

# The Surface Of The Sun

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“Make sure he’s ready.” I pressed, once more.

Marie laughed to herself. That subtle laugh that made you wonder if you’d missed the joke entirely. “You’re worked up over nothing.”

I stepped across the small room, closing the gap, and rested my hands on her shoulders.

“Promise?”

“Fine. Promise.” She begrudgingly agreed, rolling her eyes.

“It’s like the world falls apart when you’re not around to babysit him. Look at you, your hair is only half done, and you’re all... frazzled. Focus on yourself. I’ll work on the rest.” She said, before slipping back out into the wedding.

Marie had always been the voice of reason. At every turn, she’d been there to offer me a pint of ice cream and a gentle ‘told you so’. But, as was the nature of best friends, she hadn’t protested when I’d invited her to be the maid of honour at my wedding. In fact, she’d been the most important force at play in all of this. She had been the one to pick out my dress when I was torn between the two, she had been the one to put together the flower arrangements when our florist flaked last minute, and she had been the one to suggest I do my own hair and makeup after we couldn’t find it in our budget. Admittedly, I was impressed. Stubborn Marie had been uncharacteristically docile and complicit at every turn. The times she had been herself were when it had worked out for the best. She had barely even taken an opportunity to mock my fiancé. I gave her a pass on the latter today, and she seemed to be enjoying it. Besides, she hadn’t been entirely wrong. The world was falling apart, though my fiancé and I had nothing to do with it.

I couldn’t help but think that part of the reason Marie had been so accepting throughout this process was because she knew I wouldn’t have another opportunity to do this, much less have time to regret it. The reception would be over, and if time allowed it, my husband and I would drive back to our hotel room, and the world would implode in a blinding explosion of pure energy. I’d die happy, and she’d die right.

“He’s ready. And tipsy, the poor thing.” The door opened a crack, and Marie peeked through.

“You decent? Can I come in?”

“Sure, I’m just finishing up my hair.” I replied. I heard her approach me from behind, placing her hands on my shoulders as her reflection appeared in the mirror alongside mine.

“You look beautiful.” She whispered.

“You really think so?” I asked, turning around. I wasn’t sure what she saw. I’d put on a few pounds since we’d met, and my makeup was all wrong. I looked cheap.

“Of course. Anyone who doesn’t think so isn’t worth your time.” It would seem corny coming from anyone else, but Marie was rarely disingenuous.

“It seems so futile,” I shrugged, “None of this will matter by tomorrow.”

Marie messed up her face. It was clear that she was trying to justify it to herself. “There isn’t a tomorrow. If it matters now, then it matters.”

I opened my mouth to speak pre-emptively, but couldn’t think of a way to respond. In all honesty, I wasn’t sure what mattered now. It wasn’t my makeup, or the flowers, or even the dress. It wasn’t how I looked or who I was marrying.

Outside the room, something shattered, and Marie was summoned.

“Sorry,” She laughed, shaking her head, “Duty calls.”

I watched her leave, but couldn’t find the words to say goodbye. Not now. Not yet.

The part I couldn’t seem to wrap my head around about all of this was the fact that Marie hadn’t asked for a thing in return. The world was ending, and she had opted to plan my wedding instead of checking off whatever remained on her bucket list. Of course, I’d been so wrapped up in my own problems that I may have neglected her. Though had Marie felt used at any point, she would have told me on the spot.

Though, perhaps, I thought; she felt she hadn’t been kind enough when there was no imminent threat present. Perhaps this was an unneeded ‘sorry’.

Perhaps we both felt pretty cheap, for what it was worth.

“Hey, I brought you a chocolate strawberry. You seem stressed.” Marie laid a small plate in front of me on the vanity. I stared at it, not particularly hungry.

She laughed, gesturing outside the door. “Best man broke an expensive-looking vase. I’d be mad, but... It’s the end of the world. Nobody cares about a vase. They’re almost ready for you out there, by the way. It all came together. We did it.”

“We did it.” I nodded, standing up and scooping her into a tight hug. We lingered for a moment, before I finally let go.

“Marie, what’s wrong with me?”

Her eyes turned sad. “Nothing. What are you talking about?”

“I mean, it’s our last day on earth, and I’m making you fuss over me and bring me strawberries. We’re at my wedding, for goodness sake.” I told her, frantically, “You’ve been amazing, and I made it my day. I haven’t even considered what your final wish is. What do you want?”

Marie wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her dress, eyes flickering towards the floor.

“I just want to see you happy.”

The music began, and the lights lowered in the church.

“They’re ready. Get out there.” Marie took me by the hand and led me outside. Light burst through the stained glass windows, and candles filled the aisle. Everyone turned in the pews to look, and I felt my nerves melt away.

The priest began the opening prayer, and only because I was looking past the groom did I see the light expanding past the horizon.

In seconds, the dark reception was hot and white like the surface of the sun. Nobody was screaming. Nobody was speaking. There was no time for anything but hasty acceptance. As the light spread over every surface in the church, I turned to look at Marie.

She was smiling back at me.

