a squadron of vultures, the blue winds fell greedily upon the ship. Her red sails sagged and crackled under the iron weight of the ferocious beast. The giant waves overran the decks like a stud of wild horses, drowning everything in the foam of their anger. “The storm has surrounded us from all sides!”-shouted the stern-faced captain to his men. “I can’t find a way out! We can’t hold out much longer!” The sea spray fired mercilessly upon the faces of the men, blowing out the last glimmer of hope in their languished eyes. The Skylark was drowning. Then suddenly, Marek pointed ahead of them. Sprinkles of light had risen on the distant horizon. The fragile orbs flickered softly through the steel armor of the storm like a guiding light. “Follow them!”-shouted the captain and the dragon sails of the Skylark cleaved through the darkness.

Slowly, slowly, the savage cries of the storm withered away, leaving behind scars, parched up by the winds. Hidden in the fragile night silence, enveloped in the gentle embrace of the sea, Marek stood silently on the deck. The wings of the Skylark laid down unflickering, worn out by the battle with the sea giants. The clear night sky shone bright with countless stars and it seemed to him that angels had pierced countless little holes with a needle. In the distance ahead, the paper lanterns danced gently like a thousand suns. They approached, swung up in the air, took a bow and the first one landed in his wide open palms. It trembled, it glimmered and transformed into a beautiful butterfly. Marek leaned over and it whispered something

in the temple of his ear. Then it glimmered once more and its light melted in the blue infinity. One after the other, Aya's paper lanterns blossomed into butterflies and the butterflies into words. His hands trembled with awe as the words melted in his heart.

The Stern-faced captain never knew what had saved them. He did not believe in love. But love believed in him. Love believes in everyone. When Marek asked to turn the ship back, the captain furiously refused and his harsh words reached the wind. He saw pieces from Marek's shattered hopes cut the air into ribbons. Then the wind decided it was time to take matters into his own hands. He blew up the rested sails of the Skylark, shook up the sailor's sweet slumber and bravely led on the ship into the unknown. The orders of the Stern-faced captain flew around aimlessly and no one gave ear to them. He fought with the ship's helm to no avail; it too refused to obey its old master. The Skylark pierced through the countless seas, trailing along a train of stars and suns. When, finally, Aya's land rose up on the horizon, he saw her fragile outline grace the blurry distant shores. The paper butterflies in his heart flickered, jingled and rushed forward through the blue sands. There was another warm heart longing for them, where they were going to nest forever.

The End