

Light in the Water

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The fishermen called to each other, passing the news from man to man. Clusters of twinkling lights had been spotted in the water. *Dilis!* They knew from their experience that the lights signified the presence of this delicacy, which meant a lucrative haul for them. They put out to sea in their boats, readying their nets to welcome the catch. But net after net came up with not one of the miniscule shining fish. And yet around them the lights still sparkled in the water. Frustration soon gave way to mystification, then to fear. As a man, they turned to look at the vast promontory that rose from the water half a mile from the shore. Smooth and artificial, it had been there a year, long enough for it to have become a natural part of their landscape, but not long enough for them to have forgotten what it was and the horror that surrounded its presence. Hastily, they retreated from the lights in the water, boats spurting in different directions, as they spoke to each other tremulously of ghosts.

The sparkle of the waves called to Kenneth Bautista as soon as he glimpsed the shore through his windshield. But then, he loved the water in all its moods. He loved it on calm clear days when a wealth of myriad-colored treasures was instantly visible as he plunged to coral reefs below. He loved it too at night when creatures shimmered mysteriously in the depths, illuminated only by the dive light in his palm.

He had always had a fascination for the water as he did with nothing and no one else, except perhaps his wife. In many ways his love for her mirrored his relationship with the water.

He stopped the car briefly, just to take in the panoramic view of the coast that he had only seen in magazine photos before. His wife looked, at first startled when he braked, then smiled faintly in understanding. He laid his hand on hers, remembering how he had first been drawn to her as she sat

quiet and mysterious among the group of tourists he was leading to explore the shallows bordering a pristine island. She hung back, and he saw fear in her eyes. Stirred with protective tenderness, he smiled and held out his hand, speaking words of reassurance. She tentatively placed her fingers in his palm and allowed him to draw her to the water, fit her with a snorkel mask, and guide her through the water to peruse the delights of the life just below its surface. No words could be exchanged between them then, but he saw in her eyes a joy that mirrored his own thrill at his first exploration of the depths.

Her name was Mona. And though by now he had known her over two years, there would always be some things about her that would remain a mystery. Though her tentative trust in him had soon developed into easy warmth, she always held back on sharing certain aspects of herself, her memories and feelings. And he was satisfied with this. Was it not his love of mystery that kept him exploring the depths of the water? There would always be more about her to discover. Such as why storm winds and rains made her shudder like a child. Or why her constant refusal to learn to scuba dive with him changed to a determination to learn when their first trip to her childhood province approached.

He had never been there, but he had read about the coast and knew of its still little-known diving spots. Perhaps it was a desire to gain more intimate knowledge of her province that drove her to master her fear of the depths that she had made little attempt to conquer in the early months of their marriage, despite Kenneth's constant cajoling during their beach honeymoon. But he had always kept a careful respect for her boundaries in trying to convince, and he surmised now that his giving her freedom to make her own choice was what made her plunge wholeheartedly into his interest now.

She had not returned to the province for ten years, not since the mysterious death of her father. Mysterious to Kenneth, anyway, because she had never told him precisely how he died. An accident, she would always say briefly. And perceiving the subject was unwelcome though he knew not why, he let it go, as was always his way, trusting that she would give him the details in her own time. But so far she never had.

They drove on and came upon another scene worthy of a magazine picture as they glimpsed an old, stark white house, square and understated, with no Hispanic elaboration in its grills—plain metal bars guarded the windows. Still, with its indomitable columns the mansion was clearly an old

home better preserved than most he had glimpsed along the way, especially those in the more densely populated parts of the province. Set against the vast bare landscape, her ancestral home appeared a grim figure to Kenneth, leering and unwelcoming. But she gazed at it, entranced.

“I ought to write about this,” she said. She wrote promotional tourism material and often made fun of herself for rapturously describing places she had never been to and activities she would never engage in, such as exploring tortuous networks of caves or climbing steep peaks. But as tourism was rather backward in her province, she had yet to describe the beauty of its landscape.

They drove up the long driveway, where a waiting man opened the colossal spike-topped iron gate for them so they could enter the curving driveway. And as soon as he parked the car, she was out on the wide piazza, embracing the aunt and cousin who came to greet her, then taking Kenneth’s hand and leading him in a whirl inside.

“Nothing has changed,” she said.

“We wouldn’t dare change anything,” said her aunt. “We’d be afraid of your father haunting us!” And she tittered, with a hint of nervousness.

Mona led him along the winding corridors of the wing where she had lived with her father and mother. In the library, which was really her father’s room, she pointed out a collection of artifacts in a bookcase—fossilized shells, corals, and some small creatures that proved much of the province was once underwater. The collection had been begun by her father as a boy, and he had drawn her into joining him in the hobby as she grew, she explained to Kenneth.

“Fascinating,” Kenneth said. He did find them interesting, though looking at the dull-colored objects he thought to himself that he preferred the living sea creatures in their natural habitat.

He readily let her lead him to the room beside, which was her girlhood room. Once inside, he pulled down the pink satin bedspread, only to find no sheet beneath. The echo of slow footsteps down the hall made him start, then he reminded himself this was no musty abandoned house but one that had people living in it. The dragging tread belonged to an arthritic housemaid, who had come to inform them that she had made up the bed in the master bedroom for them, as Mona’s old bed was too small. Mona looked displeased, but she led the way, dismissing the maid with an uncharacteristic curtness.

The austere room had wide windows looking out obliquely to a sea view. “I suppose this hasn’t changed either?” Kenneth asked. Mona, bent over her suitcase, simply replied, “No.”

It may simply have been that the burgundy and gold draperies were dated, but there seemed little in this room, as in the rest of their wing of the house, of Mona’s fashionable mother, whom one would have thought would have liked a say in the household design, as she had insisted on arranging all the details for her daughter’s wedding herself. Kenneth allowed himself a moment of smug satisfaction as he favorably compared his own marriage with those of the past generations. *He* was an enlightened male; he never sought to dominate his wife, only to protect her as she needed. He gave her the respect, privacy, and freedom of choice that he himself desired.

Unpacking could wait, he thought, as he walked toward the sliding doors leading to a veranda. He tugged them open, and a breeze that could only have come from the sea tore through the room, lifting the fine strands of hair that hung over Mona’s face as she stood looking down at her open suitcase. She glanced up, plastering her hair down, and he beckoned to her, inviting her to enjoy the beauty of the coastal view with him. She determinedly bent her head once again and finished unpacking her suitcase. He came and helped her stow her clothes away in the hardwood *aparador*.

“I’ll take care of my stuff,” he said magnanimously. She murmured her thanks, then told him she had to go discuss the details of her cousin’s upcoming wedding with her relatives, which was why they’d come, after all. She barely allowed him a kiss as she hurried down the corridor.

He supposed it must be hard for her to return to the last place where she had seen her father alive. He hadn’t even known the man himself, knew hardly anything about him, in fact, yet he felt the strength of his presence. Lucky he didn’t believe in ghosts. He probably would if he ever saw them, but never did, even when others around him were claiming they sensed a supernatural presence. Years ago, some people he had invited to visit him at his old rented cottage in Boracay screamed at the sight of an *aswang* as they entered his quarters, but he merely peered into the gloom and saw nothing. Felt nothing.

Well, there was no reason a man he had never known should haunt him, anyway, not that he was an expert in ghosts. He opened the antique *aparador* to hang up his clothes. Nothing there, of course.

Having finished unpacking, he looked about restlessly for something to do.

There was no television. He looked about for reading matter, casually opening the drawer of the night table on which Mona had deposited her handbag, the one on the side away from the windows. There was a yellowing newspaper there, with the headline of a shipping disaster. Someone had underlined the name of the ship, *MVP Princess of Peace*. There didn't seem to be any names listed. It was only reported that there were no survivors, and to think it had been sunk by a storm so close to the coast! But the roughness of the waves must have made it impossible for anyone to swim to safety, he figured.

He leafed idly through the paper for something else to read, but there were only political issues of long ago which no longer held interest. He folded it back up and put it back. He tried to open the drawer of the other night table, but it was hopelessly stuck. There seemed to be no other reading matter in the room, other than the diving magazines he'd brought, which he'd already perused many times.

From the hall, he could hear a faint but persistent rattle, accompanied by a heavy dragging step. He would not have been surprised to find a ghost in chains cross the threshold, but it was only the ancient maid again, bearing a tray with coffee and pastries, which she set on the dresser.

"The dressmaker arrived and they are talking about the style of the dresses now. Señorita Mona thought you would be bored, so she suggested I bring your food to you. I hope you are quite comfortable."

He picked up the steaming cup. "I'm fine, though this place isn't really what I expected."

She smiled. "I remember hearing those same words from Señorita Mona's mother, when she first came here. Though perhaps with a different meaning. She expected it to be grand, certainly. But not to be as gloomy as it is." She urged the plate of pastries on him, then glanced around the room. She peered into the adjoining bathroom, then went to open the chest at the foot of the bed.

"I was only eighteen then," she went on, rummaging among the linens, "but she confided in me. She was lonely. She was a socialite from a prominent family in Manila, and they met while Sir was still in med school there. She was dazzled with him, since their family is the most important here. They

led in politics here for many years, though it ended with Mona's father. Not just because he was a doctor. He wasn't very popular and so he never became mayor, though he tried. He was just too proud and quarrelsome to make the right friends, I think. He didn't have many friends, and it was very lonely here for Señora."

"Even with his sister's family living in the other wing?"

"But they didn't move there until after he died. It was only then that his sister decided to leave her husband. Mona's father would never have approved when he was alive. I would hear them fighting about it whenever she visited. He was afraid of the scandal it would cause, even though the husband had already caused a scandal by spending more time with his second family down by the docks than with his first."

Kenneth asked her about Mona then, and got a sense of how lonely she must have been, growing up here alone, with few friends because most people in the area were intimidated by her father, even while they flocked to him for medical advice. And because Mona's father preferred that she spend her free time with him, searching for fossils and learning scientific facts. He impressed on her that she was above all the other children, in brains as well as social position. He tried to, anyway. But in her misery at her friendlessness, it was clear she would have been willing to trade social prominence and genius for the freedom to play with other children.

Having done all the puttering around she could in her arthritic state, the servant then asked if he needed anything else done. He shook his head, thanking her and she took her leave. Downing the dregs of his coffee minutes after she had left the room, he realized he had forgotten to ask her how Mona's father had died. He peered down the hall, but she had disappeared by then. He decided instead to explore on his own.

First he went to his wife's girlhood room. Most of her personal effects which remained were toys and books from her childhood, locked in a bookcase. He opened a drawer and found some old diaries. Unable to contain his curiosity, he leafed through them.

Most of the entries were quite mundane, of course. In early adolescence, many of her entries were about her explorations of the countryside with her father, with rapt exclamations over his brilliance. She often wrote about how he lectured her and how she tried to take his advice, and their long musings on what she wanted to do when she grew up, mostly dwelling on becoming a

doctor like her father, which would have been a given if she had been a boy. Then later there were entries on her parents' quarrels and coldness toward each other, with a meandering analysis of the reasons.

In the bottom of the drawer was a sepia-colored book with seashells on the cover, an inscription inside indicating it was a gift from her parents. This turned out to be the diary from her first year of college in Manila, where she wrote long entries that dealt with her struggle with homesickness and dwelt lengthily on her father's disapproval of her choice to go away to college. She wrote of her struggles with her science course and wondered if she was really meant to be a doctor like her father.

Inserted among the pages were envelopes with letters her parents had written her during this period. He took out and unfolded a letter with a salutation in bold masculine writing, feeling a bit guilty as he did so. He skimmed through it. Just as he had thought, it was from her father.

miss you, of course only one who understands mother never did.
set up my practice here give back to my people she resents
always hated it here I taught you to love it. Or so I thought. So why
Times are different I had to leave to study local colleges now.
You don't need to leave I never demanded you be a doctor you wished to be
supported your choice prefer you stay, however. more important to me
You knew Still you left your choice believe children should be free
just my opinion you didn't think hope you change your mind don't do it for me

He returned the letter to the diary, glancing at an entry dated a few days after it, where she struggled with her decision. She mentioned worries about her parents and how they would get on without her. He pressed his lips together impatiently. Why did she keep worrying about their opinion? Why did they burden her with such concerns?

He already knew the sequel to this. She had returned home after a semester, to transfer to a college close to home, only to transfer back a year later when her father died, and she and her mother moved to Manila. With this transfer came a shift in course to tourism, a field suggested by her mother, who, after being confined for years in a sleepy provincial town, was eager to travel and, Mona told him, hoped her course would lead Mona to some exciting job with travel benefits, and was disappointed that Mona had settled for an office-bound writing job.

He snapped the journal shut and returned it to the drawer with the others, then left the room, going down the hall. He peered into the cabinet that held the fossil collection. It had no lock, so he tried to open the door in order to examine the objects more closely. After several unsuccessful tugs he started to turn away, which was when the door flew open, striking the side of his face in a rebuking slap, and sharp bits of ancient rock flew at him.

Horrified, he gathered up the pieces of fossils, hoping none were broken. He would have to ask Mona for help in arranging them later. He laid them on the shelves, those petrified shells, corals, and creatures that were proof that the hills they stood on had been once under the sea, and shut the door on them gingerly.

He meandered down the hall. He heard the echoes of feminine chatter.

“Will your father give you away?” he heard Mona ask.

“No,” came the stark reply. That must be her cousin. “He is invited to the wedding as all my close relatives are out of courtesy. But only my mother will escort me down the aisle.”

“It’s too bad your uncle isn’t alive, dear, or he could do it.” That was the aunt. She sighed. “Of course he probably wouldn’t. He was such a traditionalist. I don’t think he would have liked the fact that I’m giving you away, either.” She sighed. “Ah, Mona, what a pity he did not live long enough to give you away. He must have dreamed of doing that.”

“Do you think he would have liked Kenneth?” Mona asked.

“Well ...” There was a pause. “I suppose he would. Though I must say, he’s nothing like your father.”

“Did he approve of any of your boyfriends?” the cousin asked idly.

“I never brought any home, you know that.”

“Didn’t want to scare them off, huh?”

“Well, you know how Papa was. He didn’t want me associating with just anyone.”

“I’d like to think Kenneth would have won him over,” said her aunt.

“So would I, but I can’t be sure....”

This conversation seemed too intimate for him to join in, so Kenneth went to the library instead, where he scanned the bookcases. The open shelves

were filled with grave tomes. He pulled out books aimlessly—volumes on medicine, science, history. He opened an illustrated book about the region, leaning against the shelves to skim through it. To his surprise, he felt the shelf move. A secret passage? He could believe almost anything of this creepy house, nonbeliever in ghosts and spirits as he was. He gave the shelf a shove and it swung back into a dark chamber, where he was greeted by a skeleton.

He blinked. Then, as his eyes adjusted to the gloom, he realized that this must be the clinic Mona's father had run in his house. The skeleton was an odd, old-fashioned touch, but not that surprising really given the character of Mona's father, he thought. He flipped on the light switch and the light sputtered on. He entered the windowless room, and the bookcase-door swung shut behind him.

There was not much of interest in the room. But hanging on the wall was a portrait which seemed to be much in the same style as the paintings of Mona and her mother that he had seen in their house in the city. The old doctor stared out at him, his hand firmly on a desk on which sat a leering human skull.

Odd as it seemed at first for them to leave his portrait and keep it here where no one could see it, Kenneth figured they had a reason. No one could look at this portrait and warmly remember the man, with his fiercely domineering stance and his eyes that glittered with intelligence but were also coldly forbidding.

As he stood there staring into his father-in-law's eyes, it seemed the floor shook and he stumbled backward against the desk. The skeleton swayed, rattling its bones, the bottles in the medicine cabinet clinked against each other violently, then the old-fashioned hanging lamp swinging menacingly above him suddenly flickered off, plunging him into darkness.

He had seen a heavy wooden door across the room, with a frosted glass transom above it. No light came through the transom now. He supposed it led to another room, the waiting room, which surely would open to the outdoors if not connect him to the rest of the house. As the room stopped trembling, he made his way cautiously toward the door. A jolt of electricity assaulted his fingers as he touched the knob, but he firmly closed his hand over it. It would not turn, rusted, perhaps with age. He groped his way back across the room, stumbling against the desk, then searching the back wall with his fingers for some means of escape. He had pushed to enter, so there must be some way of pulling it open. But he could find no handle.

His manly pride made him reluctant to shout for help. Nobody would hear him even if he did, he reasoned. He had always managed on his own when exploring the outdoors, when diving. He refused to let this house beat him. He would not remain trapped in this room to suffocate and become another skeleton in the closet, or rather clinic....

“Kenneth? Are you there?” Her voice was faint, but unmistakably close. The bookcase door swung open to reveal Mona standing in a rectangle of light. “We were looking everywhere for you. What an explorer you are. I can’t believe you discovered this by yourself.”

“It’s almost as if it wanted me to find it,” Kenneth replied as he stepped into the light. Now he saw that the door had on the clinic side a bracket with a stoneware urn, which he realized was meant to be the handle. Clever.

She peered into the room briefly. “Why were you in the dark?”

“Lights went out. Because of the earthquake, maybe.”

“Earthquake? What earthquake?”

“Didn’t you feel a tremor?”

She shook her head.

“It was a very slight one, I guess.”

“Why didn’t you call out? Didn’t you panic?”

“I never panic.” He hoped she could not hear the quickened beat of his heart.

She was flicking the light switch of the clinic on and off. Finally, it turned on, bathing the room in warm, welcoming light. Kenneth felt foolish.

Mona’s eyes scanned the room, stopping at the painting of her father. “I don’t like that portrait of him,” she said, and turned the light off again abruptly. “Let’s go to lunch.”

Later that afternoon, they went out to a diving spot not far from shore. Kenneth had chosen the place as one a beginner like Mona could manage. He had gone on plenty of challenging dives, including night dives and explorations of wrecks, but the thrill now would not be of a new challenge but the joy of finally initiating his wife into the pleasures of exploring the depths of the sea.

“Are you sure?” he asked her, as they sat in the boat, looking down at the water. She looked at him and nodded. Kenneth took her hand and helped her into the water.

The reefs were not in top condition. Many of the corals were dead and gray, a sad testimony to the destruction caused by invasive fishing methods. But there were enough brilliant live corals to shelter jewel-like tropical fish and other small creatures. To Kenneth's relief, Mona was calm as she took it all in. Their eyes met, reflecting each other's joy in seeing the vibrancy of life in the water. Speech is impossible beneath the waves but unnecessary for those so intimately connected.

After nearly an hour, they pulled themselves up to the boat where they lingered for a while, waiting for the sunset which came early in this season. Kenneth's eye fell on a large triangular shape jutting out of the water a hundred or so meters away. At first he thought it was a cliff, but then he realized it was too smooth, and was right in the middle of the water. "What's that?" he asked.

Mona averted her eyes. The boatman, turning from the shape after a shuddering glance, looked at him solemnly. "That is what is left of the ship the *Princess of Peace*."

It took a moment for Kenneth to remember the old newspaper article he had found. Kenneth sniffed at the story the boatman related of the strange lights thought to be dilis but must have been ghosts. But he felt the pathos and horror of the event, the ship tossed by storm plunging to sea with all passengers within, none to survive, few bodies to be recovered. He tried to recall the date of the article. "When did that happen?" he asked.

"Ten years ago," Mona answered in a strangled voice. "Not so long ago."

He looked at her. The sky was turning fiery with color and her eyes glittered with a burning light in her face that was patched with shadow. Her father who had died in an accident, the crumbling old newspaper in her mother's drawer.... He reached for her hand. "Was your father on that ship?"

She turned from him, fitting her mask and regulator over her face, and diving into the water, and he knew her answer. "Wait!" he cried, uselessly. He hurriedly followed suit and was after her, diving in the direction of the wreck. He furiously tried to transmit his thoughts to her. *Come back, it's not safe, too far, too deep*. It wasn't like her at all to take such risks, and he was surprised at the speed she went. He struggled to catch up, though he was the stronger swimmer. Yet it seemed she was hardly propelling herself through the water but was pulled forward by some current that eluded him.

She swam down a sharp drop off without the slightest hesitation. Kenneth wondered that she had not yet grown lightheaded with decompression sickness at the unusual speed she was going. Despite his fear for her, he maintained a cautious rate himself, but this made it impossible to catch up.

The water was darkening. Twilight must be falling, early as it always did in this season. He had brought no dive light with him. They must turn back before darkness overtook them. Still, she moved forward, and he could not leave her.

Could she be, insane as it was, seeking her father's body? But of course she was not insane, would never take an insane risk. Something beyond herself must be drawing her forth, pulling her away from him and drawing her to the grisly wreck where hundreds of people were entombed a decade ago. He thought of the boatman's ghosts in the water. Could the voices of the dead be calling her? Could she be possessed?

Her father. Though he had never known him, he still felt the strength of his presence, his dominance in the house he had inhabited. Could he somehow be calling to her? Though far from being fanciful, he could believe this after his mysterious experience in the house.

Let her go, he thought. Let her go. She has her own life. If you love her, let her live it.

And then it seemed he was caught in a current holding him back, pushing him away. He fought to break away then risked increasing his speed to catch up with his wife.

The current may have been a coincidence, but he had never before encountered such a strong force in the sea before, in waters that were otherwise calm. It was this that convinced him that he was dueling with the ghost of his father-in-law. He could not resist adding a rejoinder as he pushed forward. *See, you cannot hold me back. My love for her gives me strength.*

This time there was no responding push. The thought came to him that perhaps she was being used to bait him, lead him to his death. As for her, perhaps it did not matter to her father if she died. In life he had resisted her struggle for individuality; in death she would be completely his.

Well, he would take the bait because he had to, but he would not let the man win. More pleas and arguments came to his mind, and he tried to

frame the most eloquent appeals to the heart that he could. But what would the argument of love, love as he knew it, mean to a man for whom love and possession were one? He pleaded for her needs but, for her father, he felt, he and his needs came first. He felt this as surely as if the man were telling him so himself.

Finally he was close enough to plunge forward and catch his wife by the ankle, drawing her to him. She pushed against him with astonishing strength. In their struggle, the water churned and clouded up. Darkness was fast overtaking them. She continued to struggle. He held on but could not move her.

Let her go! She is mine now. Her heart is with me, I know it!

Ominous currents swirled around him, seeming to be drawing him and Mona apart. He felt his strength ebbing. And his hope.

The water by now was completely dark. The few night dives he had gone on before were exhilarating experiences, with sea life glowing brilliantly in the deep and the reassuring illumination of a dive light in his hand. This was different. Was the swirling movement in the black water around them caused by water currents, a harmless school of fish, or some large menacing creature? Or were they indeed ghosts surrounding them, grasping at them, drawing them to join them in their grave in the depths of the sea?

The more tightly he held her, the more she struggled. Never before, in any way, had it been like this between them. Always they had been in harmony, their few arguments always coming to a reasoned, respectful resolution. They made few impositions and demands on each other. Always they were open to each other's ideas, never resisting, since that first day when he held out his hand to her.

And then he knew what he must do. Though she struggled, he managed to turn her face towards his, drawing her close. His eyes pierced into her glazed ones as he tried to send her the messages he spoke in his mind.

You are free to choose. Go wherever you must. Go to him if that is what you want. I let you choose, as no one else has. And you know why.

She pushed away from him slightly. In the gloom her face dissolved into near-invisibility, though she was barely a foot away.

As hard as it was, true to his word, he did not try to restrain her. She would break away from him, he thought, and

plunge
deeper into the darkness
towards the wreck
inhabited by lost souls
her father's soul, calling to her
to come to him
swimming blindly
vertiginously downwards
fading into the deep
lost to him
forever.

And then he felt a hand grope for his. The grasp was strong. He could see no longer, but he knew her touch. He drew her toward him and guided her upwards.

They rose slowly, departing from the mysterious force that had sought to tear them apart.

He paused as was necessary and felt her breathe against him, her breath coming quickly as together they floated to the surface where they were greeted by a million tiny points of light.

The stars.

By the light of the stars they made their way to the boat, Kenneth gently pulling Mona's limp figure through the water. The good, faithful boatman hauled them aboard, and he sped them to shore. Mona lay weakly against her husband. Her breath came faintly, but it came. And even in her enervated state, her eyes were clear as she looked into his.

Years later he was to remember the incident time and again. More than ever, the sea was part of their life. As soon as their two children were old enough, they brought them to see the ocean. Mona took both children by the hand and led them to the water, telling them to listen to the sea.

"My father died in the sea," she told them. "I think of him every time I come to the sea, for he is part of it now. I can hear his voice in the waves. Listen, and you may hear your grandfather speak to you."

The children gazed at her solemnly, incomprehendingly as the waves crashed at their feet. "I think I hear," said the elder, a girl. "But what is he saying?"

"That he loves you and will always protect you in the water. As your father does." And she gave him a smiling glance.

Kenneth smiled back briefly, then turned his attention to the sea. Of course he heard nothing but the breakers and his children's shrieks as they ran hand in hand with their laughing mother into the waves. He wondered if Mona had truly heard a voice, or only hoped she did.

And still he wondered what had really transpired on that day, the day he nearly lost her to some mysterious force beneath the waves. Mona could not remember her actions or her reasons for them. And this made him wonder all the more. Had it been possession or temporary insanity? Had she heard a voice calling to her or felt the pull of an invisible hand?

Whatever had happened, it had changed her. She was no longer haunted by inner demons, no longer fearful in the water or in living her life.

He could scarcely believe that the voice Mona spoke of would express such thoughts. As for himself, he heard no messages from the waves. He never had, and he never would, he thought. Still, he always whispered his own message of thanks when he returned to the sea once more.