

The cool glass of my binoculars pressed against my face. My feet were wedged between two strong branches of this tall oak in front of my house. I was watching the sea. I was watching the roaring waves crash over the bridge connecting us to the other countries. I was watching the mist of the ocean rise and fill the air. I was watching the gray clouds roll across the sky, carrying the storms to our island. I was mostly watching the water, though. Remembering the stories I'd heard about it. The wet, salty sea that I'd never touched. The ocean I've always dreamed of seeing. I wanted to be the first to ever go underwater, to experience life in the deep as a fish would.

But I had to wait for sun. In all the fourteen years I've lived here, all my life, there has not been one sunny day on this island. Every day it storms here, tossing the sea about, and covering our roof with gray skies. Then there were winds that rocked the bridge, the bridge that no one has crossed.

It's different on the other side of the bridge, though. Or so I've been told from old stories. Over there, the sun is always shining, and the seas are always calm. Their skies are filled with pure, white clouds that bounce with the wind. I've always wondered how things would be over there. I wondered if it would be warm. I wondered if every morning the sun would peek out from the clouds and shine its light through the water, to the ground. I wondered how it would be to never have to light a candle in the day, never have to close the windows at night. And as I thought about it, I also wondered how it would feel to swim. And from that day on, I decided I would be the first on my island to find out.

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I didn't believe in waiting for a calm day, considering none were ahead. So, I accepted the idea that my swim would take place in rough seas. I reached into my dry pocket for my silver compass. The cold chain entangled my fingers. *Let's see*, I thought. *Southeast...* I watched the needle spin in circles before it froze. It was pointing in a perfect line to the bridge. I took a step forward, careful to balance the needle. Then I heard the screen door slam.

"Hallie!" It was my Mom.

“Yes?” I called quickly, eager to taste the sea.

“Dinner’s ready!” *Dinner?* I thought, wondering how long I had been outside.

“Coming!” I replied.

I marched up our bright yellow steps. I noticed some new pink flowers set in the

Watching the Sea, 6-8, p.2

windowsill. We are always trying to brighten our home, be the sun of our island in place of our clouded one. Flinging open the door, I was greeted by my little brother, a shining key in his hand.

“What’s this?” I knelt down to his level. He placed the silver metal into my palm.

“A pwe-sent!” he exclaimed, his face lighting up at the sight of my smile. I laughed.

“Well, thank you, Kai.” He started to laugh. My Mother shook her head.

“What?” I asked, somewhat suspicious.

“He hasn’t let go of that that thing since he found this morning. It was stuck under the carpet in his bedroom.” She rolled her eyes. “He couldn’t wait to give it to you. He says it has magical powers and can, ‘calm the water.’ I told him it wouldn’t-”

Just then, Kiandra, my older sister walked in. She was holding a huge canvas with a painting of what the legendary sun might look like. She was the only one who had ever seen it. Besides my parents, anyway. Apparently, before I was born the sun was plentiful. A common visitor to our island. In fact, they had said that it almost never stormed. I missed those times I had never seen. The times when our oceans were calm and sweet.

“Nice painting,” my Dad said as he came in, interrupting my thoughts. Kiandra grinned.

“Thanks. I thought we could have a mini sun in our kitchen. We could put it by the window, so we could pretend things were how they used to be, before, before...”

Her voice trailed off. She looked down and closed her eyes. But my ears perked up.

“Before what? What are you talking about?” I was staring at her, waiting for an answer. She just shook her head. I looked expectantly from each of my parents, to my sister, and back to my parents again. They were completely silent. Kai was the only one who didn’t seem affected.

*What had happened? What didn’t they want me to know?* I heard a sigh from my Father.

“So will we be eating tonight?” This seemed to wake everyone up again, as they fumbled for various plates and silverware. I was still stunned, wondering what possibly could have happened.

“I made your favorite, green bean lasagna, especially for the big day,” my Mom said, smiling from ear to ear as she glanced at my Dad.

Watching the Sea, 6-8, p.3

“What’s the occasion?” Kiandra asked, setting a bright colored napkin by each plate. I half listened, wondering what the news could be, although I was much more interested in how the sea changed. But I was starting to think that wasn’t the best subject to bring up.

My Mother was getting the candles from the cupboard, Kai in her arms. He was playing with his favorite stuffed bear he had had all his life, which was only three years.

“I,” My Dad started, a smile creeping up the corners of his mouth, “Am crossing the bridge!”

I don’t know what news I expected, but it certainly wasn’t this. Thinking I might scream, I quickly covered my mouth with the sleeve of my sweater. I took a deep breath.

“You’re... Crossing?”

He nodded. “You’re ... actually going to cross it?” He nodded again.

“And guess what, Hallie?”

I leaned forward, my heart racing.

“What?” I whispered.

“You’re coming with me.”

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When morning finally came, my suitcase was already stuffed. My compass, Kiandra’s old wetsuit, and my flashlight were hanging out of the front pocket, waiting for their time. I knew it wouldn’t be easy, the journey across. In fact, I hardly knew if we’d make it across. Before heading downstairs, I grabbed one last thing. Kai’s key.

“Ready, Hallie?” My Mom called to me.

“Ready!” I replied, imagining the sights that could possibly be awaiting me underwater. Not that my Dad had even said we’d get a chance to swim. Or what we were going to do. Or why we were going. It was at that moment that I realized I didn’t even ask why we were going. I hustled down the wooden staircase.

“Dad.” He was sitting on our couch, his suitcase and coat by his side.

“Hmm?” He looked up, calmly but sharply. He glanced at his watch.

“Why- Why are we crossing? I mean, why now? Why so suddenly?” He just shrugged.

“Well, why not?” But somehow he didn’t look like he meant it.

We ran out the door and hopped into our rusty car, both our suitcases resting in

Watching the Sea, 6-8, p.4

my arms. My Dad turned the key, and the vehicle began to move. We were on the way.

“Dad, will there be time to swim, since we’re leaving the Island for absolutely no reason, anyway?” He sighed, his watery eyes focused on the bridge. Thunder crashed, and shook the doors of our car. I saw lightning flash somewhere in the near distance.

“That,” He started, “we will have time for. In fact,” He paused to roll up his sleeve, revealing the spongy material of his old wet suit. “That’s why we’re going.” Excitement filled my mind, and as we approached the cracked bridge, I knew there was only thing left to do. Cross.

“Hallie?” My Dad had stopped the car, inches away from the bridge, he

looked me in the eyes.

“Do you have that key that Kai gave you? The one from under his carpet?”

*How did he know about that?* I wondered.

“How did you know-” he interrupted me, his face serious.

“Hallie.” His voice grew stronger. “Do you have the key or not.” I sounded like a statement.

“Yes, But-”

“Good.” His eyes were focused on the bridge again. I reached for the silver key I had hung around my neck with a piece of string. *What was this key? What did it have to do with- Well, anything really? How did he know about it? Why did he ask if I had it?*

The car jerked forward, and I felt the shift in height as the front tires rolled over the edge of the bridge. Then we took off. The car sped over the slippery bridge, each patch of ground collapsing a second after the tire came in contact with it. It was as if we were flying, the car carrying us like the white clouds we would soon see. I could see the end of the bridge, calling for us. Each second we were closer to the world I had always longed to see. Until we slipped. The ground gave way and we pushed open the car doors, just in time for the splash.

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When I opened my eyes, the car was no where in sight, my Dad was next to me, bubbles forming a circle around his head. His eyes were open wide, and he was flailing around, as if he was uncertain where to go next.

Looking around, I found that we were surrounded by crystal clear water, a fine

Watching the Sea, 6-8, p.5

layer of white sand at our feet. Bright colors danced by, shimmering in the light.

*Shimmering in the light?* My eyes widened. *Was it- Was it really? Sunlight?*

All of a sudden, I felt a strong tug, finding myself being dragged to the surface. My first breath of oxygen was like magic. The air was so perfect that I couldn't get enough of it. It was if I had never taken a breath before. I just kept inhaling and exhaling, trying to steady my breath.

"Dad?" I asked him. He was lying in the sand, his eyes closed. "Are you okay?" He sat up and nodded. He coughed a little before speaking.

"I'm fine," He replied, "are you?" I nodded. "Well, I'm just glad-" he stopped mid-sentence, looking across the horizon. A look of puzzlement spread across his face. Following his gaze, I found the bridge had somehow rebuilt itself, and there across the water, was a beautiful, sunny island. Our car was sitting in the middle of the bridge, in perfect shape, better shape than before our drive across. *This must be a dream.* I told myself. *This is completely impossible. How could this be happening?*

Turning back towards the water, we found gray clouds and thunder were shaking the air. Rain was pouring against our backs. Our little yellow house face facing the water was bright as the real sun, not a cloud in sight. I turned to my Dad.

"What-" I started. He shook his head.

"I don't get it either." He reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone, dripping with seawater. He held down the blue button in the middle, awaiting the screen to brighten. "Come on..." He pleaded to his phone, anxiously hoping for it to work.

To my surprise, the phone turned on. He dialed a number on the keypad and held the slippery phone to his ear.

"Lydia?" He said, speaking to my Mother. At first all we could hear were crackling noises, until her smooth, familiar voice answered.

"I'm here, David. Are you two all right?"

"Well, we are, but... We're just a bit confused." We awaited the crackle before my Mom spoke again.

"What is it?"

"Well, is the weather any different over there? Perhaps- Sunny?" We

practically held our breaths, awaiting her reply.

“Of course not, it’s storming, just like always. Are you sure you’re all right?”

Watching the Sea, 6-8, p.6

How is the sunny weather over there?” He just stared across the ocean, the sun covering every inch of ground on our island.

“Just fine,” He replied, shaking his head. “Just fine.”