

Calm Before the Storm

by Charlotte Taylor

Marina stepped out onto the porch and breathed in the salty ocean air. Now she stood in front of a little wooden beach house facing the water. Her mother turned to face away from the suitcases and placed her hand on Marina's shoulder.

"This vacation will cheer you up, honey."

Marina sighed, and watched as her brother slipped clumsily out of the backseat of the car, barely pausing before rushing down to the shore.

"Sebastian, slow down! You might hurt yourself!"

Her mother followed him, holding a beach bag in one hand, and a towel in the other.

The door to her parent's room was left ajar, and Marina saw her father emptying the contents of his suitcase into an old, wooden credenza. He glanced up at her.

"Why don't you join your mother and Sebastian on the beach?"

"I need to unpack."

She hauled her suitcase up the step ladder that lead to the small room she shared with her brother.

Marina sat, staring at the loose floorboard placed awkwardly in the middle of the room. She ran her hand over the worn-out wood, remembering how she used to play make-believe games and pretend she was a spy, her "secret documents" concealed by the imperfections of the old cabin. That is how children see the world, Marina thought. Every new discovery becomes a great adventure. Sebastian thought that way. Her room in the beach house had a big window overlooking the beach, and she could see Sebastian crouched over, staring intently at a starfish sitting on the edge of the shoreline.

That night, her father rushed around the kitchen roasting brussel sprouts and attempting to shoo away a stray cat that had wandered into the house. Sebastian sat on the floor, enjoying the chaos caused by their unwelcome visitor.

During dinner, Marina pushed brussel sprouts and charred meat around her plate, as her father tried to coax Sebastian into trying the unfamiliar food that had been presented to him. They sat mostly in silence for a while, then after accepting defeat, her father fed Sebastian a peanut butter sandwich. Meanwhile, her mother sat on the porch, feeding the cat their leftovers.

The first night felt very long. Marina lay in bed for hours watching waves spill over the shore. She wasn't used to the silence that filled the little house. When she finally fell asleep she dreamt that she was swimming. Drifting through the water, watching fish swim past her, their scales reflecting the light of the full moon. She swam up to the surface, and just as she started to bring her head out of the water ... she awoke.

She could see the sun starting to rise as she glanced out the window, but once she was awake she couldn't get back to sleep. Instead, she sat on the landing, with her knees pressed to her chest.

Another day passed, and she stayed inside, alone in the empty house. She watched her mother and Sebastian from the window, while her father wandered along the beach.

That night she lit a candle and lay in bed reading until her eyes started to feel heavy. Lightning shot across the sky and waves crashed against the shore. Dark clouds loomed overhead as whitecaps rippled over the deep blue sea. The last sound she remembered hearing before falling asleep was the rain hitting the roof.

She had the same dream from the previous night, but this time when she lifted her head out of the water she heard music. She couldn't tell where it was coming from, but it rang clearly in her ears.

Again, she awoke abruptly. The candle still burned and it was dark outside. She could hear the crashing waves and the wind, but there was no music. Feeling dazed and confused she sat in bed wide awake. She knew it was a dream, but the sound had seemed so real. Minutes passed, and she lay very still making no noise, hoping that the beautiful music would return. Suddenly, the rain stopped.

At first she tried to fall back asleep, but her curiosity overcame her. She climbed down the step ladder and rushed to the kitchen door. She slowly turned the handle, it made a loud click, and the door slid open.

She felt a freezing gust of wind and immediately felt the urge to go back inside, but she pushed herself to start walking down to the beach. As she looked up at the full moon she heard the singing again. This time she could tell that it was coming from the water. So she began to move towards the dock.

The sand was much warmer than the ground, but the wind had grown stronger. She began climbing up to the top of the wooden dock and very slowly started walking towards the edge, her eyes fixed on the moon above.

She stared out into the water, and her dream started playing in the back of her mind. She swam through the crystal waters surrounded by colourful, shimmering ocean life. This time she swam for even longer. She glided through beautiful reefs and underwater caves with

stones and coral. The tempestuous wind now swirled around her, but she hardly noticed. As the warm waters of her imagination consumed her, nothing seemed to matter, and it felt as though time had stopped.

Marina felt herself leaning over the edge of the dock, but she didn't feel frightened. Somehow, she'd lost complete control of her actions, but it didn't matter.

She felt the wind rush past her as she slowly moved towards the deep blue ocean. As she landed she broke the surface of the water. All her worries melted away. Then very slowly, she began to sink. This time she knew it was real. There were no reefs or caves. Just the sandy ocean floor.