

on land, the end of the world is like a gunshot.

a thunderclap. a pandemonium of sights, sounds and smells.

but under the luminarian sea, the end of the world is like a spell. a quiet infection of blisters and blood and ignorant bliss. it starts as a spark, a wink of light, a tear as the stitches of reality unravels.

no one sees it. because right now, they stand in the observatory of luneda's underwater city. a haunting whale song thrums as they wait for the mirrors to project the first lunar eclipse in a thousand years on the dome's arch.

i do not watch, pining for a fancy trick of lights in the skies. instead, i fill their glasses with flutes of bubbling ale, whisking away empty plates of shellfish and stuffed clams. each task brings me closer to the ship of my dreams. one day, i will not have to watch the eclipse in the undersea. i will watch it on land, my back pressed against the panelling of my own ship, her sails unfurling with the tradewinds.

i touch the key over my heart, tracing the luminous shine of pearl, the etchings of another language engraved at the teeth, the carvings of the moon phases.

and perhaps i do not watch the eclipse, because of the sweet rogue who charmed me into a flying ship of adventure and starry nights, because of that traitorous rogue who flirted with me before holding my own blade to my throat.

the faint sliver of light implodes. under the sea, there is no warning bang and no stench of sulfur or smoke. the sweeping periwinkles of the seascape turns ultraviolet. the undulating ribbons of the kelp forests shrivels like tattered burlap. volcanic red spills from the widening crack of light, a tide of scarlet devouring coral and anemone.

a whale song stutters as a creature of puckered skin and filmed wings bursts from the widening fissure. another creature lumbers on the seafloor, built of lava rock and a tail of obsidian spines. it smashes its clubbed tail against the dome.

i don't have the chance to scream. an onslaught of water and pressure consumes me. i hit the seafloor and silt plumes around me. a burst of warmth explodes against my chest. the key. still tied around my neck, but aglow. magnetized towards... the rift.

the key tugs again, insistent.

bubbles burble past my lips, the pressure against my chest a vice. i leap, pushing off from the seascape and dive into the rift.



gravity and time seem suspended, the world a blur of iridescence as i plunge deeper into the rift. colors flash: a hint of green from an idyllic countryside, rippling monochromes from a static room. the colors blur, blending and merging into a single shaft of pure, white light.

then, i'm standing. the key rests over my heart once more and my feet are unsteady against pure crystal ribboned with iridescence in a quiet pocket of reality.

i can't breathe.

before me, he stands haloed in light. firelight curls framing his angular features, the flare of intelligence burning bright in his eyes. his own key hangs around his neck and a rogue's smile creases his lips.

i reach for the blade at my side. my touch fumbles—the blade was still too light without its identical partner, lost on that cursed ship all those moons ago—but momentum propels me to him. i lock the blade across his throat. "i will *ruin* you."

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at the sight of her, every fibre of my being halts as if it wanted to preserve this fever dream. for the very fabric of our souls are celestial bodies in their own right—hurtling through space and time, just to careen together in a beautiful, cataclysmic collision.

and i feel the agony of the impact in a single heartbeat.

“ah darling... not even a hello?” the honeyed drawl is sickeningly sweet upon my lips. “i suppose you’ve always had a flair for the dramatics....”

"save your breath. i think we're past pleasantries." a thread of burgundy slithers down my throat, the blade humming at the salted taste of my blood. "but i'm feeling generous. beg me and maybe i'll make this quick.”

“*mia cara*, you simply had to ask. i would’ve done it *gladly*.” i toss her a wink. “however, i do see how the thought of me begging must be very appealing... i know how *utterly* irresistible i am.”

“all i hear is a fool trying to flirt his way to freedom. guess what, lover boy? i don't fall for the same trick twice. don't you remember?" her lips curl."don't you remember how those pirates stormed our ship? how you *bartered* my life for yours?"

“how you asked me to *trust* you?” i flinch then. her voice was belladonna and oleander, and i let her poison sink into my bones.

at her words, the moon began to rage and the stars revolt to their demise, going fluid before crystallizing like the loathing in moondust eyes. *eyes that i will see until the day i die.*

i drink in every nuance of those fathomless dove-grey eyes, still full of intrinsic fury and utterly eternal as if it were drenched in moonshine. i drink every inch as i were a cinephile, greedy eyes traipsing over each moon-soaked scene in a useless attempt to preserve every moment.

before i don the mask of the coward she makes me out to be.

“*goodbye, roman.*”

“n-naia... wait!” i clutch at her blade like the pathetic creature i am. “the night i came back for you... i found your knife in the dungeons! you left it behind when you escaped-”

*she does not believe me.*

i let hysteria leech into my voice, a parasite that i know will draw her attention. “ch-check my satchel!”

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my touch falters.

i can read the curve of my name on his lips, the frantic flutter of his touch against mine. i hate that i long to soothe the skip of his heart, to believe him innocent. because i follow the trail of his gaze to his cursed satchel. the worn leather encircles a blade.

everything slides like the deck of a storm-slicked ship. i drop him and snatch up the other blade. the rough callouses perfectly shaped to my grip, the hilt patterning... i twist the two blades together. the interlocking mechanism clicks like the last piece to the puzzle-this is the blade i left behind.

i've weathered the soul of storms and shipwrecks and shrieking gulls, but this? it's as though the current has reversed and i am lost at sea. i cannot—

something squeezes around me, gentle at first, before it turns suffocating, twisting the key around my neck. slime oozes as a tentacle yanks me towards an open porthole in the realm. a large eye meets mine. lava weeps from the beast's eye and its armor shifts to reveal a circular mouth of rotating teeth.

i strike a jab at the tentacle. the blow bounces off its armor.

“naia!” roman. his face mirrors that last night on the pirate ship. the determined set of his jaw, the confidence with the invisible cracks. his paw stretches towards the blade in my grasp.

i cannot trust him. he left me on that ship. colors and shapes warp, and only the glint of rotating teeth remain.

*i came back for you. i was always coming back for you, naia.* though i cannot see him, i can sense him. his words burning through me, the scream building in his throat, the cracks in his composure crumbling.

i trust him one last time. i drop the blades.

the creature shrieks, reeling back a tentacle of weeping lava. i brace for the crash, but there's only warmth. only him.

“naia.. naia?” the twin blades rest beside him, warped from heat. “naia-”

a tentacle slashes through the porthole with a bloodlust, swinging for his head. i don't think.

“get down!” i grab the blade and aim for the center of the beast's eye. i throw it. the blade flies in a single glittering arch. a roar reverberates through the realm. the tentacles withdraw with a snap, the blade clatters once more.

i close my eyes. and he's all around me like a bonfire, a safe harbour. i am lost at sea once more, lost for words.

he came back for me. then and... *now*.

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i told her once to to meet me beneath a skyline speckled with rivulets of honeyed wine ghosting the lips of drunken gods. i told her once that if the world ended and our bodies turned into stardust, i would find her in every universe.

i promised i would find her... *and i did*.

the universe roars, its agony a palpable thing as entire realms fray beneath the magnitude of my stupidity. before an chasm yawns open, spewing a monstrous effigy chiseled from spun glass. its slitted eyes part to reveal iron keyholes in *eolian*, an ancient language which appeared *luminous*, alongside depictions of the sun and the moon... intertwined in an undying eclipse.

coiled around the keyhole, a phrase repeats again and again in *eolian*, each loop and curl brimming with loathing. *return the keys*.

“naia!” her name was opulent upon my lips. it tasted of how things used to be—of the salt of her homeland and heavenly bodies whose stardust had once soaked into our skin. “your key! put it in the keyhole.. now!”

her touch flits across the key around her neck, perfectly matched with its twin, *scintillating* with depictions of the sun... around my throat.

our bodies move as one as if we were a nebula, full of calamitous rage and fervid stars—undyingly beautiful as our keys click into place within the beast's stare.

*and moon dust and firelight eyes intertwined.*

it is a mirror to the fleeting embrace of the sun and the moon. their radiance pooling upon the other's flesh for as long as time permits. an eclipse.

and perhaps, *mia cara*, that is what we are.

but all eclipses end... and ours ended to the opening of another pair of eyes.

tentacles snake from the monstrous statue as it morphs from spun glass into armored flesh. its maw parts, revealing all too familiar, rotating teeth and a sickening grin as it leaps into a realm of spoiled flesh and sulphur. *taking naia with it.*

the monster laughs.

and laughs

and laughs.

because the portholes have ceased merging and are closing, sealing whatever and *whoever* is in the realm.

the alabaster of my bones scream as i run. i become a madman, my stupidity replaced by insanity.

"NAIA!" i say her name over and over and over again as if it can bring her back to me. *i can't reach her in time.*

and i can only watch as the realm before my eyes seals. shutting me out forever.

but i will make her one last promise. the same one i made beneath a skyline speckled with rivulets of honeyed wine, ghosting the lips of drunken gods.

"i will find you, naia." even if my bones give out and my flesh rots beneath my skin. even if my body turns to stardust and my voice becomes little more than an intangible baritone. "no matter how far away you are, naia. i will *always* find you."

her moondust eyes are luminous with salt, pearlescent as liquid fire cascades down her face. her gaze bores into mine... and i see loathing. *i see the accusation in her eyes.*

and she is right.

the worlds began to merge because of me. because i once told her i would find her in every universe.

because i was convinced we were more than a eclipse, more than just a fragment in time where our souls were celestial bodies destined to collide.

but in the end, i am the sun... and she is the moon. and our eclipse will forever be tainted with goodbyes.



[\(full size // artist credit\)](#)