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If I Had 9 Lives

I would spend the first one drowning;
feel the slow-minutes trickle down
as the salt-water seeped into my lungs.
There would be something serene about drowning,
in the huge-ocean
all by myself.
At last, I'd be in harmony with the sea,
my shadow of fear washed-away.
And so, I could spend the rest of my eight lives
living by the ethereal-ocean.

My-second and third-lives would be spent
listening to each of my parents' stories.
The weight of their worries-and-regrets;
the outline of their hopes-and-dreams.
In my second life, I would listen to my mother's quiet courage,
tucked between chores and checklists.
In my third life, I would tune into my father's unspoken regrets,
hidden between the pauses in the words
I would hold their hands while they lay on their deathbeds,
as they take their last breaths,
I'd carry their wisdom
into every life that followed.

My fourth life,
I would take my parents' advice.
Clock in every nine and leave every five.
Wear beige cardigans,
even though my favorite color is banana-yellow,
and smile politely at anyone and everyone.
I would build a family that feels like a warm, predictable song.
Marry someone safe.
Raise two kids that make their beds in the morning.
Walk the dog every Sunday afternoon.

Routine would feel like an echo of the waves,
crashing on the shore, over-and-over.
"Maybe this is happiness," I'd think.
But late at night, when sleep couldn't find me
I'd stare at the ceiling, thinking wild, impossible things.
Dancing in the rain,
dying my hair the color of sky-at-sunset,
I'd always quietly wonder
what else I could have done with my life,
my *fire*.

After 4 lives of being a good girl,
of doing exactly what I would've been told to do,
I'd want to break free.
Rebel.
I would slip away from home at a young age,
before the world named me.
Driven only by an ache I couldn't exactly name.
Running-away.
From-anyone.
From-anything.
From-everything.
I'd vanish into the forest,
where pine needles would kiss my bare feet,
and moonlight would become my only mirror,
where names didn't matter.
In the outside world though, I would be known as "The-Girl-Raised-by-Wolves".
I'd be drenched in freedom.
The wolves didn't ask me who I wanted to be,
they just let me be *me*.
Soon, by my thirty-second birthday,
I would return to the "normal" life once again.
But I would soon realize that humans were doing it all wrong,
and the wolves were right all along.

In my sixth life, I wouldn't care about

what anyone would've thought of me.

I would stay out late
and sleep in until two.

My spirit, weary, sought stillness.

An eternity within the hour,
every hour.

The

wisdom-and

duty-and

rebellion,

all would lead me here,

to this state of exhaustion.

The-smell-of-stale-air,

the-silence-that-was

oh-so loud.

Stuck in a tidepool of my-own-making,

where the water never moves and nothing ever seems to grow.

And then,

I'd hear the melody of an ice cream truck outside my window.

"I used to love chocolate ice cream," I'd think.

I would step outside

and notice all the wonderful things about life once again:

sunsets, children's laughter, waves on the beach,

and the taste of chocolate ice cream.

Suddenly, it would be my seventh life,

I wouldn't have realized how much time had already passed.

And just as suddenly, I would feel sad.

Sadness curling at the thought of only having two lives left,

even though that's still one more than any other person gets.

"I'm more than lucky," I would tell myself.

"Snap out of it," I would tell myself.

But I still would feel that bittersweet sadness

wrapping around me like fog

over and over.

Before every candlelit-cake

and after every midnight-hush.
I had lived through six-lives already,
wasn't that enough?
It wasn't grief
or even pain.
It was just a silent aching,
like a name I once knew but couldn't recall.
I would die with the melancholy,
still clinging to me.

During my eighth life,
I'd feel the urgency to live my last couple of lives
like they *matter*.
I would move to New York City and buy a tiny apartment,
forgetting everything I had once done to move by the ocean in my first life.
I'd become an author;
writing stories and poems in little cafes
tucked just around the corner of my home.
Though I'd spend the whole of my author life not gaining much traction,
I would be content.
Pages filled with words and
mugs filled with coffee
coloring my days.

My ninth life
I would move to the beach,
back to the ethereal-ocean.
I would feel the serenity all over again.
I'd be in harmony with the sea once again.
I would go back to swimming,
in the vast ocean
all by myself.
And as the tide would pull me gently-under,
I would look back.
Each life,
a thread in the fabric of who I've become.

I'd come to understand, finally,
that everything I'd learn through each of my lives
mattered.

In my first life I'd learn:

sometimes what I dread most is simply misunderstood.

In my second and third life I'd learn

the people who came before me shaped more of me than I realize.

In my fourth life I'd learn:

a picture-perfect life isn't always the best life.

In my fifth life I'd learn:

I must lose myself in order to truly find myself.

In my sixth life I'd learn:

happiness is always there, if I just look for it.

In my seventh life I'd learn

to cherish the small moments in any life I've been dealt.

And finally, in my eighth life I'd learn:

happiness can come in many forms: books-coffee-solitude.

I'd smile, not with regret, but with a knowing gratitude.

After nine long, hard lives I would finally realize

the true meaning of life:

"It is good to have an end to journey toward;

but it is the journey that matters, in the end."