

I Have Drowned an Entire Ecosystem, Now Will You Go On a Date
With Me
By Maya Lerma

EXT. DEEP SEA - DAY

It is a surreal image of an ocean, all swirling lights and dancing colors. There is a central figure, ambiguously anthropomorphic, flowy in all the wrong places. More a part of the sea than human. They are holding a cartoonish rotary phone, with a wire attached to nothing in particular. This is PERILOUS. They laugh with exuberance, voice high and loud.

PERILOUS

-and so I said, "I will shatter you
thousandfold, scatter each fragment of
your soul to the farthest reaches of my
domain, and watch as you are torn
asunder by the abyss."

As Perilous again collapses into a giggling fit, kicking their feet and rolling around, the screen divides and we see DESOLATE, on the other end of the phone.

They are angled and harsh where Perilous is free-flowing, their sea is dark where Perilous' is brilliant and glittering. They hold another rotary phone, but most of their attention is directed toward the notepad in their lap, in which they are writing something unknown.

DESOLATE

Remind me of their crime, again?

PERILOUS

Crime? Why, what greater crime is there
than being annoying?

DESOLATE

Annoying you, I'd imagine.

Perilous laughs.

PERILOUS

Yes, I think that part was rather
implied.

DESOLATE

...What a devastating fate it would be,
to truly hurt your feelings.

Desolate stalls after speaking, holding the notepad up with their pen at the ready. They seem to be waiting for something in particular.

PERILOUS

And what a thought to have. Do you intend to hurt my feelings, Desolate?

DESOLATE

(solemnly)

I wouldn't dream of it.
(beat) Perry.

Perilous chokes on nothing, sputtering.

PERILOUS

Perry?! That's horrendous! Don't bother dreaming of hurting my feelings, you just did!

Desolate starts taking notes.

DESOLATE

I gather you find it distasteful, then.

PERILOUS

No need to gather! I'm telling you I hate it!

Desolate faithfully notes it down. Perilous listens through the phone, rolling around and bemoaning the terrible nickname.

PERILOUS (CONT'D)

(whining)

Did we not already decide on Louis?

DESOLATE

I can recall you deciding.
(beat) There is no 'Louis' in your name.

PERILOUS

Sure there is. Just slide the 'I' over some.

DESOLATE

I rather like the 'I' where it is.

PERILOUS
(sighing)
Of course you do.

Perilous seems resigned to the matter, reclining back and relaxing to the soft sounds of pen on paper. There is a peaceful silence.

PERILOUS (CONT'D)
What would you recommend, then, in regards to punishment? Since you dislike my methods.

DESOLATE
I do not dislike them, Perilous. I am merely more accustomed to disinterested mercy, in my seas.

PERILOUS
You find me cruel, then? Do you pity all the poor creatures that live in my tormentous sea?

DESOLATE
You are putting words in my mouth.

PERILOUS
You don't deny I am cruel.

DESOLATE
I cannot deny what is-
(beat) Are you teasing me, Perilous?

There is a very suspicious stifled breath on Perilous' end.

PERILOUS
I wouldn't dream of it.
(beat) Desi.

Desolate breathes. It is unclear if they are sighing, or something else.

DESOLATE
I dare say... You don't have to bother dreaming of it.

Perilous burst into hysterical laughter. This goes on for a while. Desolate seems oddly content to listen.

PERILOUS

(breathless)

Ah, you really know how to make a sea split, don't you?

DESOLATE

(curt)

You entertain yourself more than I.

PERILOUS

Oh dear, have I hurt your feelings this time? I didn't mean to go about it so harshly/ really-

DESOLATE

You did not. Merely... I do not think you are so cruel, Perilous.

PERILOUS

Well, of course not. Am I any more cruel than yourself, after all? Are my vicious jaws worse than your forsaken ruins? Are my towering spines worse than your abyssal trenches? I cannot say, but nor can you.

DESOLATE

I... yes, that was most of what I wished to convey.

PERILOUS

You are a million years too young to be telling me that, Desolate.

Desolate stalls for a moment, looking into the receiver and readying their notepad.

DESOLATE

Do you find me... too young?

PERILOUS

(baffled)

What do you mean?

DESOLATE

Do you think of me as a charge to watch over, or an equal?

PERILOUS

That's... I'm not sure it could be decided so cleanly either/ way-

DESOLATE

But if you had to choose one? What would it be?

The brilliant scattering lights of Perilous' ocean dim and slow. The fish that dart around stop and tremble, accustomed to their sea's fickle moods.

PERILOUS

I... I cannot say. You are certainly far younger than I, and I'm sure there was a time I considered you something to be coddled but... I cannot recall much of it.

DESOLATE

I doubt I will ever forget, but yes, it has been a long time since those days.

PERILOUS

Yes... Most eons now it feels that I am the petulant child and you my minder. You'll have to forgive this ancient sea for tormenting you so.

Perilous speaks lightly, the teasing reawakening in their tone, but Desolate does not react with the same enthusiasm.

DESOLATE

Do you often think of yourself as a tormentor?

PERILOUS

(startled)

...I'm not sure what you mean.

Desolate's sea writhes and thrums. They hold the phone with a pensive look. They decide all at once how to word their concern, discarding their notepad to the trench below.

DESOLATE

We are equal in cruelty, within the realm of our domains. You said it, just earlier... No, you said you could not say it. Did you mean that we are equal, or that you know which is more cruel but could not say it?

PERILOUS

...You are in a remarkably philosophical mood today, Desi.

DESOLATE

Perilous. I wonder often if you foolishly imagine yourself to be more terrible than I.

PERILOUS

(scandalized)

Foolish?! We really will be equals in cruelty if you keep that up!

DESOLATE

So you did think we weren't, when you said it.

Perilous pauses. The lights are dull and frozen. The fish are gone. They laugh once, flat and toneless.

PERILOUS

Would that you weren't so perceptive, Desolate.

(beat) You cannot truly say that I am wrong.

DESOLATE

You are wrong.

PERILOUS

Wow.

DESOLATE

You are wrong.

PERILOUS

You really only needed to say it once-

DESOLATE

You are wrong.

PERILOUS

I am going to hang up, Desolate.

Desolate takes a shaky breath. Their sea trembles.

DESOLATE

You were so wrong I had no other words to explain it.

PERILOUS

Alright then, you had enough now? I'm hanging up.

DESOLATE

I... did not like coral reefs, before.

Perilous seems begrudgingly intrigued.

PERILOUS

...You've never mentioned it.

DESOLATE

I found them untidy. They were useful, certainly, but they changed too fast for my liking. I didn't like looking at them with the knowledge that I wouldn't be able to recognize them the next century I glanced over.

PERILOUS

What are you getting at, Desolate?

DESOLATE

(breathless)

I saw yours. In the center of your domain. It was... It was beautiful. Like I was staring at something entirely alien to me, sprawling lights and towering spines. It amazed me more than anything I'd seen before. Ever-changing as any reef, yet something about it so permanent. Eternal in its neverending shifts, destruction hand in hand with life.

Perilous twists, staring down at the expansive reef below them.
It is their favorite spot.

DESOLATE (CONT'D)

I... have watched you spin lights from
your fingertips, carve rolling falls
and blooming vents with the wave of a
hand.

I've seen every ocean alive as of yet,
and you are the only one I can't bear
to look away from.

Can you see my frustration? When
somehow you cannot seem to see your
masterpiece for what it is?

When you tell me of how you've
terrorized your subjects yet again, as
if your domain is a realm of lifeless
wrath and bitter asperity?

Debris shoot up from the trench beneath Desolate, banging into
each other and revolving at incredible speeds

DESOLATE

Your subjects fear you more than
anything, because there is nothing more
terrifying than losing the home you
have built for them, than being bereft
of all its majesty.

You are terrifying because to them you
are god. A beautiful, terrible thing.

Your domain is everything.
You are everything.

Viscous, magnificent everything.

Perilous floats. The fish buried in the reef's nooks peek out to
look as their lights scatter and fragment in every direction,
their silhouette fluttering into the blooming colors of their
sea, that swirl and bloom with flustered intensity.

PERILOUS

(softly)

Oh.

Desolate breathes heavily. The fragments of wreckage float around them, sinking slowly as if left by some unseen destruction.

DESOLATE

I apologize, if I've... overstepped.

PERILOUS

No, it's- You didn't-... I-...

Perilous takes a steadying breath.

PERILOUS (CONT'D)

I... You called to ask me something,
didn't you?

The debris surrounding Desolate swarm with renewed fervor.

DESOLATE

Ah... No, I- I feel I might've missed the
window.

PERILOUS

(softly)
It's alright, I insist.

DESOLATE

Will you go out with me?

Perilous is dumbfounded.

DESOLATE

I believe I warned you that I'd missed
the window.

PERILOUS

(flustered)
Missed the- you-...

PERILOUS' lights are blinding and quick, almost blurs.

PERILOUS

...Apologize for calling me foolish,
first.
(beat) And Perry.

DESOLATE

I love you.

The tallest part of the coral reef crumbles inward with an overwhelming light show. The fish scatter.