

Here is the boy, drowning.

In these last moments, it's not the water that's finally done for him; it's the cold. It has bled all the energy from his body and contracted his muscles into a painful uselessness, no matter how much he fights to keep himself above the surface. He is strong, and young, nearly seventeen, but the wintry waves keep coming, each one seemingly larger than the last. They spin him round, topple him over, force him deeper down and down. Even when he can catch his breath in the few terrified seconds he manages to push his face into the air, he is shaking so badly he can barely get half a lungful before he's under again. It isn't enough, grows less each time, and he feels a terrible yearning in his chest as he aches, fruitlessly, for more.

He is in full panic now. He knows he's drifted just slightly too far from shore to make it back, the icy tide pulling him out farther and farther with every wave, pushing him towards the rocks that make this bit of coast so treacherous. He also knows there is no one who'll notice he's gone in time, no one who'll raise the alarm before the water defeats him. He won't be saved by chance, either. There are no beachcombers

or tourists to dive in from the shoreline to save him, not this time of year, not in these freezing temperatures.

It is too late for him.

He will die.

And he will die alone.

The sudden, gasping horror of knowing this makes him panic even more. He tries again to break the surface, not daring to think that it might be his last time, not daring to think much at all. He forces his legs to kick, forces his arms to heave himself upward, to at least get his body the right way round, to try and grasp another breath just inches away—

But the current is too strong. It allows him tantalizingly near the surface but spins him upside down before he can get there, dragging him closer to the rocks.

The waves toy with him as he tries again.

And fails.

Then, without warning, the game the sea seems to have been playing, the cruel game of keeping him just alive enough to think he might make it, that game seems to be over.

The current surges, slamming him into the killingly hard rocks. His right shoulder blade snaps in two so loudly he can hear the *crack*, even underwater, even in this rush of tide. The mindless intensity of the pain is so great that he calls out, his mouth instantly filling with freezing, briny sea water. He coughs against it, but only drags more into his lungs. He curves into the pain of his shoulder, blinded by it, paralyzed by its intensity. He is unable to even try and swim now, unable to brace himself as the waves turn him over once more.

MORE THAN THIS

*Please*, is all he thinks. Just the one word, echoing through his head.

*Please.*

The current grips him a final time. It rears back as if to throw him, and it dashes him head first into the rocks. He slams into them with the full, furious weight of an angry ocean behind him. He is unable to even raise his hands to try and soften the blow.

The impact is just behind his left ear. It fractures his skull, splintering it into his brain, the force of it also crushing his third and fourth vertebrae, severing both his cerebral artery and his spinal cord, an injury from which there is no return, no recovery. No chance.

He dies.