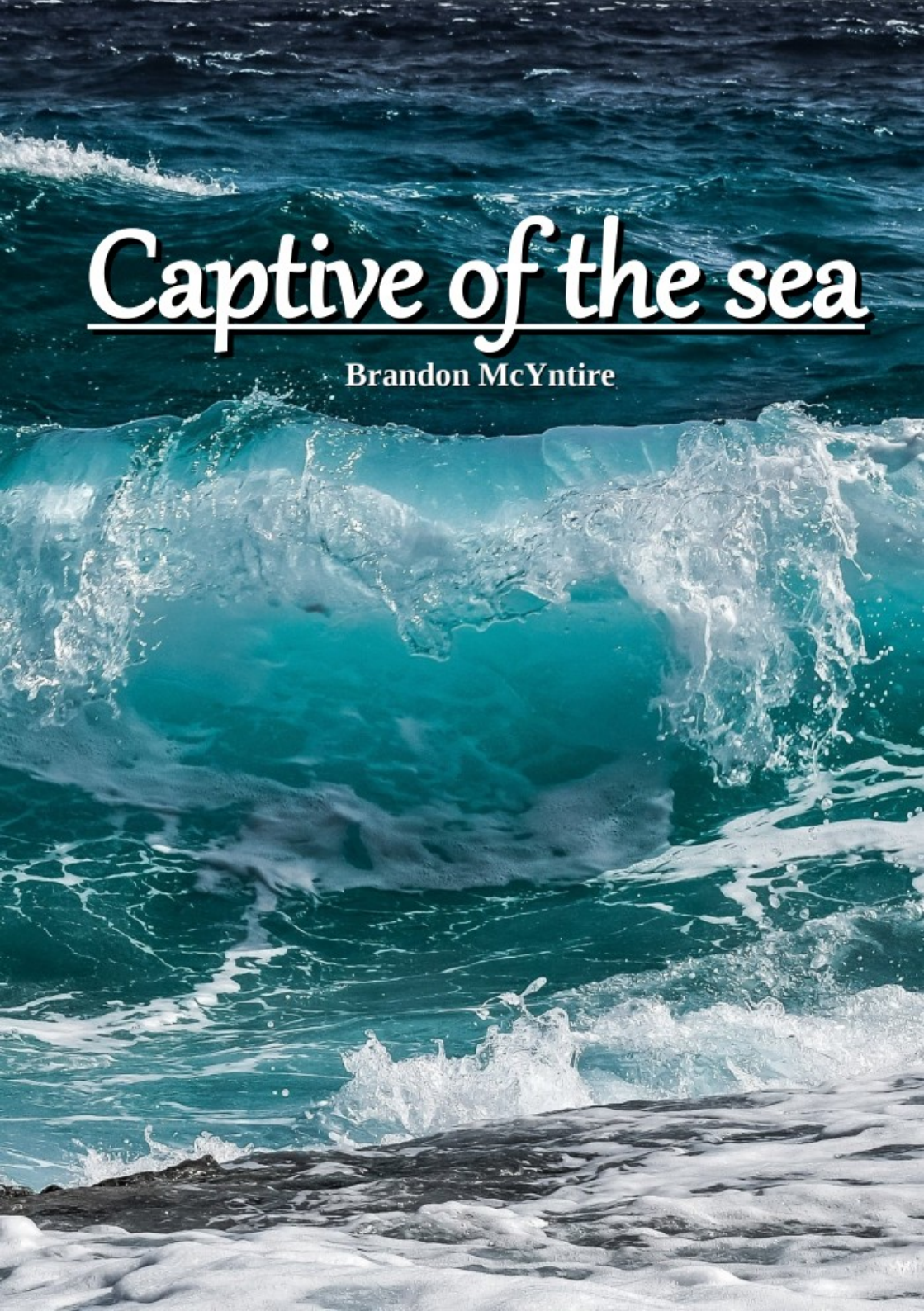
Captive of the sea
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"The Cliff of Love"

The journey took up to twelve hours, but it was worth it. The apartment at the end of the cliff looked like something out of a postcard – the sea stretched to the horizon, the sun slowly lowered to the surface. As soon as they settled in, they comfortably settled on the terrace and silently enjoyed the breathtaking scenery. The first evening was perfect. As if cut out of a fairy tale. They were lulled by the atmosphere of the house, full of pleasant warmth and affection, interspersed with the muffled sounds of the outside world. Candles sparkled on the table, their flames danced to the rhythm of delicious music, which gently complemented the quiet conversation. Their eyes met, full of understanding and shared joy. Smiles appeared on both of their faces, which appeared again and again with every touch of hands, with every look deep into their eyes. Words were not enough to express what their hearts felt – tenderness, passion, desire for each other's company.

The entire evening passed in a loving atmosphere of two people expressing their affection for each other with tender touches and sincere words. Every second was like a gem stored in memory for eternity.

The first evening was just the beginning of a beautiful journey that two hearts decided to experience together. A journey full of love, understanding, and priceless memories.

"First vacation"

They finally found time. She was Lorin – a beautiful thirty-something with long dark hair and a baby face that seemed to have fooled time. He was Josh – a taller, thinner man, a spice merchant whose words smelled just like his goods. Their first vacation together on the Adriatic was a dream come true. An apartment on a cliff, a view of the sea and a sun that seemed to shine just for them. In the evening they sat on the terrace belonging to the apartment, she leaned her head on his shoulder, he told her about the scents of basil and saffron. They made love, laughed, walked along the beach, where the hustle and bustle of tourists mixed with the murmur of foamy sea waves. It was perfect.

"Apartment by the sea"

The first day was like a dream. The apartment smelled new, the bed was soft, she joked, they laughed. They made love, then walked along the coast. In the hot evening, the sea was still full of people, even though the light of the lanterns was already reflected on the darkening surface. This was how they imagined the ideal vacation.

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But not what came a few days later. Something had changed. She was silent. She sat on the terrace, staring at the sea. She didn't look at him, nor did she answer.

"Honey?" Nothing. He tried again. And again. The apartment became a prison. Gray days began for him, the beach emptied, the sun seemed to forget to rise. All he heard was the sound of the sea. He couldn't see himself in the mirror. There was a candle on the table, a photograph next to it. Lorin and Josh.

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They walked along the beach together, the gentle sea breeze caressing their happy faces and the golden rays of

the sun mingling in their hair. Their hearts beat to the rhythm of the waves gently crashing against the shore. Their first vacation together by the sea, their dream finally came true. Lorin dreamed of romantic walks hand in hand with Josh, evening bonfires on the beach and long conversations under the starry sky. Josh longed for adventures together, trying new foods and discovering hidden corners in this exotic paradise.

The first days were exactly as they had imagined. They entered the turquoise waters, built sandcastles, learned about foreign cultures and tasted delicious seafood. They spent their evenings by candlelight on the terrace or in romantic restaurants, where they confessed their love. They were united by the enthusiasm of the moments they were experiencing, which was enhanced by the aromatic scent of exotic flowers growing nearby.

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But suddenly everything changed.

It was morning when Lorin woke up to silence. Josh was no longer beside her. The bed next to her was empty. And Josh? She ran out onto the terrace and looked around,

but she didn't see anyone anywhere. Concern slowly turned to fear. The cruel truth was emerging.

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When Josh returned late that afternoon, his face was pale and his eyes were joyless. He explained to Lorin that he needed to take a walk alone to sort out his thoughts. But she wouldn't understand him. From that moment on, the air between them thickened. Lorin withdrew into herself. And even when he tried to find the reason for the change, Lorin refused to talk to him.

Two hearts that had been beating in unison just a few days ago fell silent, silent. A holiday that was supposed to remind them of their love suddenly turned into a struggle with unknown fear and immeasurable emptiness.

Josh tried to save their relationship, but without answers from Lorin, he was helpless. The sun, which had previously pleasantly warmed their faces, suddenly burned like a reminder of loss. The sea, which had symbolized their endless love, had changed its character and now irritated them, exasperated them with its profound incomprehensibility.

"Noise"

Sometimes Josh went to the beach. It was deserted. Every time. Still dark, as if the sun had forgotten to rise. An unbearable silence, broken only by the sound of the sea – monotonous, annoying, endless. He walked among the empty loungers, but he hoped to see someone, looked for a familiar face, wanted to catch at least one glance. No one anywhere. He returned to the apartment. Lorin was sitting on the bed, her eyes red with tears, her hands folded in her lap.

"Why aren't you talking to me?" he asked.

She was silent. He wanted to hug her, but something prevented him from touching her. There was a wet towel hanging in the bathroom. Just for her. She hadn't even looked at Josh since yesterday.

She sat on the terrace, drinking coffee, leafing through a book as if he wasn't there. The beach umbrellas swayed in the wind by the roaring sea, the children laughed, screamed, but she was lost in her thoughts... she didn't notice anything, she was very sad.

“Honey?” he tried to talk to her. Nothing. Not a twitch. Josh walked past her, touched her shoulder—a chill went through her. Something was different, wrong.

Arousing bad feelings. The air was heavy, full of unanswered questions and unspoken words. He walked past the mirror on the wall. He couldn’t see himself in the mirror.

Suddenly he remembered. The waves. The moment he had dived too deep. Although apartment 12 was still the same, he was no longer the same.

"Memorable moment"

They sat together on a blanket, surrounded by the sound of the sea, the constant chatter and laughter of tourists. The air was salty, warm, as if the very essence of summer surrounded them. They didn’t need words. Just being was enough. When he stood up, he kissed her forehead and said, “I’m going to get a little wet.”

The water was cold, but he smiled, turned to her, and winked. She laughed and waved at him. It was a moment Lorin would remember forever. Because it was the last. The waves closed in on him, the laughter seemed to die down. She sat on the same blanket for days after that. The sea roared, but Josh never returned. The cliffside apartment remained silent. And she had to learn to live with the fact that some moments are forever—because they are the last.

"From the apartment to silence"

He woke up in the morning. It was dark everywhere. Silence. The curtains didn't move, the sun didn't shine through the window. The apartment seemed deserted, even though he was still in it. He sat on the edge of the bed, but she wasn't there. He hadn't seen her for a few days. No trace, no words, just her scarf forgotten on the chair. Where had she gone? Why had she left him alone?

Memories came flooding back to him. Of the beginning of the vacation—the laughter, the touching, the walks on the beach. Of that evening when he decided to go for a swim. The water was cold, but he smiled, turned, winked at her. A memorable moment. And then... nothing. When he returned, she was different. She was sitting on the bed, her face in her hands, her eyes empty.

"Why aren't you talking to me?" he asked. She was silent. "What did I do? We weren't arguing..."

But she didn't look at him. Not once. He was pacing back and forth around the apartment, as if searching for answers.

He went out onto the beach, which was empty. The waves were crashing and rustling, but they didn't bring him any pleasant feelings or joy. The tourists had

disappeared. The sun wasn't shining. Everything remained gray... lifeless.

In the apartment, he couldn't see himself in the mirror on the wall. He froze. There was a candle on the dresser. Next to it was a photograph. His face. The date. He remembered. The wave that swept him away. The silence beneath the surface. His last breath.

The apartment was the same. But he was no longer among the living. And Lorin... she was just learning to live without him. Every morning she sat on the terrace, staring blankly at the sea, where she had lost him forever.

And he... he was still there. In the darkness. In the silence. In the memory.

"Invisible barrier"

They sat in the apartment, surrounded by a silence that wasn't peaceful but suffocating. She stared at the table motionless, her fingers intertwined, her eyes occasionally closing as if trying to return to the place where he had been with her.

He sat on the edge of the couch in the small living room where they had once laughed, where they had planned trips, where they had whispered about their dreams. But now it was just her—and him. But she couldn't see him.

He didn't realize it at first.

"Darling, why are you silent?" he said again and again, his voice full of pain and incomprehension.

She didn't even move.

He felt an invisible wall grow between them. Not out of anger, not out of remorse, but in connection with something he couldn't name.

"How did I hurt you? Why did you leave me?" he repeated into the void, into the space from which no more answers came.

He noticed the reflection in the dark glass of the display case. There was no silhouette of him in it. No features of his face. Just her, Lorin, the love of his life and only love – alone.

He began to remember. That moment in the seawater. The cold that surrounded him. The silence below the surface. How he tried to swim out... but couldn't.

Only then did he realize that she had never left him.

She was still there. She sat, silent, suffering.

For several days, she would wake up to an empty apartment, still smelling his scent. In the evening, she would sit on the couch where she had hugged him for the last time.

And he was there too. In the darkness. In the silence. In the space between two worlds.

Their love didn't fade away. It just moved to a dimension where words are no longer enough.

And she... was just learning to live without him.

Conclusion

Sometimes extensive and profound ideas can be expressed in one or two sentences. That's what the term "microstory" (or micro-narrative) is for. Such a story can be squeezed into 300 words. But I couldn't do it in this case either. In the end, I exceeded more than a thousand words. I claim that it is truly an art. It is a hundred times more difficult to write a story in such a short text that it is concise, captivating and brings all the important situations closer in the sentences themselves. I wrote this short story, which can no longer be called a microstory, based on an event that happened on vacation in Croatia. Although I only watched from a distance how rescuers circled the helicopter above the sea, it was clear to me that something serious had happened. Although only weak information reached me, after arriving home I put it together, I thought about it. Gradually, a short but powerful story emerged for me. It was written by life itself. Sometimes even the most beautiful moments or days can suddenly bring the greatest sadness into the lives of carefree people. I played with words and sentences for a long time that would best describe these moments. I often sat and stared into space. I tried to find a combination of words that would realistically describe the situation. It is not easy. Only now, after all the books I have written to date, have I

understood how difficult it is. That is why I decided to try to grapple with this genre and not stop until my story reaches the standard I set for myself, that is, 300 words. I may never succeed, but it is a challenge for me. And so I cannot ignore it. My challenger has become the micro-story itself. I offer you the story that I originally wanted to write based on this challenge. I still have a long way to go to achieve this goal.