

Swimming Out of My Life

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“Life would be a whole lot easier if I had only remembered how to swim.”

The seagulls cawed in the distance. Sunshine washed gently onto my freckled arms and I smiled softly. A warm hand slipped into my own and I glanced up at the sun burnt face of him, my father. He was my everything. I could not imagine a world that did not have him in it and I did not want to.

Racing ahead of him, I shouted rambunctiously, “Catch me if you can, Daddy!”

Laughingly, he took off his sandals and started ripping down the beach like a uncontrollable torpedo.

“You bet I will, Ally,” he taunted back.

I yelped and squirmed while he hurled me to the sand and wrapped his arms firmly around my back.

“You’re caught like a fish in a net!” he joked.

“Well, Daddy, fish can get out of nets, you know,” I shot back triumphantly.

“Well, aren’t you just the clever one?” he teased while gently lifting me off of the ground.

“AHHHH!” I screamed as my father pulled me into the ice cold ocean.

We exploded below the water in a tangle of arms and legs and I opened my eyes quickly. All I saw was a flashing smile before I leaped out of the water under the sturdy arms of my father. He lifted me toward the sky and I started singing like I

was the queen of the world. I felt the tremors of his body moving me up and down as he began laughing uncontrollably.

This game went on for another hour or so until I finally said aloud, "Daddy, take me to shore, I wanna build the biggest sandcastle ever!"

I seated myself down on the wet sand in a pink and yellow polka-dotted bathing suit and grabbed my Blues Clues bucket and shovel. I had hidden it in a secret spot behind the rotting piers, and it held little memories from each of my visits to Rhine Beach. Sliding my hand over the rough ridges of a pastel orange shell, I giggled softly as I remembered the comical battle my father had had with the waves to get me this shell. After placing it gently back in the overflowing bucket, I shoveled sand from a small hole I was creating in the middle of the beach. This was going to be the castle where the prince saved the princess. This was how everything had to be just like in the fairytales my father always read to me.

"Help!"

A shout rang out in the distance and I jumped straight up. Sand slid down my legs as I began running toward the ocean. No longer was it turquoise in color; it now had become a menacing black that dipped and swirled in a blanket of darkness that made me blind to everything. The crabs under my feet. The broken pieces of shell that drew blood. The tangled web of sea algae. The only thing I could see now was the man who had held me for my entire life. My father was drowning and I was helpless. My toes would not budge toward the ocean as my brain became paralyzed with fear. What would I do? How would I rescue him? How could I rescue the man who had rescued me all of my life? My arms began flailing as I tried to remember the

breast stroke my father had taught me when I was only five years old. I had grown up on this very beach; it was a second home, a secret coven for each and every young memory I had ever known. I could remember every precise detail. The crisp linen of a picnic lunch. Sand dollars littered on the shore. Starfish clinging to pieces of wood. Ask me anything from my past and I could remember. Ask me how to swim and I could not. Watching the last of my father's white arms slipping under the surface haunted my dreams for years. I wanted to be in the water that day. I wanted to be the princess who saved the prince, but I was not. Maybe this was the way things were planned. Maybe I was just not meant to have a father.