

LAURA STEEL PASCUAL

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## *Sea Daisies*

1. *Turn left onto the track heading back to the village.*

We must've walked this path a hundred times now. It's an easy route to remember really, not very complicated—just follow the path and avoid the tourists.

Those darn holidaymakers.

Honestly, they get on my nerves most of the time. They're always all over the place.

They absolutely *love* visiting the Count House, for example.

'*A centre for interpretation and education*' is what it says on the website. '*Used for a range of community events*'.

I can't see why they like it that much; I've always found it pretty boring.

Blasted tourists.

Hounding the place.

Poking their nose in things that don't concern them and looking at us as if we're part of a show. It's enough to make you want to hate them.

I for one *can't* stand them.

*All* they do is get in the way, and knock people over.

Your hand tightens around mine as we walk in silence.

You don't really say all that much anymore but your hand in mine still somehow calms me.

I think it's because of your mother.

She's been distressed for months. Ever since the accident, actually.

You stopped talking to her after that.

You stopped talking to everyone really.  
Including me.

2. *At the ruined shed, turn right down the track to the coast.*

That's where you first kissed me. There, by that old, rattling shed.  
Not exactly the most romantic scene but who am I to complain?  
We were *drunk*.

And I was laughing, because we were stumbling and it was the  
middle of night and I didn't have a care in the world.

Because all I could see was you.

And I was sure all you could see was me, too.

And when your lips touched mine, I felt like magic.

I remember thinking how the waves dashing down onto the  
cliffs in the distance sounded a little like music.

A little like a rhythm.

Perhaps they too were singing along to the long, lost song that  
my heart was soaring to.

But the waves hurling against the cliffs today don't sound very  
magical.

They sound unpleasant, almost *angry*—as if they were crashing  
down warnings in their fury.

The goose bumps that are emerging on my skin because of them  
are very much real.

"Joseph," I tell you as we walk in silence down the path, "maybe  
we shouldn't go all the way today, it's looking a little stormy."

You just glance at me, and shrug.

No words emerge from your lips, *nothing*.

I just wish you'd *say* something.

I've been putting up with this for *months*, and all I ever get back  
are mumbles and groans that could just as well be the bloody wind.

This whole farce is beginning to annoy me and, as patient as I've  
been trying to be, it's getting ridiculous.

You didn't used to be like this. *We* didn't used to be like this.

I don't even know what we're doing right now, or why.

And it's been looking stormy for days now, and as nice as it is to  
lie on the grass on the cliffside on a sunny day and just take in the salt  
air and listen to the roll of the waves—it's not bloody sunny today.

3. *At the engine house, take the right hand junction east along the coast path.*

There are a few choughs flying overhead and for a moment I wonder where they're going and if they'd consider taking me with them.

But they're only crows and so I know the answer is nowhere. If not nowhere, only towards death and sorrow, or so my mother likes to say.

I wonder if choughs even count as crows because, even if they *are* pretty similar, they're still different, with their red bills and legs and their distinctive 'cheew' call.

I'd never really stopped to think about it.

And I sort of wish it had remained that way because now there are shivers climbing up my spine and making me feel unwell.

But that's what silence does to you, I guess.

4. *Continue along the footpath.*

There are daisies growing underfoot and they make me smile a little as you pull me along.

We used to spend our days picking at them and making them into chains. It was always so relaxing. And when we were so bored we didn't know what else to do, we'd gather them up, go near the edge and watch them flutter down.

Sea daisies, you used to call them.

Then we'd just laugh, and talk, and *laugh*.

And it'd be so *nice*.

But we don't do that anymore, and it saddens me.

The grasp you have on my hand becomes tighter perhaps because you sense my distress.

It actually feels a little uncomfortable now, a smidge too secure.

I don't say anything because I know you won't answer.

At best, you'll let go of my hand—and I really don't want that, since this is the most affection you've shown me in weeks. And I'm *treasuring* it.

I'm not sure why I'm feeling so uneasy.

It may be due to the grey sky and godawful, dreary atmosphere. Perhaps it's the fact that due to the weather and the lateness of the

evening, there's no one about. And even if it's never bothered me, it really is quite dangerous out here. Cliff edges and rocks can be crumbly and slippery when wet—and they *are* wet.

Or maybe it's you.

You with your dark hair, and dark eyes, and dark aura.

*Why won't you speak to me?*

You haven't uttered a word all the time we walked or even when you showed up at my house and just stood outside as if you were a ghost—waiting for me to come to you.

All broody and silent.

No bloody explanation either.

You haven't told me where we're going or what we're doing.

You just started walking and held my hand.

And what does that really say about *me*?

All of this is making me cross now, it really is.

I'm about to put my foot down and say something when you stop.

The wind's beginning to blow harder and it's messing up my hair. There's a storm coming and you're just standing there.

Looking at me.

Not saying a *word*.

“Look 'ere, Joseph,” I tell you. “Why've you brought me up here? You alright?”

But you don't say a thing.

“You're being a right tuss, you are,” I continue. “What are we standing about for? There's a storm coming, and my Mum's expecting me back. It was bloody hard for me to convince her to let me go out in the first place.”

Nothing.

“It really isn't the nicest weather.”

And you just stare at me and I'm beginning to see a smidge of disgust in your eyes.

*Joseph.*

And I'm starting to panic now because you're never like this and the wind is howling and I just want to go home.

“Bloody *talk* to me!”

But you just *stand* there, your grip on my hand making it actually

hurt.

“What the heck has gotten into you?”

And in my anger, I kick you.

It’s not too hard but it does the job. You let go of me, and I immediately use the opportunity to stretch my fingers. The loss of your skin on mine makes me feel both relieved and upset.

And you’re stepping away from me now and turning, and making your way towards the edge.

“Are you *nuts*?” I shout after you.

I don’t know what you’re playing at, to be honest.

“Get away from there! We need to leave!”

But you ignore me.

And it hurts.

I feel like I’m missing something—something big, huge, *important*.

And my brain is blanking at your name.

All I can think is how you’re near a cliff, in a storm.

And what if a bike comes?

*Joseph.*

And so I go after you because I love you.

And I’m worried and I don’t know what’s happening—but I don’t like it.

“*Joseph!*”

And you hear my voice, and you turn—and for the first time in weeks it feels like you can actually hear me.

The waves hitting the side of the cliff are rough, and the salt in the air is making me want to choke, and the grass is wet.

So when you stumble, I scream. And run.

And for what feels like a lifetime it seems like everything might be alright.

But then you grin.

*And dive.*

And the air becomes a mixture of your laughter and my agony.

“*Joseph!*” And I sound hysterical because I *am* hysterical. “*Joseph!*”

And when I reach the edge and look over, I can’t see anything.

And I feel sick.

I’m going to be *sick*.

A desperate, strangled cry is stuck in my throat and I feel like I can't *breathe*.

I back away from the cliff and I know.

I don't want to believe it but I *know*.

So I run.

I run and I run and I *run*.

Because I *know*.

And it starts to rain.

And I start to cry.

And the water coming down from the sky mingles together with the tears pouring from my eyes till they're one and the same—sliding down my cheeks in what seem like torrents.

And I'm choking and I'm shaking.

But I run.

5. *Turn right onto the track and head back to the car park.*

I'm back, but it doesn't feel real.

I run through our little village, past the pub and the bakery *and* the post office—all the way home.

I don't even stop when I pass your house—where your mother must be waiting—and there are still flowers piled up on the pavement outside.

*Home. Home. Home.*

There's a light on in the kitchen and I can see my mother's silhouette.

I sprint up the porch steps and burst into the room.

"Mum!" I let out, and I'm trembling. "*Mum!*"

One glance at me and she's running.

"Sweetheart? *Sweetheart!*" She asks me, her face lined with worry. "What's wrong? Did something happen?"

I can barely get my breath back.

"The cliffs... He slipped..." I let out in a hurry. "*Joseph...*"

"*Joseph,*" she repeats, and there's a hard tone to her voice that I don't understand.

You two get along—she *likes* you.

"Yes," I insist. "He fell, Mum. *He fell.*"

My mother nods her head.

“Yes,” she tells me softly, leading me up to my room. “I know, darling. I know.”

And I try to resist her as we walk up the stairs.

What doesn't she understand?

*You fell.*

We can't just stand around.

We have to tell people. We have to tell your family, your *mother*.

And she's been so upset since the accident; *this might kill her*.

The poor, poor woman.

Losing her son all *over* again.

And then there's *my* mother.

I wish she'd stop telling me that she knows.

It's all she's saying—repeating herself as if they are the only words she has left.

But how could she know?

She wasn't there.

*I was there.*

I was there.

*The accident.*

The struggle in me fades.

No. No. No. *No.*

*The accident.*

Please, *no.*

And then I start to cry.

And I'm in my room, and my mother and I are sitting on my bed, and I just cry.

And the strangled wails that are emerging from my throat are the only things that are keeping me alive.

“How'd I forget?” I ask out loud, and my voice is too high pitched. “How could I possibly forget?”

And the memories. Oh my *word*, the *memories*.

I wish they'd stop.

Please just make them *stop*.

A perfect summer day.

A picnic. A stroll. Laughter.

The feeling of being invincible.

And then us being dumb, and fluttering daisies over the edge.

And the tourist.

The bloody tourist riding his bike and losing control.

And startling me.

And making me step back into you.

And you, *too close to the edge*, falling.

Falling.

*Falling.*

And the screams, my *screams*—I can't get them out of my head.

And I'm screaming now, too.

And there's a bolt of intense light outside my window, for the storm is not only in my head but all around me.

I feel like it's engulfing me.

*Suffocating me.*

And it's my mother crying instead of me now.

*But I love you.*

And it was all *me*.

*It was all my fault.*

And she's rocking me back and forth and I feel six again.

It just hurts *so much*.

*How could I forget?*

"Here, sweetie," my mother says, reaching over to my bedside table and grabbing a small, white bottle. "This will make things better, I promise. I promise."

And there are two pills in my hand and I just look at them.

*How could I forget?*

And so I stare at them.

And I notice her getting up and returning with a glass of water and trying to hand it to me. But I don't take it.

How could I forget?

"Here, love." And her voice is shaking. "Drink up. Come on, it'll make it better. I promise." And so I take the water.

And I swallow the pills.

And then my mother convinces me to get into bed.

But after she leaves I stay awake.

How could I forget?

And as I lie there in the dark, I hear a knocking on my window.

And a few seconds later, someone makes their way in.

SEA DAISIES

I don't need to turn the light on to know it's you.  
You don't say anything but I know it's you.  
It's always you.  
And I scoot over so that you can creep under the covers with me.  
I know you haven't been sleeping well since the accident.  
You and your mother aren't talking and, although you haven't  
told me as much, I know you're upset about it.  
So when you wrap your arms around me and they're a little too  
tight—I don't mention it.  
And it feels like I'm forgetting something, but I can't place what.  
And I feel so awfully *tired*.  
And so the light remains off.  
Because it can't be that important.