

A Lone, Red Buoy

I ran with my little legs in the ocean water off the coast of California. Offshore, a lone, red buoy floated in the water, placing the line of reality versus imagination. The air of California was cold by their standards but warm from where I stood, as I was used to the Minnesotan winters. The water might have been chilled, but my excitement overran that. I splashed and ran in circles. My mom called for me to come closer to shore, no more than a foot out, so I would sink in. I complied, only to run out again. My brother went further out. I dreamed of the day would be able to do that. He didn't swim, but at least he got to go out. The waves only lapped across my feet, barely touching. Clouded, sandy foam brushed my feet. It almost knocked me backward.

I dreamt about diving into the water and swimming out to the lone buoy. I dreamt about feeling the water brush beneath my fingertips and across my legs. I dreamt about going under and looking across in the clear water. I dreamt about the colorful fish I would see.

A wave knocked me down and took me under. I had gone too far out, like my mother had warned me, and my face was suddenly under water too. My eyes burned as I opened them. Gray water swirled. Foam clouded the sun. Sand fell into my eyes. Everything rushed past me, and I felt it leave me. I gasped for air only to breathe in water. My fingers dug into the slimy, green rocks below me. I couldn't grip one after another. All were too big for my small hands.

A strong hand gripped my arm and pulled me up. The world swirled around me. Coldness made my bones shake. Everything was chilled, and my body grew numb from it.

"Are you okay?" my father asked, still gripping my arm.

I blinked sand out of my eyes. Sand was caught in my throat. It coated my skin. "Let's do that again," I laughed.

"Let's not," he responded.

Feeling me shake, he pulled me out of the water and onto the sand, which instantly grew to be hot even in California March. I stared out at the gray water with the gray sky behind it. The clouded foams slithered up the beach, almost to my feet. A gust of wind blew the salty water to my nose. The breezy sounding waves sung to me. I wanted to go back.

"Not just yet, Sophie." My father wiped his hands off on my skin, trying to warm me. "Warm up a little."

"Dad," I groaned.

"Sophie." His eyes matched the ocean, and then he let me go.

Immediately, I went back to the water. It came to my waist. I wasn't allowed to go any further. My fingers slipped through gracefully. The slimy rocks touched my feet, and I tried not to fall in. Looking back at my father, I wanted to slip under. I wanted to dive in. My father shook his head at me.

"Later," he called. "You have to learn how to swim first."

Fifteen years later, I know how to swim, and I wade into the water at Portobello beach in Scotland. The water is cold on an abnormally hot day in Scotland, and the sky is crystal blue to match the water. I have never truly swam in the ocean, but I want to now. Through my years of going to California, I had never swam but just ran in. Now, I yell at my friend to follow me as I dive under.

Salt immediately enters my mouth, and I grow thirsty. My skin mucks up from the seaweed, and my hair fills with it too. Water slips through my fingertips and across my skin. I

stay under the water as long as I can until I have to take in fresh air. Salt burns my eyes. The water shines blue but is gray underneath. Now, there isn't a way for me to touch the ground, and immediately my friend turns back.

"Come on, Sophie."

"You go!" I scream and wave her off. Diving back under the water, I have one focus as I push myself through the water. Up above, farther out than anyone else dreams to go, there is a lone red buoy. I want to touch it. Long ago I left my friends and strangers, and I am now one with the water.

Letting myself slip under, I purposely open my eyes and let them burn. I sway and then fall a little more. Gray water shines under me, sparkling as little things float past. The bright sun gives me a sensation of never being alone. It guides me upward if I want to go; I don't. I lay within the water. It is quiet, with no waves or voices. It is Sirens calling to me, and I accept them.

It all ends when a motor buzzes above me as a Jet Ski zooms past. The movement of the waves push me up. Warm air hits me. I breathe in the fresh air. Salt stings my eyes. I blink them away. Coughing, I take in more air. The Jet Ski zooms past me again. Screaming at them, I completely interrupt the silence. The male glances over, and I give a rude gesture about being this close.

With the Jet Ski zooming off, I am alone. Children's laughter comes all the way out, and I realize I am still too close to shore if I can hear them. I see the lone red buoy and keep swimming. My body burns as it stretches and flexes to push through the water. As I come to it, I marvel at it. The sun hits the fading red with a brown, rusting bottom. Finally I can touch it. Reaching out, I do just that. The hot metal burns my skin. I pull my hand back.

The Jet Ski zooms over again, and he yells at me in a Scottish tone. I am not exactly sure what he said, but it is something about going back to shore; I'm too far out. He zooms away again.

I glance at the lone, red buoy, and I dive back under. The water swirls around, and I can't breathe. I popped up as a little girl again, yelling at my dad, "I did it!"