

Lotus Eaters

The water hardly stirred in this small cove as the waves crashed against the rocks outside. This time of year was nice, the water was warm and the temperature outside was perfect. Not too scorching, not too cold. The droning rumble of the ocean waves was like honey to their ears. This window of balanced weather is short lived, but enjoyable nonetheless. The solitude was nice, but it felt empty sometimes. Halik sat beneath the overhang of the stone, toes barely sticking out to be warmed up by the sun. Their lanky figure hunched over in the shade sharply, hardly fitting in that cramped space. Something was eating them inside, feelings extremely familiar that remained unresolved and voracious. They clutched their tendrils gently, letting the tips curl around their fingers. The eyes on their neck had their eyelids barely open, not particularly focusing on anything.

Halik dreamed of the Alter World, painful and skewed memories haunted them even after obtaining freedom from its clutches. The darkness was a cruel comfort, as much as it gave Halik a sense of safety, it had its own cruel qualities. The darkness was a door to let in the negativity, thoughts normally trapped beneath the surface would boil over. Old habits die hard.

Sleep became difficult at times, nightmares tumbling into chaotic nonsense- only to be forgotten once they arrived into the waking realm but the fear still lingered. The type of unease that lasted throughout the day and set the stage for poor slumber. A vicious, undeserved cycle. Halik had no permanent home for the time being, permanence wasn't a priority right now when there was a whole world out there waiting.

The sound of water gave Halik a sense of reprieve from that fear. Time was kinder these days, being hopeful for the future wasn't a fool's errand anymore. Halik saw less and less weird looks from other Skireans. Young Skireans would ask them questions, some hid behind their parents and whispered to their guardians about how they were afraid of Halik's large teeth and many eyes. In true child fashion, some questions asked were fairly tone deaf but Halik didn't mind. They knew they meant no harm, it's hard to learn new things when the information given is tainted. One memory they held dear was when someone said their green eyes were pretty. That's what inspired Halik to be better, to teach the world about themselves, the old world and the magic that was left behind.

Halik took a deep breath, letting out a long breath before standing up from the shadows and out into the world. Today was a new day.

The criss-crossed ocean lapped up at the shore, the light bouncing gently back off of the square waves. The frothy tide washed away Halik's steps and marks from their tail lightly dragging against the sand grains. Halik had recently taken up a new hobby, shell collecting. They forgot to bring a bag today but they didn't mind too much, big hands meant being able to hold more! Their ears swiveled towards the ocean, was that someone. . . Yelling?

They gazed at the horizon, a small, bright red shape splashed around in the water wildly. Their sounds were high pitched and squeaky. They were being dragged through the water and pulled by the current. They were some distance from shore away from Halik, there was still time. Halik didn't know much about swimming but they needed to do something. They began to take long strides into the water, feeling the ocean's cooler temperature sap away their body heat. Their large hands slapped the water as they swam as fast as they could, the current began to pull at their fur and limbs. They felt their heart skip a beat as they stepped past the point where they couldn't feel the bottom. They were so close, if they missed the window to intercept, there was nothing beyond the cove except open water for miles.

Halik fought the current, feeling its pull beginning to drag them, yanking them below the waterline. The eyes on their neck stung, taking on a pink hue from the salt. Their tendrils were frantically moving, rising up to grasp the air as Halik choked on a bit of water that forced its way into their mouths. Halik saw the shape draw near, feeling the thick plastic-y texture in their hand. They held on, fingers going numb as the cold stole any and all feeling. It was a child, face pale as their cries had become much quieter with each struggling breath. The temperature of the ocean and probably inhalation of seawater contributed to the child's cyanosis of the lips. The child clung to Halik, who felt the effects of adrenaline start to wear off as exhaustion made their movements sluggish.

Halik held the kid as high as they could, swimming against the current wasn't an option. Both of them would drown. Keeping the kid held as high as they could, trying not to cling on and put their weight on the child. They let the current take them, swimming parallel to the shore until the ocean began to even out, its grip slowly letting up. It felt like an eternity being forced to float and tread water. They were pulled out to open water but not as far as Halik believed they were. They could still see a sliver of land.

A loud buzzing noise began to approach the two, Halik turned to see a large water ski approach the two with a long, flat buoy hitched for them to hold on. Halik didn't remember much after that, they were so tired and thankful. Turns out a family was having their beach day on a small beach that had no lifeguard, not paying attention to their only child who happened to wander into a riptide. The only thing the parents got right was to keep their child in a life-vest.

Halik was praised for their heroic efforts, finally feeling much more seen in society beyond just a strange figure.