

BLUE

“Everything’s changed.” Ariel thought, staring at the clock on the dance club wall. “And I only have one hour and ten minutes to live.”

She’d seen his kiss coming all night long. She saw it in the light brush of his fingers over hers every time he handed her a drink. Or in his shaky laugh and the nervous push of his hand through his hair over and over again. He was smart and funny. A bit awkward in his own skin but she found it endearing. Ariel hadn’t expected to meet anyone tonight. It had been non-stop partying these past two days and she’d planned things to continue that way until the end. But that changed when he came into the club. It was 11pm and Ariel saw him enter flanked by two friends. The friends were laughing and loud, already drunk, but he wasn’t. Her first thought was; “That one will be fun to play with.” It was a wicked and probably a bit unkind of a thought but she’d abandoned etiquette at the beginning of this bender. His eyes locked hers first and he surprised her by making a beeline toward her on the dance floor. “He’s overcompensating” she thought. His confidence, overcompensating or not, was impressive and made a delightful tickle in her stomach. It was the first real thing she’d felt in awhile. She continued dancing as he approached, sweat beading across her forehead and dampening her fuchsia tinged bangs.

“Hi...I’m David” he introduced himself.

“Ariel” She yelled over the thumping music.

“Can I get you a drink?”

She nodded and let him lead her off of the dance floor. Ariel noticed that he smelled like a forest. Green and brown all mixed together. It was nice and she felt another pleasant tickle in her stomach. He led her to a booth in the corner and then took off through the crowd to fetch the drinks. She watched as his dark hair disappeared into a sea of youth. Her eyes wandered to the neon clock on the far wall. It was midnight. Midnight of the last night she’d ever see.

Ariel looked out over the crowd acutely aware of every detail and color. She felt the slow roll of envy creeping through her veins. It just didn’t seem fair that she was who she was and what had to happen was going to happen. Tears rimmed her eyes and she quickly brushed them away as David broke through the crowd toward her. He was carrying two ridiculously ornate drinks and Ariel couldn’t help but smile. He sat down and pushed one toward her.

“What’s this?” she asked.

“Everything. I thought we should celebrate.”

“Celebrate what?”

“Us.” He replied jovially, picking up his drink and clinking it to hers before taking a sip. Ariel drank hers down in a few gulps. It helped to beat back her sorrow and besides, it was what she’d learned to do if you were celebrating.

“If you can drink a Mai Thai on steroids like that, this is going to be a short night.” David said looking at her in awe.

“You don’t know me” she snapped back. Ariel felt instantly bad. He didn’t deserve that response. Her predicament had nothing to do with him.

“Fair enough” he answered, raising his glass and gulping to try to match her pace.

“Don’t” she replied, reaching over and touching his arm. “We can slow down and talk.”

David put down his drink and looked at her. His eyes were a heavy blue like the deep of the ocean. She felt another tickle in her stomach.

“You first.” he said.

Ariel opened her mouth to say something, well, to lie, but found that she was at a complete loss for words. Nothing would come out. Her thoughts raced through her head of stories she’d been telling since she arrived in this city one year ago. But now, these thoughts mixed with truths she couldn’t possibly tell.

“Maybe that drink went to your head quicker than you thought.” David smiled. “How about I go first.”

Ariel listened as he told her about his life. A good kid from upstate New York, raised in a good family. He had one sister and two beloved dogs. A year ago, a guy like him would have sent her running. He was too normal and well adjusted. She’d liked the rebels and the screw ups. But things had changed a lot for her in a year and as David spooled out his life, Ariel found herself hanging on his every word. She could feel the weight of her own secrets pulling like lead on her limbs. She convinced herself that tonight didn’t matter and by sunrise she’d be willing to take her story to the grave. But now, she wasn’t so sure. The anger that had numbed her for so long was melting and a terrible, terrible sadness was taking its place.

“Are you OK?” David was staring at her with concern.

“I think I need another drink.” she replied, snapping out of it. “No tropical islands this time.”

“Coming right up.” He smiled playfully at her, a tiny dimple dancing in the corner of his cheek and disappearing into the crowd again.

The neon clock read 2am.

“Shit” Ariel said under her breath.

Time was running out. She let her eyes wander around the club. A skinny kid sporting a full Green Day outfit caught her eye. Ariel watched as the flame of his lighter danced in the dark while he lit a cigarette. The bright image of the flame played on Ariel’s retinas for a few moments before fading. It reminded her of that fateful day when her life had been changed forever.

“A penny for your thoughts.” David interrupted. He stood in front of her with two different but equally ridiculous drinks. They fizzed and glowed blue and had what looked like a puff of cotton candy on the tops.

“I said nothing fancy.”

“You said nothing tropical. This is Blade Runner meets Coney Island.”

A laugh escaped Ariels lips. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d laughed and it sounded strange, like it wasn’t her own. She lifted up the glass and looked at it quizzically.

“How am I supposed to drink this?”

“Improvise” David said, picking up his drink, pulling off the cotton candy and popping it into his mouth. He smiled back at her with blue stained lips.

Ariel laughed again and popped the small cloud of cotton candy into her mouth. It exploded in a rush of sugar against her taste buds and she winced overwhelmed by the decadence.

“You don't like it?”

“I’m not used to such strong flavors.”

“Where are you from that you’ve never had cotton candy before?”

Ariel opened her mouth to answer and tell one of her lies but again, nothing came. A flush of frustration bloomed on her cheeks and she sucked back the second drink as rapidly as the first.

“Okaaaay” David said throwing back his own drink.

“I’m sorry. I’m just not myself tonight.” Ariel stammered.

Herself. If he only knew.

The alcohol took quick affect on David and he put down his drink a little too heavily.

“Well, we’ve just met and I have no idea who this “myself” is. But....” He swayed slightly in his seat. “I do know who’s sitting with me now and she’s just wonderful.”

Ariel looked at David and his goofy, half-drunk smile. She felt comforted by him, even under these extreme circumstances. He talked more about his life. A New York University student in his senior year at Tish studying creative writing.

“What kind of profession is that?” she interrupted.

“A very poor one. But I had no choice.” David stood up and put his hand on his heart attempting to look dignified but only looking silly. “The stories live here, inside my heart. They beat never ending and without them.” David hung his head and fell heavily back against the booth. “I die.”

Ariel giggled despite herself. The story she could tell him would change his life forever and she pondered, for the first time since she’d arrived in this city, if she should tell it.

The clock read 3:45am.

Dammit. Her stomach lurched. She wasn’t expecting to feel afraid. Ariel was fully aware of where this night was going to go and she thought she had a handle on it. Her gaze wandered to the dull, blue glow left in David’s drink. Her thoughts were pulled light years away to her home. A beautiful, blue planet named Moril, on the edge of this solar system.

Moril was mostly ice with a desolate surface but teeming with life deep below. Her species was called Axian. In her native habitat, she looked much like the creatures you find at the bottom of the ocean or deep below a glacier. Translucent with no pigment. Bleached and white from lack of any exposure. Her species was a complex civilization filled with scientists, engineers, explorers, teachers and workers. Much like earth. Except war had been abandoned long ago by the Axian. It was deemed useless and wasteful and fell away to make room for advancements in technology and space travel. She’d had parents, two brothers and a sister. But she didn’t really get along with any of them. The “black sheep” of the family as they refer to it here on earth.

The last time she’d seen her parents, she’d been fighting with them. It was a holiday on Moril. A day when Axians shut down all activity and spent time with each other, playing games, eating and talking. Ariel hadn’t been in the mood despite her parents insistence she stay with the family. The fight sent her screaming out of their home and Ariel had wandered the long, blue/green hallways that connected one city to the next for hours.

“You didn’t answer my question.”

Ariel snapped out of her memory and looked at David. He seemed far away like looking through the wrong end of a telescope.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t hear you. What was it again?”

“How did you get your name? Ariel. It’s unusual.”

“My parents liked the movie Little Mermaid.”

“Now I see why you dyed your bangs that color.”

David smiled. He was right. She’d chosen the color she most liked to dye her hair not realizing it was the same color as Ariel’s. Also, she’d told him half a lie. Little Mermaid was the first movie she’d seen when she arrived on Earth. She liked the metaphor of Ariel. A girl being from a completely other world having to adapt to things she knew so little of. And she adopted the name because her Axian name was impossible to translate into human language. It would only sound like a series of rapid vibrations that frankly, would rupture a normal human ear. As David talked, she slipped back into her memories of her last day on Moril.

She’d walked all the way to the shuttle bay in the neighboring city to her own. All young Axians were taught to fly and Ariel slipped into a shuttle setting the controls for one of the space stations on the outer orbit of her planet. She just wanted to get away that day. Take a breath from her responsibilities as an Axian, a daughter and a sister. What she wouldn’t give to get those responsibilities back now. She’d landed on the space station which was empty and shut down for the holiday. It was nice being the only one there. Ariel remembered how she’d danced through the dim hallways to her music, taken a swim in the on board pool and eaten as much as she could stomach in the cafeteria on the main deck. It was on that deck that she felt the first wave of destruction. She was sitting, feet perched on the table with nobody to tell her to take them off, when the entire station shuddered like it had a cold. Ariel turned off her music and looked around. Another shudder racked through the room and it was then that Ariel saw her planet collapsing through the thick glass window of the cafeteria. She watched paralyzed as the frozen surface of her home rippled and began buckling inward. The space station came to life around her. Computers booted and cry’s for help echoed through the air. She listened to her people as they died. The planet collapsing in on them until there was no one left but her. Without warning, the core of Axian had simply eaten the planet and everyone on it. Ariel blacked out then. From shock or perhaps it was the last large energy wave that hit the space station and sent her flying back against the wall.

Whichever it was, when Ariel woke, she was alone. After a few weeks and food running out, she formulated a plan to get to earth. Axian’s have incredible resilience and adaptability and she knew that her body could adjust and change once she entered earth’s atmosphere. But it was the

trip she was more worried about. It was long and there were a lot of dangers she didn't fully know how to calculate for. With the help of the computers and logs from other Axian space travel, Ariel did her best and her best worked. She made it to earth one year ago.

The neon clock read 5:00am.

Ariel's thoughts raced. There wasn't enough time to muse on her year here. It had been good. Her body adjusted. She looked like a 5'5", brunette haired, light skinned 25 year-old female. She'd made a few friends, learned some earth history and enjoyed a lot of earth's abundances of food and drink. It had been fun, but lonely. These past few months particularly. For the greatest tragedy of her story was that Axians only live 25 earth years. As the minutes ticked by, her short life was becoming acutely real. Ariel's memories kept coming faster and more eager and she could feel the panic rising in her throat. The tears wanting to make their way to the surface. It was in this moment that David leaned in to kiss her. She saw his face drifting close and fell into his kiss hoping that it would take her mind off of what was coming.

And it did. But not in the way she expected.

She was in love for the first time.

"Everything's changed." She thought, staring at the clock on the dance club wall. "And I only have one hour and ten minutes to live."

Ariel knew what she wanted to do. She took David's hand and led him out of the club. They walked silently through the streets of New York and into the encroaching morning. She led him to her apartment and into her bed. They made love. It was gentle and pure and reminded her of a person she once was. She wanted to tell him everything but there wasn't time. As the sun peeked over the horizon and they lay together, fingers entwined, she stared at him, not knowing what to say. David smiled and his tiny dimple danced. She let her eyes fall into the deep blue of his and realized that somehow, he knew. A deeper force was at work between them and it didn't matter where they were from or how long she had left to live. Ariel let herself slip away, peacefully thinking of love, her family and her home. David watched her body drifted like snow into the air until it was gone. He didn't feel fear or sadness for in her place lay a tiny child. It wiggled and cried and looked up at him. David smiled and picked up the child.

She was the last of her kind but would never know. She would only know love and the deep blue eyes of her father.