

{{{ AFTER WES SILVA'S ATTACK }}}}

The Range Rover jostled slightly as the road narrowed and snaked up the incline, past Menemsha and another small fishing village, Lobsterville. Kyra had been unable to relax, moving around the house anxiously, and Tarek had suggested a drive up island and lunch. She'd agreed a bit reluctantly, but now feeling the fresh air on her face through the open windows she was glad they had come. Aquinnah, Tarek told her, meant 'land under the hill' in the language of the native Wampanoag people, and was a settlement on the northwest coast of the island.

He pulled into a semi-circle parking area and cut the engine. Together they walked up a steep street, past shops and take away food places, to an observation deck. From there, Kyra could see for miles. To her right she could see the rainbow of colors of the famous clay cliffs, and to her left the ocean. The wind whipped at her hair.

"There's a public beach down there, that way." Tarek pointed, "Before the island undertook conservation efforts to mitigate the erosion, people would cover themselves in the clay."

"What do you mean?" Kyra peered at him. Was he teasing her, again?

"Seriously." He nodded. "I guess like a spa?" He shrugged. Kyra frowned, not understanding the appeal.

"It is stunning," she lamented, staring out at the ocean. Behind them, watching over the island was a red brick lighthouse. It stood sentinel, warning sailors away from treacherous shoal known as the Devil's Bridge below. Tarek took her hand, intertwined his fingers with hers and led her back toward the little town.

They stopped at a quaint restaurant with a deck overlooking the cliffs. He led her through the little dining room and straight out onto the deck. They chose a table in the sun next to the railing. The deck had been built at an angle, protecting the patrons from the sea breeze. It was almost warm.

"Take a seat, I'll get us some food."

Kyra sat down. She let the sun warm her shoulders.

Tarek ordered for them at a window. She heard him chatting familiarly with the man behind the counter.

He returned to their table, carrying a tray.

"They have excellent clam chowder," he said handing her a large ceramic mug and a spoon. "It'll stick to your ribs." He looked at her sideways and patted his own hard, flat stomach. Kyra rolled her eyes at him but cracked smile, a genuine one. That seemed to appease him and his own smile widened.

"Thank you."

He set two glasses of iced tea down on the table and took the seat next to her, stretching out his long legs and crossing his feet at the ankles.

Kyra moved her spoon through her soup, idly staring out past the cliffs to the wide ocean beyond. Kyra watched a seagull launch itself from the railing. It hung in the air as if suspended floating on the wind current. Its head moved back and forth, searching for something in the surf far below.

She tasted the warm, thick soup. He was right. It was good. Kyra stole a glance at Tarek. He was staring out at the ocean, lost in his own thoughts. Without looking at her, his hand rested gently on her thigh, his long fingers grazed the seam of

her jeans. The gesture was comforting and protective. Her heart thumped against that familiar tightness in her chest.

“Kay,” he said softly and turned to her. His eyes were sad. She shook her head.

“I know.” She said and turned away. She was leaving. It’d never been a question. It wasn’t a question. This, whatever it was, could only be temporary. As if the divine intervened in answer to her silent plea to avoid discussing the future, Tarek’s phone rang.

“Collins.” He answered. “Yes?” The chair’s legs made a scraping sound against the decking as Tarek pushed it back and stood. He walked away from the table, his phone to against his ear. Kyra watched him pace back and forth talking to whomever was on the line.

A few minutes went by before he hung up and rejoined her. “Come on.” He said holding out his hand. “We’re going to work.”