

*The Siren*  
Ariel Niforatos

She walks in endless fields of sorrow in a world she cannot name and through streets that end without destinations. She dances through lonely alleys and backstreets with only the wind pushing her forward and blowing through her hair with an illusion of grace. An invisible force pulls her along with slack marionette strings as she stumbles through a kaleidoscope of nightmares.

She remembers him, the one with empty eyes and a voice as smooth as honey. He whispered soft promises, deals made in the dead of night in rooms decaying with the stench of past crimes. "I can make you forget," he said. "I can make it all go away."

Her body is covered in stories, tattooed with ugly purple trails that creak through her flesh and burn with the ache of remembrance. She is a poet, a siren, the muse of a city that uses her up and spits her back out into the lonely and forgotten when it is done with her. She is a princess in name only to a world that churns in shadows of grey and black and turns its royalty into demons.

She is tired of the endless night, tired of the demons disguising themselves as princes, tired of the monsters slithering in the dark with readied fangs and sharpened claws. She is tired of remembering.

He held out a vial that sparkled with eerily beautiful translucence. It was the end, he told her. The end of everything, an emptiness that would take and take and take until it was finally full. She felt the coolness of the vial in her palm and the crimson thread of her life pulled taut as the Fates sharpened their scissors in ecstasy.

"Anything," she whispered and the emptiness was hers. It was a hunger that never died, a free fall that never ended, an hourglass that slowly drained her memories one drop at a time. The shadows became hazy, the demons no longer had faces, and the world filtered through in murky slices of grey.

Her kaleidoscope spins and spins until the shadows fade and another world emerges. She no longer hears the cries of tortured souls or the hissing of the demons, and she no longer feels the venom slowly spreading in her scars.

She walks through fields covered with blood-red roses and pricks her fingers on their thorns. She dreams of a place filled with color, a city emptied out until she is the only one left. She is nobody's muse, nobody's siren. She lives in a kingdom all her own, a princess ascending her spiral tower into the furthest depths the clouds will take her.

Each day the thread becomes tauter, the demons get further away, and the spiraling staircase loses itself inside clouds that all look the same. She knew what it would cost. She knew that everything has its price and that the price of her memories would be her soul.

“You can go anywhere you want,” he promised.

She settles down into fields filled with the cloying scent of golden daffodils until she can no longer remember anything at all. She is a princess and her kingdom awaits her. She falls into a hundred-year slumber from which no prince will rouse her, knowing that she will never wake again.