

## A Story in Lisbon (Inspired by Fado Music)

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She comes out with the moon, her skin of alabaster shining under its pale light, as she walks through narrow streets paved with stones. Her dress adorn cigarette burns and her lips the fire that light them, verses written on her arms and legs. She doesn't care when people stare, when she takes pens out on the bus. She writes unfinished symphonies on the midnight line, in hopes that she'll find them complete in the morning.

She wastes away her hours in dusty bars with tables of oak. She sits by the fireplace with a glass of cherry liqueur, writing poems with black ink and throwing the most beautiful ones in the flames, watching as they turn to ash. She tips the waitress with gold coins more than a century old. The girl knows better than to ask where she found them, but she swears they smell like soaked wood and the port after midnight.

She doesn't talk. The people know her, and what she wants. If you have an spare ink bottle or a beautiful pen, you may sit and watch her write, but don't talk. If she likes you, she might murmur the melodies she's thinking of, those song only she gets to hear. The men buy her drinks and the women braid her hair in exchange for a glimpse into her mind, but she's only ever done it once, for the flower girl that put a carnation behind her ear.

She's always the first one after dusk and the last one before dawn, putting off the fireplace with what's left of her third glass. She walks barefoot to the port, watching the sun rise with her shoes and a song in hand. Fishermen wave at her as they set off to sea and she waves back, the morning breeze tangling her black hair. She throws the last paper of the night to the water, gifting her song to the lovers swallowed by the waves.

Sometimes she sings, if she's had a drink too many. The regulars stare as she makes her way to the stage, the owner running in the back to fetch a microphone. The lights dim and silence covers the room like a blanket, warm and cozy. The new costumers don't budge though. To them she is no different than any other woman, getting on stage to vent her pain and drown the sorrows in alcohol. Until she opens her mouth.

When she sings, time slows down. Her voice is soft like rose petals with the intensity of waves crashing against the shore, making the nightingales blush in shame. She is hypnotic, honey dripping from her lips as the whole room stands still. Her songs are old, hidden in the wrinkles of time so that only the elder guitarist knows to play them, putting out his third smoke of the night.

They speak of the sea, at times gentle and others cold and heartless, drowning people mercilessly. A maiden came to her one day, asking back the lover the sea stole from her. Not daring break her heart, the sea made the maiden a siren, and told her to go search for her beloved sailor. She sings of

the siren's endless search to the world's edge, and the loneliness in her heart, how she wishes to fill the emptiness inside her with the kiss she steals from sailors, along with their last breath.

The notes fall gently off the guitar and fill the room with a soft ambience; the echoes of waves as she reaches the highest note and suddenly stops, leaving the audience with a emptiness that can only be filled by her sorrowful voice. And as the song ends, reality comes rushing back like a storm on a sunny day. The applause doesn't come immediately. They need a moment for the fog to clear, to regain control of their arms, for the taste of salt and cherry to fade away.

But when it does, it comes like a rain of flowers, a storm of praise brushing against her cheek as she makes her way out, cutting through the crowd that has gathered at the door. She walks away without looking back, tears gathering in her eyes as the sounds of the bar grow distant. She gets on an empty bus, last row, knees pressed to her chest. Even her sobs sound melodic, as she gazes at the city moving by. The symphony written on the wall is still incomplete.