

Ariel C. Williams  
(352)519-4704  
ariel.williams@yahoo.com

about 500 words

## **The Sun**

**by Ariel C. Williams**

Sand bled through her toes at every flick of the ankle, each grain of salt representing a week spent in intensive therapy. When the wind blew east, energy and compassion overcame her, while at the west, depression and suicide knocked. The voices in her head were constant and loud, something that would make anyone a little batty.

She inched closer to the water; butt still on the sand, submerged in icy water. Waiting for Robert to treat her with respect and dignity got her nowhere. Instead, she sat in the freezing cold with too much pride to accept love from a co-worker like Joe. After all, she'd met Robert at her previous job, so fully trusting male co-workers felt dangerous.

Joe and a few others from the new office left Samantha on the beach. She contemplated staying there, no matter how high or cold the water could get, to find any semblance of peace.

Upon making her final decision, placing her belongings on the driest spot around, she heard a thunderous voice. It scared her, almost making her choke on the water she'd began to enjoy tasting.

“You said you were going to join us at The Hub. Now you’re soaked and wet. What gives, Manny?” Joe said.

“I changed my mind, Joe. You all were engaged in conversation already. Plus, the table looked full,” Samantha said.

“From here, the table does look full, but I can assure there’s a dry seat awaiting you next to me. I want you with me. With all of us.”

“Really? I was hoping you’d all forget I said I was coming. I got caught up in this beautiful water.”

Somehow, he could always tell when she needed something. Samantha turned away from Joe wondering if he’d caught the symbolism in her last sentence. It represented what her mother called “the worst” – another attempt at suicide over Robert’s mess.

“How could I forget about you, Samantha? The only reason I left you is because I could tell you needed a moment to yourself. Now it has passed. Let’s get you into some dry clothes and at the table.”

He gently helped her up. It seemed like Joe knew Samantha from a previous life. He was always available at the right time. She never thanked him for it aloud, but she noticed it and was grateful for the goodness he brought into her life. While he was the strong one in their dynamic, being near Samantha – at work, offsite events, the not-so-accidental run-ins at the bookstore – offered him something special, too. Neither of them understood what it was but at times like these, they didn’t question it.

Clumped sand rinsed off Samantha’s clothes, making her feel like a new woman. Safe, secure, a sense of belonging established. The abusive and adulterous road past Robert would be long but with angels like Joe around, she would be fine. Samantha felt the sun graze her cheeks.

With a smile, she darted off with Joe toward The Hub, tasting the seasoned fries and ketchup-hamburgers before arrival. For the first time in ages, Samantha felt like she mattered.

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