

A Tale of Lost Turtles

The young boy and girl patiently watched the sun rise and, once their cheeks had been kissed with the brightest blend of colors, they ran for the shoreline. The coastal seaboard was empty then, the waves gently drenching the sand with their touch. Years ago as children, they had pinky swore to always keep tradition, visiting the coastline annually to experience nesting season. Turtles were the girl's favorite, and the boy wanted nothing more than to keep her happy.

They hurried towards the endless expanse of seawater, the boy glancing at the girl's beaming expression ever so often. She had a deep love for life and all of its forms, and that's what he loved most about her. As they made their way towards the beach, he held a small picnic for them firmly in his hands, as always. The boy loved surprising her and every year, whilst watching the sunset, she'd happily enjoy whatever it is he'd made for her. Tapping his shoulder, she pulled out her camera and sighed contently, pulling him from his thoughts. They'd made it.

Seashells cracked under the pressure of their feet as they trekked across the sand. She reached for his hand and interlaced their fingers without saying a word. He couldn't help but smile. Lost in thought once more, he began observing the movement of their feet. They moved at a synchronized pace, as if they were coordinated to do so. He now watched as her feet slowly came to a stop. As quickly as she had held his hand, she had now let it go. Confused and slightly alarmed, the boy looked straight ahead and quickly understood why. The turtles were missing.

The young boy and girl had been sitting at the shoreline for what seemed like forever, quietly watching the waves pull themselves up towards the sand. "Where are the turtles?" the boy pondered. He slowly looked over at the girl, hoping she'd be okay. He noticed that she'd tucked her camera away, breathing quietly and heavily. She looked at the sun with glossy eyes, and he realized there was nothing he could say that would make her feel better in that moment.

He slowly grabbed her hand and lifted her up. The boy intended on figuring out why the turtles were gone, hoping a valid reason would make the girl feel less disconcerted. He led the way to a ticket booth nearby, hoping that maybe someone would have an answer to the endless questions running through their minds. The boy looked down once more, hoping to distract himself with the coordination of their movement, but he only noticed that their feet were no longer in sync. Had the disappearance of the sea turtles really hurt her? Perhaps they had come too early, too late, too quickly. "If you're happy, I'm happy." he'd always tell her. The turtles would be there when they got back, he was sure of it. Maybe then the girl would be happy again.

The booth had a single light bulb shining overhead, and an unaccompanied employee watched as they walked towards him. The boy gestured at the girl, reassuring her that he'd figure everything out. She looked at him with a deep gaze, slowly gripping his hand before letting it go. The boy made his way towards the employee and asked about the turtles, hoping for a swift and reassuring answer. Their conversation was quick, and as the boy made his way back to the girl, he began to fidget with his fingers. He pulled her aside and relayed the employee's response to her: Most of the turtles had died, the rest being treated at a facility nearby. The girl's eyebrows were furrowed now, expressing her untold confusion. The boy tried to explain it to her as simply as possible, but he knew the truth would hurt. The coastline endured crowds of bustling beachgoers every summer, and the vast amounts of people meant vast amounts of waste left on the sand. There were people who dedicated their time to cleaning up the beach, but even they couldn't collect all of the trash at once. Small amounts of garbage and plastics washed into the ocean over time. The general public wouldn't worry over a small amount, even if it meant this small amount would begin to build up over the years, slowly spreading across the shoreline. Eventually, the plastics began to get caught around the turtles' necks, in their noses, on their shells. The boy told her what the employee finished with before ending their conversation: It

seems people prefer to leave their problems for someone else to solve, rather than walk 20 steps towards the recycling bins and toss their waste themselves. Upon hearing this the girl quietly gasped, tears rolling down her cheeks. “Who would do such a thing?” the girl wondered. The boy slowly wiped the tears from her eyes. Seeing her affliction made his heart ache.

Bringing her a picnic was something he'd loved to do. When they'd finish she would thank him for dinner and slowly make her way across the beach to take pictures. This would leave him with the task of clearing the area. It was simple and went unsaid. All he'd have to do is take their supplies and discard them in the recycling bin nearby. He'd quietly groan, wanting to spend as much time with her as he could. Growing impatient, the boy would do what he thought best: shove their supplies into a plastic bag and place it near the boardwalk. The idea stayed well-kept in his head. “Someone will come pick it up, they have people for that,” he thought. Thinking about it now, he felt a sharp sting in his bothered conscience. The boy looked in the girl's direction, the sound of his heart pounding in his ears. She's still crying and he wanted nothing more in this world than to comfort her, but how could he? He, like many others, was guilty.