

Clarissa Grunwald

## Elysium

If you're good, you get a wish. Just one.

He didn't even have to think about it. He stood in the middle of a field of yellow flowers and said, "I want to be with her." Not a particularly unique request, but there are things more important than being unique.

And she was there.

Still twenty-three years old, blonde, smiling the way she always smiled, with her eyes lit all up the way he imagined they'd been just before she died, dark and shiny with wind and fear and falling. He could imagine the sound her voice before she spoke, that feathery singer-voice. She said, "What happened to you?"

"Cancer," he replied.

"No, I didn't mean—"

"Oh." He looked down at his hands, blotched and knotted. "I got old. Were you—were you waiting a long time?"

"Didn't seem like it."

"I'm 76," he said. "I thought—well, I'd been hoping—Well. One wish only."

"It's fine," she promised. "It's fine."

So they talked, and walked through the fields of yellow flowers, and held hands. And she fell asleep under the moon and he curled up besides her and listened to her breathing. She was just the way he remembered her; she was perfect.

She was *just* the way he remembered her.

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She was twenty-three years old. She hadn't died by accident. They gave her one wish. She had no use for an afterlife. One existence had been more than enough.

So she stood there, patiently, and she was probably smiling with her eyes lit all up as she disappeared. Her footsteps uncrumpled, leaving nothing but yellow flowers, for miles and miles and miles.

Fifty-one years later and he arrived, said, "I want to be with her." But she was gone, gone, gone.

"What happened to you?" her shadow whispered, but there was nothing left to block the sun.