



TAYLOR ♀ MADE ♂

— *Tan Lines* —

by
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The problem with hotel bathrooms is they come preloaded with existential dread. There's just something about the almost-white tile, the bone-dry towels, and the super-bright lighting that makes you aware of every pore, every stray hair, every atomic-level imperfection.

Abigail sits on the lid of the toilet, bikini top clenched in her fist. The stupid thing isn't even a fancy, Instagram-influencer bikini. It's just a boring standard-issue triangle top and matching bottoms. She'd bought it in December during one of those 40%-off sales at Target, thinking that by Spring Break she'd be ready. Ready for what? To look like a girl who belonged on a beach, obviously. To not care, or at least to not care so much. To be the fun version of herself that everyone assumes she always is—loud, fearless, the girl who steals shopping carts and rides them downhill with her roommate, the girl who talks shit to assholes and dresses her friends like runway models. That girl wouldn't think twice about a triangle top. That girl would already be outside, drink in hand, sand between her toes, running into the freezing cold Atlantic because her hunky boyfriend dared her to. That girl would laugh when the wave hit, would shriek and splash and not once glance down to check if the salt water had shifted anything, revealed anything, undone anything.



Abigail turns the bikini top over in her hands, thumbs tracing the thin elastic edge where the fabric meets the strap. She'd tried it on exactly once, in her childhood bedroom—the one that's now staged for open houses, stripped of every poster and Polaroid and scrap of evidence that she ever existed there. It had fit fine. Technically. The way a bandage fits a wound: functional, correct, covering what needed covering. But the mirror had shown her what it always showed, and she'd stuffed the bikini back into the plastic bag and shoved it under her bed and not looked at it again until she was packing for this trip.

She tries the strap-over-the-shoulder test again, holding the triangle cups in place. The empty space glares at her in the mirror—two fabric tents, no campers. She could maybe stuff them, but that feels like bringing the lie to the beach, where water and gravity and physics—Taylor's fucking physics—would conspire to expose her. Tissue paper dissolves. Silicone inserts float. The ocean doesn't care about your dysphoria; it just takes what it wants and leaves you standing there, bare and obvious, while some frat guy's girlfriend pretends not to stare, or laugh, or screenshot you for the group chat later (“Myrtle Beach: The Sex Reveal”).

Abigail sinks back against the tank, the lid cold under her thighs.

The bikini top dangles from her fingers like a dead fish. She could text Will and say she's feeling sick. He would understand. Actually, he'd understand too much. Will is, at times, annoyingly empathetic. Sometimes she wishes he was just a little more like the jerks she'd dated before—oblivious, self-absorbed, easy to hide from. But Will notices things. He asks follow-up questions. If she says she isn't feeling good, he'll come back from the beach (he went first to save them a spot) and knock on the bathroom door with that gentle, two-knuckle tap of his, and she'll have to explain why she's been in here for forty minutes having a staring contest with a triangle of coral fabric. And then he'll say something kind, and then she'll cry, and she doesn't want that right now. She wants to be brave.

Somewhere in the suite, a phone buzzes, then stops. She kept waiting for Taylor to text their now customary: *Pls respond if not dead*. They were down the hall in the room they'd booked with Maya, probably arguing about sunscreen SPF ratings or whether hermit crabs qualified as pets (they do).

Taylor had been different since winter break—looser, like someone had finally unbolted the emergency exits and let air circulate through the whole building. They still overthought everything, obviously. That was hardwired. But now it's like Taylor is running some kind of secret emotional VPN, rerouting the anxiety through a server that actually processes it instead of just caching it in an infinite loop. The counseling helped—Taylor would never admit how much—but Maya was the real MVP, obviously. She had this way of saying “You're fine” that actually made Taylor believe it. Abigail had watched the transformation over the last few months with a weird mix of pride and jealousy. Pride, because she'd been there at the start, had watched the chrysalis crack open in real time. Jealousy, because Taylor had arrived at MIT performing a gender and left performing themselves, which was basically the dream, the whole point, the thing every trans girl prays for when she's lying awake at 3 a.m. bargaining with a God she doesn't believe in. And here Abigail sits, the girl who'd coached Taylor through every crisis, unable to put on a fucking swimsuit.

Knock knock knock.

She freezes, mid-self-pity spiral, bikini top dangling. The knock is not tentative. It's the knock of someone who knows you're spiraling and has decided to intervene. A bestie knock.

“Abby.” Taylor's voice through the hotel room door. “You okay? We're all at the beach.”

“I'm pooping,” she shouts.

“You're not pooping.”

“How would you know?”

“Because you text when you poop which is, honestly, horrifying. Let me in.”

“No. Go away, I'm having a moment. Aren't I allowed to have a moment?”



“You’ve had, like, forty-five moments. We miss you. Will sent me.”

Of course he did. She can picture Will standing ankle-deep in the surf, squinting back at the hotel, that little crease between his eyebrows, too considerate to come himself because he knows the difference between a boyfriend-crisis and a best-friend-crisis. Knowing which one requires which responder. Annoyingly perceptive. She loves him so much it makes her jaw hurt.

“Abby.” Taylor’s voice drops, loses the comedy, the way they say it when the bit is over and the real thing is there, out in the open. “C’mon.”

She leaves the bathroom and opens the front door. Taylor leans against the frame, already sunburned across the nose, wearing swim trunks and a striped tee. Their hair is stiff with salt. Sand dusts their ankles. They take one look at Abigail, one look at the bikini still in her hand, and step inside.

“Okay,” they say. “Talk.”

“There’s nothing to talk about. I just hate my body.” She says it the way you’d say, *I just hate Mondays*.

“Yeah,” they say. “I know what that’s like.”

“It’s crazy unfair how you got boobs that would actually look amazing in a bikini and I got, like, two peach pits.”

Taylor shrugs, slouching against the mini-fridge. “I’d trade them to you, if I could.”

“No, you wouldn’t. Maybe seven months ago you would’ve. But you like them now. Don’t even try to deny it.”

Taylor is quiet for a beat too long. Then: “Some days.”

“Some days is more than I’ve ever had.” She sits on the edge of the bed, the bikini draped across her knee like a napkin at a dinner she can’t afford. “You know what’s fucked? I spent all semester dressing you. Making you feel gorgeous. And I meant every word. But the whole time, I couldn’t do it for myself. Like, I had all this confidence to export but none left for domestic use.”

“You looked amazing. And remember that nurse costume? That sure got Will’s attention.”

“This isn’t about Will,” Abigail replied. “Like, I told him I’d wear it, yeah, but that’s not the point. I want to *want* to wear it. I want to be that girl, Tay. The one who just puts it on and walks out and doesn’t even think about it and doesn’t try to Jedi-mind-trick herself into believing she’s confident.”

Taylor slides down the wall until they’re sitting on the carpet, knees up, arms draped over them. The pose is so familiar—the old Taylor, the hiding Taylor—that it makes her stomach hurt. But their face is different now. Open. Present. “You remember what you told me? That first week. About poison dart frogs.”

“God, don’t quote me back to me. That’s so annoying.”

“You said the bright ones survive because they stop trying to blend in. You were right. But you left out the part where the frog is also terrified. It’s just bright and terrified at the same time.”

Abigail looks at the bikini. “Will’s going to think I look ridiculous.”

“Will’s going to think you look like his girlfriend. Which is his favorite thing for anyone to look like.” Taylor stands, brushes sand off their shorts. “Listen, I’m feeling pretty daring today, and kinda femme, so I’ll put on one too. We can debut together. Like a controlled experiment in gender terror.”

Abigail blinks. For a split second, she’s convinced she’s hallucinated it. Taylor in a bikini? Taylor, who spent freshman orientation wrapped in three layers even when it was 87 degrees out? Taylor, who used to shower in the dark like a vampire?

“You’re serious.”

“I am. Maya bought me one. I’ve been working up to it. Dr. Anders says exposure therapy is about choosing your moment. This is my moment.” They extend a hand. “Make it yours too.”

Abigail stares at the hand, then at the bikini, then back. “Bright and terrified?”

“Bright and terrified.”

She takes it.



They head down the hall to Taylor and Maya’s room. Taylor unlocks the door and Abigail steps into the climate-controlled chill of a Myrtle Beach hotel suite that, if you squint, could almost pass for a set in a low-budget reality TV show. Think Love Island, but with less straight people.

“How nervous are you?” Abigail asks. “Like, on a scale of zero to Chernobyl?”

“Solid seven.” Taylor unzips their bag and pulls out a scrap of emerald fabric that Abigail has to squint at before realizing it’s a bikini top. It’s simple, unpadded, with thin straps. Nothing fancy. Nothing hiding, either.

“Maya picked it,” Taylor says, like that explains the color, the cut, the insanity of it all.

“Of course she did.” Abigail holds her own coral triangle top next to it. Side by side, the two bikinis look like items from completely different inventories—one designed for a body that’s too much, the other for a body that’s not enough. “We should swap!”

Taylor snorts. “Yeah, because nothing says ‘self-acceptance’ like literally wearing each other’s insecurities.”

“But I’m serious! Your boobs would fill mine out, and I wouldn’t



have to worry about—” She gestures at her chest, the universal shorthand for absence. “—the void.”

“The void.” Taylor sits on the bed, the emerald scrap pooled in their lap. “Abby, you spent an entire semester telling me to stop hiding. You fished Maya’s number out of the trash. You put me in a shopping cart. You held my face in your hands and told me I was beautiful.” Their voice catches. “Now it’s your turn to believe it about yourself.”

“Yeah, but you are like *objectively* beautiful. All I have is pink hair. My face is okay, I guess. But everything from the neck down? It’s like it never got the estrogen memo.” She says it with a snort, but it’s only funny if it’s not true.

“You have nice hips. Also, a great ass.”

Abigail’s mouth falls open. For a full three seconds she just stares at Taylor, processing, recalibrating, running diagnostics. Then a laugh detonates out of her. “Did you just compliment my ass?”

“I’m stating a fact. It’s a good ass. Will thinks so too.”

“He told you that?”

“He didn’t have to. I have eyes.”

She covers her face with both hands, the bikini top crushed between her fingers. “Oh my god. The old Taylor would’ve combusted

before saying the word ‘ass’ out loud. Maya has corrupted you. She has infected your neural net. The dark side is strong.”

Taylor grins, all teeth and sunburn and a weird new confidence that makes Abigail want to punch them and also hug them. “If I start quoting *Mean Girls*, you’ll know it’s stage four.”

“You already do!”

“Oh, yeah. Anyway, you corrupted me long before I met Maya. Don’t try to blame her for my moral decay.”

Abigail laughs, then goes quiet, turning the coral top over in her hands. “Okay. Real talk. Are you going to tuck?”

Taylor’s face does that buffering thing—the one where their brain hits a search query with zero results. “Am I going to what?”

“Tuck. You know.” Abigail gestures vaguely downward. “Our situation in a bikini bottom. At the beach. With people.”

Taylor stares like she’s just asked them to explain cold fusion in Korean. “I don’t... what does that mean? Like, tuck something into my waistband?”

“Oh my god,” Abigail says. “You sweet, oblivious angel.”

She’s going to have to walk them through it. Of course she is! The universe has handed her a roommate who can survive MIT physics but cannot, for the life of them, grasp the metaphysics of “girl mode” swimwear. She takes a breath and launches into the tutorial. “Okay, so, first of all, this is not optional because we’re in fucking South Carolina. Second, it’s not complicated. It’s just physics, your favorite subject. You’re redistributing mass to minimize a visible profile.”

Taylor blinks. Like, full system reboot, rainbow Pride screen of death, please restart your gender. “Oh no.”

“It’s fine! Now, there are three methods, ranked by commitment level.” She counts on her fingers. “Tape, which hurts. Compression, which is fine. And the full send, which involves—”

“Please stop gesturing.”

“—stuffing your junk up and back and kind of... folding it into a little pocket? Like origami.”

“There has to be a better way.”

“Better? Sure, there are these things called the inguinal canals, they’re where everything descended from back when your balls were up in your belly. So you just push things back up into them. They’re like little hidey-holes for testicles. Isn’t that cute?”

Taylor sits there, mouth half-open, clutching the emerald bikini like a rosary. “You’re telling me I have to un-drop my own—”

“That’s just the most advanced method! I mean, it’s the method that I, personally, use, but you do you.”

Taylor looks like they’re about to faint. “You... just... shove them back up there? Into your... canals?”



Abigail shrugs. “Look, it sounds worse than it is. The first time I did it I nearly passed out, but now it’s like putting in contacts. Weird for a second, then you forget.”

“I think I’ll just, uh—push it all back, I guess.” Taylor’s face has gone the color of the hotel towels. “Maya said the bottoms should have enough lining to—you know—contain the situation.”

“Smart girl.” Abigail nods approvingly. “Maya thinks of everything.”

“She measured me.”

“She what?”

“With a tape measure. For the bottoms. She was very clinical about it.” Taylor pauses. “Then less clinical.”

Abigail screams into a pillow. “I cannot with you two. You’re disgusting. You’re perfect. I hate you.” She stands, shaking out her coral top like a matador’s cape. “Okay, we’re doing this.”

They face opposite walls and strip. Abigail counts to three in her head, drops the robe, and there it is. The body. Her body. Pale and goosebumped under the hotel vent, arms kind of okay but everything below the collarbone just... barely even trying. She gets the top on. The triangle cups are supposed to lift and separate, but there’s nothing to

lift and nothing worth separating. Two sad little flags on a flat frontier. She stares at the wall, breathing through it.

A warm thump against her left cheek—not her *face* cheek—makes her yelp. Taylor yelps at the same time, an octave higher. They’ve backed into each other, bare skin to bare skin, ass to ass.

“Boundaries!” Abigail shrieks.

“This room is eleven feet wide, there are no boundaries!” Taylor hisses back. “Also, you backed into me.”

“I did not.”

“You did. It’s that ass of yours. It has its own gravitational field.”

“Oh, fuck off.” But she’s laughing. They’re both standing there, back to back, half-naked in a budget hotel room in Myrtle Beach, two bodies that never got the memos they were supposed to get, and the whole thing is so absurd, so cosmically stupid. “Alright, get to work, Indiana. Tuck and roll.”

Abigail finishes first. She tucks with the efficiency of someone who’s done it a thousand times—muscle memory, like tying a shoe or applying eyeliner. Quick, practiced, gone. The bikini bottoms smooth over and there’s nothing to see. Just a girl. Just Abigail. She exhales through her nose and doesn’t look at the mirror yet. One thing at a time.

Behind her, Taylor is having a significantly worse time.

“Ow.”

“You’re overthinking it.”

“I’m not overthinking it, I’m—ow—it’s not—it won’t stay—”

“Stop fighting it. Gravity is not your enemy here. Just guide everything back and let the fabric do the work.”

“Gravity is always the enemy.”

She risks a glance over her shoulder. Taylor is standing with their back to her, bikini bottoms halfway up their thighs, both hands frozen somewhere south of the equator, their entire posture radiating the energy of someone trying to solve a Rubik’s cube blindfolded. Their breasts hang free, heavy and pale, and for once Abigail doesn’t feel the usual pang of envy. She just sees her friend, terrified, trying. “You need help?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Because it wouldn’t be weird, we’re besties. I can—”

“Of course it’d be weird!”

“Okay, okay. Jeez.”

A long, agonized pause. The air conditioner hums. Somewhere outside, a gull screams.

“Okay,” Taylor says quietly. “It’s... in.”

“In?”

“Back. Contained. The situation is contained.” They pull the bottoms up the rest of the way, snapping the waistband with a finality that sounds like a bear trap closing. “Oh God. That feels so weird.”

“You get used to it.”

“When?”



“When you stop thinking about it.” She pauses. “So, for you? Probably never.” Abigail turns around fully. Taylor still faces the wall, shoulders hunched, arms crossed over their chest in the old hiding posture. “Hey. Turn around.”

“No.”

“Taylor.”

“I look ridiculous. This was a bad idea.”

“You don’t know that. You haven’t looked.”

“I can feel it. I can feel all of it. There’s so much... skin.”

“That’s how bikinis work, genius. Skin is the default setting. The clothes are the add-on.” She steps closer, keeping her voice gentle. “Turn around. Please.”

Taylor’s shoulders rise and fall with a long breath. Then, slowly, they drop their arms and turn.

Abigail’s throat closes.

The emerald top cups Taylor’s breasts perfectly—not flattening, not pushing up, just holding. The color is stunning against their skin, which is still winter-pale but flushed pink across the collarbones from the sun they caught in just the last couple hours. The bottoms sit low on narrow hips, the lining doing its job, the line smooth and

unremarkable. Their stomach is soft, a little rounded, with the faintest silver stretch marks tracing the sides of their hips like tiny rivers on a map. Their legs are longer than Abigail expected—lean, lightly muscled from all those walks across campus.

They look like a girl. They look like a boy. They look like neither. They look like Taylor.

“Well?” Taylor’s voice is small, arms twitching at their sides, fighting the urge to cover up.

Abigail swallows. “Holy shit.”

“That’s not a real answer.”

“It is. You look beautiful. You look like you.” She points at the mirror on the closet door. “Now look.”

Taylor turns to the mirror and she watches their face cycle through the old sequence—horror, disbelief, the flinch of someone expecting a punchline—but this time, it doesn’t end there. Something else surfaces. Not confidence, exactly. More like recognition—the raw, startled kind, like seeing your own bones in an X-ray and realizing they were holding you up the whole time. The same expression they’d had the night of the Halloween party, standing on the fire escape in the Jadzia Dax uniform.

“Well,” Taylor says.

“Yeah.”

“I look...”

“Say it.”

Taylor stares at their reflection for another beat. The emerald catches the light. The spots of sunburn glow. Their eyes are bright, big, and wet. “I look... pretty okay.”

Abigail steps up beside them. In the mirror, two figures stand side by side: one with too much, one with not enough, both in swimsuits that scare the shit out of them. She loops her arm through Taylor’s, feeling the warmth of their skin against hers. Their reflections look back—imperfect, terrified, and here.

“Your turn,” Taylor says, nodding at the mirror. “Look.”

Abigail has been avoiding it. She’s been focused on Taylor, on coaching, on deflecting. Classic maneuver. But now there’s nowhere to hide, so she looks.

The coral top is mostly empty. That’s just a fact. Her collarbones jut. Her hips, at least, curve—Taylor wasn’t lying about that. Her legs are strong from all the walking and the stairs and the dancing. Her hair, freshly dyed last week, is the brightest thing in the room, a shock of pink against all that pale skin.

She doesn’t look like the girl from the Target bikini photo on the tag. She doesn’t look like Maya, who fills out a swimsuit like she was poured into it. She doesn’t even look like Taylor, whose body is its own beautiful paradox.

She looks like Abigail. Flat-chested, sharp-elbowed, pink-haired Abigail. The girl who steals shopping carts and adopts strangers and

puts stars on ceilings and falls in love with boys who are too kind for this world.

“Well?” Taylor says. “What do *you* see?”

Abigail blinks hard, once. “A bright, terrified frog.”

Taylor squeezes her arm. “The brightest.”

They stand there for another minute, together, looking at themselves. Then Abigail straightens her spine, adjusts the triangle top that will never be full, and grabs her sunglasses from the dresser. “Okay,” she says. “Let’s go scare the straights.”

It’s barely 10:30 a.m. and the sun’s already blasting down like some kind of radioactive death ray, ricocheting off the sand, the ocean, every single molecule of exposed skin. Abigail steps out of the hotel, sunglasses jammed on, and walks straight into a wall of humidity so thick it feels like she’s being poached alive.

She pants. “Oh my god, we need to be in the water right now.”

“Agreed,” Taylor says, squinting at the brightness like a mole person. “The UV index has to be—”

“If you quote a number I will bury you in the sand and leave.”

The beach unfurls ahead of them, a wide, flat strip of beige interrupted by clusters of umbrellas and coolers and the occasional toddler screaming about something unknowable. The Atlantic is a flat, glittering sheet, deceptively calm, the kind of ocean that looks like a postcard until you’re in it and it’s trying to rip off your swimsuit.

Abigail scans for Will. It takes about two seconds because he’s the size of a lighthouse. He’s set up camp near the waterline—umbrella, two towels laid out with military precision, a cooler that probably contains exactly the right number of waters and contraband beer. He’s shirtless, which is just—yeah. She’s seen it before, obviously, but context matters, and the context right now is that she’s walking toward him in a bikini for the first time and her whole body is screaming at her to retreat.

Maya spots them first, though. She’s sitting cross-legged on a towel, big floppy hat, oversized sunglasses, a yellow one-piece that makes her look like she wandered off the set of a French film. She raises one hand in a lazy wave, then does a visible double take.

“Oh my God,” she says, pulling her sunglasses down. “Look at you two.”

“Don’t,” Abigail warns.

“You look incredible.”

“Goddammit.”

Will turns. His eyes find Abigail, travel down, come back up. The crease between his eyebrows deepens—not in confusion or horror, just that thing he does when he’s feeling something too big for his face to process in real time. He stands, sand cascading off his shorts, and walks toward her.



Abigail braces. Here it comes. The reassurance, the careful compliment, the well-meaning but suffocating kindness that'll make her feel like a patient instead of a person. She's already rehearsing her deflection—something sharp, something funny, something to keep the softness at arm's length—

Will stops in front of her. He doesn't look at her chest. He doesn't look at her hips or her legs or any of the parts she's been auditing for the last hour. He looks at her face.

“Hey,” he says.

“Hey.”

He smiles, then he takes her hand, his fingers swallowing hers completely, and leads her toward the towels like this is just a normal Saturday, like she's a girl who belongs on a beach.

Taylor, meanwhile, has frozen at the edge of the sand, arms crossed over their chest, bare feet curling against the heat. Maya pushes herself up and walks to them, hat flapping in the breeze. She stops close, tilts her head.

“The green is perfect,” she says. “I knew it.”

“I feel like a science experiment,” Taylor mutters.

“You look like a dream.” Maya reaches up and uncrosses Taylor's



arms, gently, the way you'd open a book. She holds both their hands, steps back, and just—looks. Takes them in. The wind off the ocean lifts Taylor's hair, presses the emerald fabric against their skin, and for a second the whole beach goes still around them, or at least Abigail's version of it does. There's music, too.

“Beautiful,” Maya says, matter-of-fact.

Taylor's chin trembles, then they squeeze Maya's hands and say, “Race you to the water.”

“You'll lose.”

“I always lose, that's not the point.”

They take off running—Taylor in the emerald bikini, breasts bouncing, legs flashing pale against the dark sand, laughing so hard they can barely breathe. Maya kicks off her sandals and sprints after them, hat flying off, blonde hair streaming behind her. They hit the water at almost the same moment, the wave catching them mid-stride, and Taylor shrieks—a sound so wild and delighted that three separate families look over.

Abigail watches from the towel, Will's arm heavy and warm around her shoulders. The weight of it anchors her. She leans into him, feeling his chest rise and fall, feeling the sun press against her bare

skin—all of it, the parts she hates and the parts she’s learning to tolerate and the parts she might, on a good day, someday, almost like.

“You okay?” Will asks, his voice low, just for her.

She watches Taylor and Maya splash each other in the shallows, watches Taylor throw their head back and laugh at the sky, watches the sunlight catch the emerald fabric and turn it electric.

“Yeah,” she says. “I think I am.”

The ocean doesn’t care about her dysphoria. It doesn’t care about Taylor’s, either. It just rolls in and pulls back, in and back, the oldest rhythm in the world, indifferent to the shapes of the bodies standing in it. The salt water is freezing and Abigail knows that the second she gets in, her hair will go flat and her mascara will run and the coral bikini will cling in ways that reveal every absence.

She stands up anyway.

“Where are you going?” Will asks.

She pulls her sunglasses off and drops them on the towel. The sun hits her full in the face, and for a second she’s blind, just a girl made of light and nerve endings and stubbornness.

“Swimming,” she says.

Then she walks toward the water. Not running, not hiding, not checking her reflection or adjusting her straps or calculating the angle at which she might be observed. Just walking, bare feet in wet sand, the ocean spreading out ahead of her, and for half a second it’s like the world blips out. No sound, no nerves, no internal monologue. Just the water, the light, the way she leaves little ghost-prints behind.

Taylor sees her coming and grins—that crooked, conspiratorial grin they share now—and they hold out a hand. Maya holds out the other. Abigail takes both.

The wave hits her knees, her thighs, her stomach. The cold is a shock, a slap, an awakening. She gasps, then laughs, then gasps again. The water doesn’t care that her chest is flat, or that her voice cracked deep this morning, or her knees are ugly, or her legs are too short. The water just holds her, the way it holds everyone—briefly, imperfectly, without judgment.

She dives under. The world goes silent and dark. For three perfect seconds, there is no body, no dysphoria, no mirror, no war. Just salt and motion and the muffled heartbeat of the Atlantic.

She surfaces. Taylor is right there, wet hair plastered to their forehead, emerald bikini dark with water, grinning like a fool. Maya floats on her back nearby, eyes closed, serene as a saint.

“So?” Taylor says.

Abigail pushes her hair out of her face. The dye is so fresh that it bleeds a little, tinting the water around her, a tiny bloom of pink in the gray-green sea. “So,” she says, “I think I want to stay in here forever.”

“The water’s literally sixty-two degrees. You’ll get hypothermia.”

“I don’t care.”

Taylor laughs. The sound carries across the water, bright and



clear, mixing with the crash of the waves and the distant shouts of strangers and the steady, patient rhythm of the tide. It sounds like the beginning of something.

It sounds like the opposite of entropy.



















