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## *Day Dream*

The sun warms the apartment building on the Terrace, welcomed into all of the rooms but one. Inside, the bustle of traffic and call of gulls is muffled to an undercurrent of peaceful white noise. Sunlight cuts through a careless gap between the curtains and falls on a cluttered side table. There's a Japanese fan, painted with fireworks. A crystal paperweight sits in just the right spot to split the sunbeam into rainbows and throw the pieces around the room. A large framed photograph leans on the wall, showing the majestic sweep of the Northern Lights, speckled with a million stars. Around the corner, full of quiet breathing, is a bedroom, dark but for the faint light of a pair of glow-stick bracelets.

The moon, fuzzed by high altitude iciness, sat perched on the hills watching the colourful spectacle below. I picked my way down the zigzag steps towards town. A gaggle of tourists passed me going up, decked out in glow-stick necklaces, and I knew I was heading in the right direction. Months here and I still hadn't sussed the street layout—it was Phoebe who was good with maps. It felt weird to be out on my own tonight. Not that I was really alone. The streets were thronged with people, all headed the same way as me. Phoebe had left before the sun had set, to make last minute preparations before the big reveal.

Up ahead in the park, a patchwork of light flashed across the sides of a tall black cube, surrounded by people. I squelched across the muddy grass and copied them, tapping the bumpy blocks of

LEDs that made up the cube. Wherever I placed my hand, blocks lit up in response. I ran my hand down and the light followed in a scrolling waterfall. I stood back to let a pompom-hatted kid have a go, and continued along the path.

Over a rise, the festival opened up before me. All manner of attractions were spread around the bay, connected by fairy lights that led a path down the waterfront. Beyond, suburban street lamps beaded the hills and left streaky reflections in the harbour.

I fished out my festival guide and turned to the back. Installations dotted the map, each with a number and description. Number 27 was circled for me, all the way down the other end of the bay.

Wanting to draw out the feeling of anticipation, I decided to take my time wandering down the waterfront. I ventured deeper into the mass of festival goers, enjoying the buzz. I liked this city. I'd had my taste of others, too big, and too small. This was the baby bear—just right. I followed a group of night-time sightseers over the footbridge to the little bay, where the water shimmered in a multicoloured mirror of café fronts and festival lights. The museum loomed against the sky, giant sculptures clinging to its sides. Pulsing jellyfish coiled their tentacles around the rooftop next to bristling sea urchins, spines tipped with lights. In the centre of the bay was another new feature, a fountain that sent up an arc of spray. A far-off projector beamed swirling 3D patterns into the disc of water to create an ever changing display of colour.

Number 27: *Day Dream*. “No peeking!” Phoebe would say, and secrete herself in her workroom. I might well have been miffed that she was spending more time on her work than with me, but I knew she didn't mean to be distant. Life's too short to be bitter. I just couldn't wait to see what Phoebe had been planning all this time.

Down on the quay a silhouetted crowd had congregated to look into the water. Joining them I peered over the edge, where there arose from the depths words spelled out in wobbly sea-green light. Ripples dissolved the words into invisibility, and they rose up again to say something new, but I couldn't make out all the letters.

A woman in volunteer-issue hi-vis approached, giving out glow-sticks. I asked for two, please. Her smile faltered when she caught sight of my face, though she was very polite and tried to hide it. It

didn't bother me nowadays. No point in hiding myself away—even that can arouse suspicion. “The guys next door say I must live with a vampire,” Phoebe had joked once, in a hotel someplace in Europe. I'd laughed, 'cause it'd reminded me of my vampire phase, when I'd lain around reading Anne Rice by candlelight. I'd felt like I'd finally found characters I could relate to. Children of the night like me, craving a normal life... Except later, on reflection, I saw that I'd got the crummy end of the deal. All the loneliness that comes with the vampire condition, without any cool shapeshifting or instant sexiness. When not reading, I was filling a notebook with mediocre poetry. I wasn't much fond of re-reading it now. Reliving my early teens verges on the torturous, but it was a good way to spew my thoughts onto paper.

I thanked the woman for the glow-sticks and bent them into bracelets around my wrist, snapping them into life. Down underwater, the glowing words reappeared. I unscrewed the lens cap of my camera and knelt down to snap off a few shots. Maybe Phoebe could help decipher the mysterious words.

Further on I passed a store lit up pale violet. *Glow Gelato*, the sign proclaimed. Under hanging snowflake cut-outs, black light turned customers into silhouettes with shining white shoelaces, their radioactive orange and green ice creams floating in the negative space. I admired from a distance, not risking getting caught under the UV strips. Funny—unable to taste ice cream on a summer's day, now denied ice cream by night as well.

People behind me shuffled, oohing and aahing, and I turned to make way for a parade of performers dressed in lights. Black-clad acrobats in electrical suits and bright animal masks prowled through the crowds, followed by faceless dancers in fluorescent skirts who seemed to glide down the road like flowers twirling in a river current.

I was impressed. Phoebe and I had been to lots of these over the past year or so. In Pitlochry, we saw ancient forest transformed by night into fairyland; in Ghent, mountainous cathedrals outlined in neon, magical stained glass scenes all aglow; at Sapporo's sculpture competition, Seussian creatures of candy-coloured snow, then on to the LED landscapes of Tokyo's winter festival; and just for fun, a quick stopover in Chiang Mai for the famous lantern festival.

Phoebe's *Aurora* was touring around, so we were too. I loved it—cities flowing with life, so different from an Alaskan winter. I had spent those endless arctic nights out with my cameras, revelling in my newfound independence. That was where I met Phoebe, who'd travelled North to be inspired by nature's own light show.

Across the bay, a bunch of uni students about my age whooped and ran down the wharf, pretending to push each other into the water. A part of me envied them. I wondered what I would study if I ever went to uni, if I ever had to think about the future. When I was little I wanted to be a lighthouse keeper. Perhaps science, astronomy, or software stuff, like Phoebe. I liked photography, though. Life is short, even more so for people like me, and I was drawn to the idea of preserving a moment. Maybe I would have become a real photographer, if things were different.

I made my way beneath a thick spider's web of fairy lights that netted the stars above a busy courtyard, lines of light tracing out constellations. I recognised Scorpio, the Southern Cross, an upside down Orion. Picnic tables near food trucks were full of families sipping hot chocolate. An iridescent wall of short planks curved around them, painted glow-in-the-dark. The planks blinked from salmon to turquoise like opal fish scales as you walked past and viewed them from a different angle. This was number 20 on my map. I kept walking.

"Technology and creativity aren't so very different," Phoebe was passionate about explaining—"What I do is a blend of art and science." This was to a critic at *Forty-Four Sunsets*. The exhibition was inspired by a line from one of Phoebe's favourite books, so she was ecstatic to have her installation accepted. We arrived at the gallery feeling on top of the world, and went about seeing what the other artists had produced. Each painter and photographer offered a different interpretation and a different style. I particularly liked the torn paper sunset, big strips of pink and blue and yellow artfully arranged in layered cloud formations across the wall.

Phoebe's one seemed simple compared to the other forty-three, but that was its charm. She was good at making you see ordinary things in a new light. We'd salvaged a window from a junk shop, cleaned and painted it, then Phoebe had spent weeks crafting the

electronics which she closed in behind the frosted glass. The window was installed in a semi-dark room of the gallery, looking like part of the building, until it was turned on.

Then the panes were illuminated, and a shaft of golden light flowed from window to floor.

It slowly crept over the room, in a diamond that shifted through gold to orange then deep red as the rays hit the walls. Finally, the light faded, and soon after, the sunset cycle began again.

Often I'd marvelled in watching the dying sunlight on its daily journey across my bedroom wall, so close yet so untouchable. But in that gallery I could dip my hands right into it. Over and over Phoebe's sun set while I stood transfixed in its brilliant light. "I do try to include some sort of interactive aspect in my work," I heard her tell the art critic.

I agreed with Phoebe about a lot of things, including her philosophy on interactive art. There's a difference between observing and participating, and I'd always been determined to participate in life as much as I was able. Back home, on rare occasions when Mum and Dad trusted me on my own and my big sisters were at school, I'd abandon my correspondence work and sneak upstairs. I was never allowed here during the day. At night I was free to hang out with everybody else, and if the weather was nice I'd use my telescope on the balcony, where Dad taught me the constellations. In the daytime, the long windows let a stream of sunlight in, fragmented by the shadows of trees outside. On windy days this confetti storm of light fluttered to and fro, reaching out for me, but I wouldn't dare get close.

The cautionary tale as to why has been told to me so many times I no longer know if I'm remembering or merely imagining. Worn out from constant supervising, mum had dropped off on the couch, and awoke to find that I had disappeared from the rug where I'd been playing. Motherly panic set in. I was a late walker, newly fond of exploring, and too curious for my own good. She searched every downstairs room, and called my name.

Where could I possibly have got to? Then my mother heard a horrific wail. She sprinted up the stairs two at a time and there I was, on the balcony in the dappled sun. Too late I was rushed indoors.

Barely five minutes of exposure left a permanent reminder in the form of fierce burns.

People ask me if I remember, 'cause you'd suppose that the pain and hospital stays would have made a lasting impression. But all I dream about is the ghostly sun, warm on my skin. So whenever I was home alone you'd find me there, staring at the pretty lights that flickered in the upstairs room, dreaming about the one thing I could never do.

I never expected the experience that awaited me at the end of the bay. An alluring glow beckoned, its source just out of sight. I didn't need a map to know that I had found Number 27. When I rounded the corner, it was like stumbling through a portal into an alternate universe.

The sunset installation had been indoors, all closed off and sealed away. Artificial. This brightness, though, out in the open air... Apollo himself couldn't have conjured a purer slice of daylight. Light trickled through a green ceiling of leaves and spilled their watercolour shadows over the ground. It drifted over my open palms. It positively sparkled on the grass beneath my feet.

It was so real it was unreal. I felt as if I were frozen in a flying saucer's tractor beam like in old sci-fi movies. Or I was a fossil in amber, swimming in liquid sun.

A breeze swayed the branches, and the spots of light scattered and quivered. I lifted my face, letting dappled light fall on dappled scars, with a touch impossibly gentle, like it was always meant to be.

I sensed a familiar presence at my side.

"Hey, daydreamer," Phoebe said.