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## Gone

by Mari Syrad Grieves

A faint outline, barely there. Maybe she was still dreaming. She parted her pale lips, but her mouth was too dry to form a sound, just a rasp of air escaped. Had it been enough for him to hear? She could barely see. It was so bright. White light engulfing every shadow and sharp line. She blinked her eyes trying desperately to wake up. She had to see him once last time before he disappeared. “Elliott”, the word formed on her tongue, the tip of it lightly hitting her teeth, “Elliott”. This time he heard her, opening his eyes in response to her voice, he backed out onto the balcony, his silhouette consumed by the light.

She warned him not to be deceived by appearances as they played in the waves on the dusky beach months ago. She told him she couldn’t be his; she couldn’t stay, not forever, just for now. He didn’t care and he didn’t believe her. She was life, she was fire. They had thrown themselves down onto the soft, cool sand laughing and clinging each other waiting to trace the stars with their fingertips.

“I love you, Sophie.”

The words faded on his lips and his smile turned ashen as she looked in his eyes and saw just a trace of the handsome face she had held moments ago. She tried to grab at him, his hands, his clothes, hot tears stained her cheeks; it was too late. He was gone.

It was three months before he returned. Sophie was drinking coffee in the kitchen when she looked up to see Elliott grabbing some toast from the toaster, his collar turned up and his tie still undone. He smiled at her.

“Elliott”, she exhaled, “I thought you wouldn’t come back this time.”

They had a year after that. A wonderful year during which their daughter had been born: Annabel. As time went on, Sophie convinced herself that the curse had lifted, that maybe she had made up for everything she had done wrong, for everything that was wrong with her. Elliott couldn't remember anything about the time he had been gone, he told her it was like the blink of an eye. They were so happy and so in love. But then, just like that, it was over. Sophie shouldn't have forgotten, she shouldn't have let her guard down. She went to check on the baby.

"Annabel...Annabel."

Sophie's screams were endless, primal. Annabel had vanished just like Elliott had vanished, like her sister, like her parents had vanished. "I'm so sorry", she whispered. Perhaps Annabel would come back once or maybe twice, but by the time Elliott disappeared on the bright balcony a few weeks later, it was too late, Sophie was lost to the wild that had finally come to claim her.