

## Waiting for Her

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As he sat by himself in the quiet little cafe, the man looked out the window, watching the sun sink slowly towards the skyline; watching and waiting. Gazing out upon the street, he scanned the scenery with a wandering, yet hopeful manner. Did she remember their promise, would she come?

Still watching out the window, the pleasant surroundings of the cafe helped to ease his mind, as his thoughts turned back to the night they'd first met. It had been in that same cafe, a chance meeting of two people, he relaxing after work, she stopping in for a quiet cup of coffee before returning to school for a late night's work on a project.

They'd met, and shared conversation over the steaming aroma of their java, the warmth of the little cafe working its magic on them. What had started out as a simple meeting had grown into something much more than that. They'd talked for over an hour, when finally she had to leave and he ended up walking with her to the university. The following night they met again.

From there things grew quickly, their warm friendship blooming into a passionate romance. As the days grew longer into summer, they spent many hours together, lost in the bliss of their relationship. It had been wonderful being with her, as if for the first time he was really in love, having found someone so absolutely perfect, their souls fitting each other like a long-lost and nearly forgotten favorite pair of gloves.

That summer had been the best in his life, they'd been so happy together, but it had all come apart that fateful day at the beginning of August. They'd gone once again to their favorite cafe, and it was there where she'd broken the news to him. It came out with both exuberance and underlying reservations. She'd been extremely lucky to have been awarded a special grant to allow her to study abroad, one that meant a lot for her education.

She'd originally applied for the grant several months before and had not received it, but due to unexpected circumstances, the original recipient had canceled; with a little luck and some help from one of her professors, she'd been surprised to find herself faced with an opportunity of a lifetime.

Obviously she was excited, and he too was genuinely excited to for her, but they both knew what this meant for the two of them. While she now had free passage and support to go overseas, he was held to his job which he very much enjoyed, and at that time it had not been possible for him to relocate with her. They had talked it over at length, the depth of their relationship and their passion making it very difficult on both of them. But in the end, there was really no question to it, she had to go and realize her dreams, and neither of them would allow themselves to hold her back.

Their last few weeks together had been a flurry of emotions, consuming each other as they tried to hold on to the remaining days that slipped from them like grains of sand running down an hourglass. In the end they'd promised, that no matter what happened in the year they were apart, they would meet once again at their cafe on her return, and find out where they stood.

That had been a year ago, and tonight it was time for that fateful meeting. As he watched the sun gently kiss the horizon, casting an orange glow across the sky, reflecting its radiance upon the panes of glass of the buildings surrounding him, he wondered once again if she would come.

Thinking back to that fall, his eyes watered slightly. After their tearful separation, he'd been miserable, more lonely than he could ever remember being in his entire life; it was as if a vital part of him had been ripped away, leaving an aching hole in its absence. They'd written long letters to one another, even been able to talk regularly on the phone, and while it was so wonderful to hear from her, it only ebbed the pain momentarily. Sooner or later he was left alone once again.

As the days had grown shorter and autumn had crept into winter, they had slowly grown apart, their communications had begun to ease off, like the hours of daylight becoming steadily shorter and more sparse. Perhaps it was just the distance between them, perhaps it was the way their lives had begun to diverge from the path they had once followed together. Maybe it was just easier to try and forget than having to dredge up those feelings each time they were reminded of each other's absence. Whatever it was, they had both been to blame, and as the cold weather of season stole over the land, the cold realization that the relationship was slipping from their grasps stole into his soul.

Then as the winter months had dragged on they had lost touch completely, and he had received no further word from her. What had happened, why had she forsaken him like that... like everyone else? As the last glimmer of the sun's rays slipped beneath the horizon, he was forced to remember it all. Memories broke in upon him, shattering the protective haze of his denial.

At once he could not avoid the deluge of thoughts and remembrances, as he recounted the cold drama that had played out before his eyes in the world around him. He remembered once again how mankind's time had run out so quickly, like a broken clock, racing out a downward spiral into oblivion. It had started with a series of a few random and seemingly-unconnected, unexplained deaths, but had quickly escalated into a mounting terror as the unknown plague had swarmed over the world, devouring all souls in its path, save for him, who in its cruel irony had left unscathed to wander the desolate streets alone.

With the daylight quickly fading, he stared out the window of the dark tomb of the abandoned cafe, watching the dead and empty city through burning eyes. The walls of glass of the deserted buildings no longer shimmered with their false radiance, but were cold and empty tombstones, useless monuments to a departed world. As he stared into the encroaching darkness, sobbing at the last vestiges of the delusions which had comforted him, he realized, with an absolute certainty tearing at his soul, that she would not be coming back... nobody would.