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Reverie

E M. Infanger
Bard College

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Reverie

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2023

I dedicate my senior project to the Bard Surrealist Circus. May it continue to bring joy to the student body.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Counting Seconds

The crab trap was broken. One of its wooden beams had splintered, the sharp point tearing a large hole in its metal netting. Any crabs that may have been caught escaped, leaving the trap empty. Although not beyond repair, it was now no use for Kay and his father, Albin, to recast it out to sea.

“This one needs to come home with us,” said his father.

Kay nodded and took the trap from him. His father then finished harvesting the last few traps, expertly holding each crab by the claws with one hand and measuring their purple-grey bodies with the other. The ones big enough were plopped into one of their two buckets while the smaller ones were thrown back into the water along with the empty traps.

“Ready?” asked Albin, taking a bucket of crabs in each hand.

Kay nodded again and followed him at his heels as they walked from the docks into town. Despite being just past dawn, the streets were already filling with people and market stands. Blue streamers and colorful paper lanterns were being hung up to line the streets. Most were cylinders painted with silver patterns, but some were specially made to take the shape of flowers, people, animals, and whatnot. Kay found himself slowing down to ogle at them. As he moved to catch up with his father, an older woman tending a toy stand called out to him.

“Amelia,” said Kay, coming to a full stop in the middle of foot traffic. Seeing that his father had disappeared further down the road, he approached Amelia’s stand and set the broken crab trap at his feet.

“Good haul?” she asked.

Kay shrugged and looked up at the rocking horse shaped lantern at the top of her stand down to the many toys that were on display.

“This one’s pretty.” He pointed at a wooden top delicately painted with interconnected swoops of teal and gold. Kay gave it a spin and watched until it fell. “How long did it take you?”

“The paint job? About an hour... with a confident and steady hand,” said Amelia. Kay spun it again. “How long ‘til you turn eleven, Kay?”

“Another week,” he answered matter-of-fact. His eyes remained on the spinning top.

“And have you decided on an apprenticeship, my boy?”

The top began to falter, but Kay grabbed it before it dropped. “No,” he said, his voice less confident than before.

“Well, you know that I’d be happy to have you.” She paused and then let out a big yawn. Kay’s eyes took the time to wander. He looked at the other toys: a doll with auburn curls, a set of toy ducks, a bilboquet. “Your father says that you’re a good whittler... but not the best painter,” she teased.

“I’m no good with colors.”

“You might be surprised by what I can work with.” Kay spun another top shaped like an acorn. Amelia watched for a moment and then sighed. “I’m supposing you’d best run after your father now.”

Kay did as he was told, abruptly leaving before the top could fall. He waved goodbye and went to join his father at their seafood stall. When he arrived, Kay was delighted by the two fish shaped lanterns adorning their stand. They were not yet lit, so he could see each paper scale painstakingly glued to their bodies.

His father was busy setting up their stand, carefully placing salted cod, eels, and trout on one side of the table and the fresh buckets of crabs on the other. Once he saw Kay, he addressed him with a firm voice. “You need to learn to follow close.”

Kay knew he had to explain himself. “Amelia wanted to talk,” he said.

“Oh, Amelia. Good woman. Honest. I suppose that’s alright.” His father grabbed a live crab that had made its way onto the table and tossed it back into the bucket. “Sorry, friend, but today is not your day,” said his father apologetically to the escapee crab. He turned to Kay and told him, “Once everything is sold, the day can be yours.”

The sun rose higher in the sky, and more people came out to buy their daily bread and admire the lanterns that had sprung up seemingly overnight. Kay jealousy watched as groups of laughing children skipped through the streets. One particular group of sisters tried to steal a star-shaped lantern only to be reprimanded by their mother. By midday, Kay and his father had sold everything at their stand; the crabs were the first to go, but eventually, the long slabs of salted fish too were sold.

“Alright”, said Albin as he wiped the sweat off his bald head. “We’ll go home, fix the trap, and you can be on your way.”

Kay felt his limbs go cold as the blood escaped them. The trap had not accompanied him to the stand that morning. His father looked around the stand before asking where it was.

“Papa, I know I had it at Amelia’s.” Once Albin processed what Kay had said, he closed his eyes and let out a sharp exhale. “It must be back there. I’ll go now and get it,” Kay promised.

“Yes, I think that would be best,” said his father.

Kay ran into the now bustling streets. He went back to Amelia's stand where he found her selling a painted wooden doggy to a young boy. The trap was not in front of her stand.

"Amelia", said Kay once the younger boy had left. "Did I leave a crab trap here?"

Kay could see her put two and two together. "That? Oh, dear. I suppose that could've been a crab trap." Kay saw every wrinkle on her face deepen to create an apologetic expression. "I thought it was rubbish, so I let the prospector take it away for... whatever he's making nowadays."

Kay began to stutter but ran off again before he could finish a thought. Amelia tried to tell him to stay, but he moved too quickly to hear her; instead, he had to check every inch of the cobblestone streets, looking down alleyways and behind market stalls. The only thing he found was a black button in-between two of the street's stones. Though it had a few scratches, it was still shiny, and Kay decided to pocket it.

After about fifteen minutes of fruitless searching, he tripped over a woman's skirt and decided that he had had enough. He muttered an apology to the woman and dusted himself off.

Once his father could see Kay empty-handed, he closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. The sky had begun to fill with grey clouds, and the wind chilled. Kay approached the stand and desperately tried to explain what had happened, but could not find the words. His father stopped him from sputtering.

"Kay, do you understand why this is frustrating?" Kay looked through his father, trying not to focus on the reprimand that was likely headed his way. His father waved to get Kay to look at him again. "What do we catch with those traps?" his father asked.

"Crabs, Papa."

“And why are crabs important?”

“They’re our livelihood”, said Kay, echoing the phrase that his father had said countless times before.

“That’s right. I know you didn’t mean to lose it, but you can’t be forgetting this and forgetting that. Not at your age. You’re gonna bankrupt me.” The two stood in silence for a moment. “So here’s the plan,” his father continued. “You and I are going on a short fishing trip. It’s still mid tide, so we’ll catch a few cod, and you can still go to the maritime festival.”

Despite the change in weather, Kay agreed to the plan. It seemed to him more than fair. They collected the proper fishing gear from their home and went down to the docks once more. Dressed in his fishing jacket, Kay loaded up their smaller fishing boat with poles, bait, hooks, and line. His father untied the rope connecting them to the wharf. Once the last bucket had made it aboard, Kay’s father pushed the boat away from the dock with his foot. They rocked a bit before his father was able to sit and row them both out to sea.

Kay shivered against the cold but prepared a fishing hook with bait nonetheless. After a short time, they were far enough away from the shore to catch deepwater cod. His father held the oars still in the water, and the boat came to a stop. They bobbed slightly with the tide.

“Ready?” asked his father. Kay nodded and handed him the fishing pole. “Kay, I’d like you to keep track of how long it takes to catch each fish. From when I cast the line until when I reel it in.”

It took Kay a moment to realize what his father was asking of him. “Each fish could take twenty minutes to bite”, said Kay.

“Or more,” said Albin. “But I want you to learn attention. No spacing out. All your focus should be on the counting.”

And so his father cast out the long line. Kay sat and pouted in silence while he counted the seconds. His father whistled a tune, and the asynchronous rhythm combined with the ocean’s waves made it difficult for Kay to keep time. After only a few minutes, the darkened clouds began to spit.

“Rain”, said Kay, being such an observant young man. His father looked up to the sky and hummed in agreement.

“Maybe the fish will be keener to bite now, which will make your job easier.”

After another five minutes, Albin felt something at the end of his line. He stood up and reeled in a fifteen-pound haddock. It wiggled as it was taken off the hook and dropped into their biggest bucket.

“How long was that, Captain?” asked his father.

“Eight minutes and twenty-seven seconds.” Kay fudged the numbers a bit, but it was close enough. His father smiled, gave praise, and cast the line out again. As soon as he did so, the rain picked up, pattering against the metal of their boat. Not even a minute passed before rain began soaking through the shoulders of Kay’s jacket, and he immediately suggested they drop anchor back at the dock.

“Let us catch one more, and then we can go back in,” said his father. “Here, hold the line, but remember to keep time.” His father handed Kay the fishing pole. Kay stood to hold it properly, making the boat sway in a way that made him feel sick. He closed his eyes.

Long after losing track of time, there was a harsh tug on the line, and Kay stepped back for leverage. As he did, his rubber boot slipped on the wet floor of the boat, and he fell backwards, hitting his low back on the gunwale.

He toppled over the side, and his head made contact with the sea. His nose stung as it filled with frigid ocean water. The fishing pole was gone, and Kay began to thrash about, unsure if he was sinking or floating back up to the surface. He opened his eyes to look for which way was up, but they burned with salt. His hearing muffled, yet he could still hear splashing and air bubbles. Eventually, his instincts betrayed him and overpowered any rational thought. He inhaled, filling his respiratory system with water. Relief flooded his senses, and Kay thought of nothing but the paper lanterns he had seen earlier that day: the rocking horse, the two fish, and the star. He felt perfectly suspended and motionless, and his body relaxed as it sunk into sleep.

Chapter 2: Warming Up

When Kay awoke, he found himself face down in wet, rocky sand. The low tide sent in a small wave, covering him in cold water. He winced and raised himself up only for pinpricks of black to swarm his vision. Despite the fuzzy feeling inside his head, Kay managed to push his weight back onto his knees, pebbles grinding into the skin. The sky was dark, and the air was soft with fog. Kay hugged himself to retain what little heat he had left in his body; his clothes were soaked through.

As he stood up, a yellow light flickered in the corner of his eye, and he instinctually turned to follow it. Through the fog, upon a small rocky peninsula, he saw a lighthouse. Its beam of light continued to rotate until it flashed in Kay's field of vision again.

He clumsily leaned down to take off his waterlogged boots and socks. His hands were bright red and hurt to bend. Just as he was examining the rest of his body, the dreadful sound of a foghorn erupted from the lighthouse. He cowered away and held up his hands on either side of his head. Still, he trekked toward the only building in sight, carrying his boots with him while his bare feet sank into the cold wet sand.

Beyond the damp beach, along a dirt path, and finally up a small flight of moss covered stairs, Kay made it to the door of the lighthouse. Said door was inset, and Kay found himself grateful for the littlest bit of shelter gifted to him by the slight overhang. A lantern to the side of the door was lit with a low burning candle, which gave Kay hope. He pounded on the door with a closed fist and then backed off to wait in a shivering mess. Nothing happened even after a minute, and once he heard another blare from the foghorn, Kay pounded on the door again.

That time after only a moment, Kay heard echoing footfalls coming from inside. The door opened only a hair, and he could see the orange glow of a candle on the other side. Kay found the image eerie and unsettling, and his mind thought of different things that could be lurking behind the door. However, it quickly flew open to reveal a tall woman in her bedclothes.

“Get inside, child!”

Although Kay was happy not to see any kind of creature, he found himself frozen for a moment. Still, he did as he was told, dripping onto the woman’s dirty brick floor. The inside was small, dark, and completely bare save for a staircase that sat against the room’s rounded walls.

The woman took Kay’s boots from him and tossed them outside. She muttered to herself as she shut the door behind him.

“Coat, too,” she said. Kay looked around and then took off his fishing jacket. The woman hung it on a peg near the door. “Up the stairs, go on. It’s a long way up, but there’s a fire waiting for you.”

Kay suddenly felt as though the woman was speaking too quickly. He crossed his arms and slowly turned toward the staircase. The woman put her hand on his back and steered him up the loosely coiled steps.

It was difficult to see beyond the first few feet of the woman’s candle flame, but Kay could tell that the floor above was larger but just as bare and unlit as the last. The floor above that one he guessed was a kitchen; he could see the shine of stacked copper pots and perhaps a small circular table for eating. Finally, the fourth floor was furnished with rugs, comfortable chairs, tables, and oil lamps. There were no paintings or photographs on the curved walls, yet the room was far from drab. A tall bookshelf stood holding novels and nautical knick-knacks. A vase

shaped like a fish held a bushel of purple heather, and a dark wood grandfather clock emitted faint mechanical clicks. The woman began to scramble but quickly opted to usher Kay over to a couch that sat at the side of an open masonry stove. Another blast from the horn startled Kay again.

“You’ll get used to the horn,” said the woman. “You just stay right there”. With that, she set her candle down and marched up the stairs to the floor above. Kay stood right in front of the low fire and rotated. His pupils were wide in the dim room, and his brows wrinkled.

The woman came back down with quilts, pillows, and clothing. She dropped the heap of textiles on a chair and draped a towel around Kay’s shoulders.

“I don’t think I have anything to fit you, but you best put something on unless you wish to freeze.”

Kay used the towel to dry his hair, leaving it in spikey disarray. He stared at the pile for much too long before the woman picked him out a wool dress shirt and a pair of work pants covered in splatters of white paint.

“I’ll leave you a minute,” the woman said as she got up. She grumbled as she climbed the stairs once again.

Once she was gone, Kay let the towel fall from around his shoulders and onto the ground. He started taking off his wet clothes, grimacing at the burning sensation as they peeled from his skin. The clothes sloshed as they hit the towel. His hands trembled as he dressed himself, and although the new clothes were much too big, they were dry and warm. Kay sat on the couch before the fire, and a wave of exhaustion swept over him. He hugged his arms to his chest.

It was a while before the woman came back holding a mug in each hand and a sugar dish under her arm. She placed a mug and the sugar in front of the boy, handed him a quilt, and sat down in her own chair. Somehow, the black liquid looked almost blue when it shone in the light. He held a hand above the mug to feel the hot steam.

“Something to warm you from the inside out,” she said.

Kay took the mug in both hands. The ceramic felt scorching. They sat quietly for a moment. The woman finished nearly half her tea in one go. Kay mimed her and took a sip of the hot bitter liquid.

“My name is Nim, and I’m the lighthouse keeper here,” said the woman, finally breaking the silence. “You’re not the first poor shipwrecked sod, but you are the first tot.”

Kay’s nose scrunched up in distaste. After a moment of blankly staring into his mug, he silently recalled what had happened: counting, falling, oblivion, and finally waking up on the cold beach.

Nim examined Kay’s face and put her mug on the table. “Can you tell me anything?” she tried to ask, but Kay interrupted her.

“I can’t be here,” he slurred. Suddenly he became aware of his surroundings in a different way. Nim moved to the edge of her chair as though to catch him.

“Calm, calm,” she said. “You shouldn’t leave unless you have a death wish.” Kay shook his head.

“He doesn’t know where I am.”

Nim nodded silently. She took another sip of her tea and got up, making Kay feel uneasy. She set a pillow down at the opposite side of the couch that Kay was sitting on.

“Are you well enough to lie down?” Nim asked.

He looked at the pillow and then at Nim. It was the first time that he had looked her in the face. Her expression was stern, and he took note of her short choppy hair and downturned eyelashes. She patted the pillow a few times, beckoning him to lie down. Kay eventually broke the eye contact and rested his head on the pillow.

“Good, yes. On your left side.” Nim pulled a blanket from the pile, folded it, and placed it at Kay’s feet. “Right now, it’s best if you just sleep.”

Kay could only worry and stare blankly at the fire. The light hurt his heavy eyes. Nim licked her fingers and extinguished the candle. The lamps were soon to follow. She sat back down in her chair and finished what was left in her mug before wrapping herself in a blanket of her own. She shifted in the chair until she was comfortable.

Within a few minutes, Nim’s breathing became gruff and developed into a snore. She remained undisturbed even at the sound of the foghorn every two minutes. Between the two loud noises, Kay found it difficult to relax, but eventually, they created a rhythm that allowed him to close his eyes, rest his neck, and fall into sleep.

Chapter 3: Honest Work at Midday

Kay stirred. He opened his eyes and felt surprised to find himself in the same place he was the night before. Nim, however, was no longer in her chair. In her place was her blanket, now crumpled up into a small ball. Light came into the room from a single window, and Kay could see shiny flecks of dust suspended in the air.

He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and noted how his skin was still sticky with salt. He looked at the tall grandfather clock. It read 12:05, just after noon. It had been ages since he got up after sunrise. Kay jolted upright and felt his body ache. His tea from the previous night was still sitting on the table in front of him. He decided to take another sip from the mug, which he regretted. It was worse cold. He threw the covers off himself and bumbled around the room, mug still in hand. His uncovered feet were chilly, and he could feel every particle of the floor's grit stick to his soles.

He followed the light to the window and looked out. The ocean appeared a rich cyan as it reflected the cloudless sky. From his vantage point, he could see the jagged coastline encompassing a larger landmass hosting a sparse cypress forest further inland. Kay cranked the window open and stuck his head out so that the sun shone on his face. He basked in the warmth before dumping the contents of his mug out the window.

At the base of the lighthouse, Nim walked to the door holding Kay's clothes from the night before, now washed and dried. Just as she got to the inset door, she was abruptly showered in cold umber liquid.

From inside, Kay heard a splash and a stunted cry. He leaned out further to see Nim looking around and then up at him with a scowl. His hand covered his mouth in shock, and he quickly scuttled away, leaving his empty mug on the windowsill.

“The one day I wished there’d been wind,” Nim muttered to herself. She entered the lighthouse and began ascending the spiral staircase.

Upstairs, Kay froze. He thought about hiding and then about running, but he ultimately found that he could not move from the place he was standing. The sound of Nim’s footsteps vastly preceded her; the mostly empty rooms below allowed sound to reverberate into the upper levels. Kay felt his cheeks and neck go warm. Eventually, Nim appeared in the living quarters with damp shoulders and hair.

“You’ve got some nerve,” she said. “You pull another stunt like that, and I’ll throw you back in the ocean.”

Kay remained stiff. He stammered out what would have been an apology, but Nim stopped him. “Relax. I’m teasing you. It takes a lot more than cold tea to vex me.” she said. “How you feeling?” she asked. Kay paused.

“Warmer.”

Nim nodded. “Good.”

She grabbed a towel from the pile of clothes and dried off her hair before approaching Kay and giving his clothes to him. There were small streaks of tea spatter at the top of the pile, but they were clean otherwise.

“I’ll swap you,” she said, gesturing to his mug. Kay ran to the windowsill and back. He gave her the mug and took the pile into his arms. He inhaled shakily and exhaled in much the same way.

“A little ‘thank you’, and we can call it even.”

Kay looked away from her, embarrassed. “Thank you,” he said.

“You’re welcome. If you feel well enough after you’ve dressed, meet me two stories up in the service room.”

She left rather abruptly, and Kay set down the clothes to change. He put his socks on first after he dusted his feet off. The rest of the clothes were soon to follow, and once he was decent, Kay made his way up the stairs.

The floor above was similar to the living quarters but also featured a cozy twin bed. The one above that was more bare but still featured a table and a few chairs. After another flight of stairs, Kay reached the service room. He was a bit out of breath when he saw Nim there looking inside a metal barrel. Everything in the room was tidy and organized. A few towels were draped over her shoulder, and she was holding a bottle of clear liquid. She looked at Kay.

“Follow me up into the cupola,” said Nim. She then walked over to a steel ladder attached to the wall and began to climb up one-handed.

Kay did as he was told and accompanied Nim up the ladder and into the room encasing the lighthouse’s lantern. Unlike the other rooms, the cupola was hexagonal, and its walls were constructed out of large panes of glass. From there, Kay could see for what seemed like tens of miles in every direction. The sea was calm, and a few sailboats rested on the water. From that high, he could also see that there were roads and buildings clustered within the inland forest.

There was a large one with a bright red and white roof; it would have been impossible not to notice the profound contrast of the two colors against the green trees.

Kay looked back to the center of the room and was astounded by the lantern's lens. It was made of four panels of curved glass, each with a crystalline bullseye in its center. Kay thought the shape resembled a convex version of a church steeple. Between every glass ring of the bullseye was a deep groove, which created a shape that allowed the sunlight to refract. Although it was the daytime, the lens still rotated, and every time it caught the light just right, brief colorful prisms flashed in Kay's eyes.

"Can I touch it?" asked Kay, not looking away from the lens.

"Only if you're planning to clean off your dirty fingerprints," said Nim as she handed him the bottle and a towel.

Kay took them from her and touched the smooth glass with his fingertips. It was pleasantly warm, and he ran his hand over each ridge to feel the texture. Once he had, he opened the bottle and wet his cloth. After lifting it to his nose and smelling the liquid's harsh astringency, he wiped the glass down. Nim took the bottle from him and doused her own towel before beginning to clean the large dustless glass windows.

Once they were finished, Nim checked the lens and hummed in approval. "Well done. A lighthouse keeper in the making," she said. "Anything you need?"

"I could use a toilet."

Nim nodded and led Kay down the long spiral staircase and out of the lighthouse. His boots were still outside and slightly damp, but they would do. He put them on, followed Nim over to an outhouse, and went in. Nim patiently waited at a small tree, her arms crossed.

“Alright,” Nim said after Kay was finished and had come to join her again. “Morning duties are finished, so I think it best if we go into town.”

“What are we doing there?”

“Trying to get you home. I got the sense that there was someone looking for you.”

Kay thought that he should have been more frantic than he was. His family was probably searching for him in all the wrong places, yet he could not seem to feel a sense of urgency. Still, he agreed with Nim and followed her into the wood.

Chapter 4: The Port of Mellim

“It might be easier to find who’s looking for you if I knew your name,” said Nim as she and Kay walked along the side of a dirt road. The terrain was flat and surprisingly dry. Sunlight leaked through the tree leaves, shining directly on top of both of their heads.

“It’s Kay.”

“Kay,” she repeated. “And what sort of people are we looking for?”

“A man, my father. Albin. He’s a crabber.”

Within the trees and foliage, Kay could hear tweets and rustles from songbirds. He fought the urge to stop and watch them; however, he still looked to the treetops in hopes of seeing squirrels. Their journey into town felt a lot longer than twenty minutes.

“You know where we are, Kay?”

“Well, I can tell we ain’t in the big city.”

Nim smiled to herself. They took a left turn, and Kay turned his attention to what was in front of them. He could see the ocean again peeking through the trees and the outskirts of a town. He smelled the stables before he saw them set away from the large arched entrance of the town.

“We’re coming up on the Port of Mellim. You know it?” asked Nim. Kay shook his head no. “It’s mainly good people, but it’s still better not to run off.”

They kept walking on the road past the stablehands who stared a bit too long and officially entered the port. Within ten feet or so, the smell of horse dung was replaced with that of hot oil. The streets were busy and loud. There were vendors selling food, puppets, jewelry, and such. He tried to keep close, but Kay could not help but admire all the novelties.

“It’s not like this all the time,” said Nim over the crowd.

“You all celebrate the maritime festival a day after us.”

“Festival? No. I don’t know what this is.”

Nim looked around and stuck out her elbow. Kay took it, and she led him through all the different sorts of people. To avoid a woman passionately trying to sell hats, Nim almost bumped into an old man carrying a toddler on his shoulders. Nim pushed past them, but Kay followed their gaze over to a woman who was seemingly pulling coin after coin out of thin air. Nim pulled Kay along the road until they came to a square brick building with tall arched windows and doors.

“Where is here?” asked Kay.

“The Mellim Constabulary,” said Nim. Kay’s mouth became a thin line. They walked down the small path leading up to the building and through double doors. “I’m not holding out much hope either.”

There were two officers inside. One leaned against the long welcome desk reading a hardcover book. The other was in the next room asking questions to a man nursing a cut lip. They both wore boxy black coats that ended at the shin. Kay found the shape rather funny and thought it made the two officers look like big walking rectangles. Once the leaning officer saw Kay and Nim, he perked up, put his book down, and took his proper place behind the desk. He held a pen out to a sheet of paper and asked them how he could help them.

Nim approached the desk, and Kay followed her closely. “I have a lost child, Constable, and we’re trying to get him back home,” she said.

The man was already writing quickly and with zeal. “Misplaced boy. Ten, eleven, twelve years old. Name?” he asked.

Nim’s eyes squinted for a second. Still, she nudged Kay, and he told the officer his name. The man confirmed the spelling and scribbled more notes onto the paper. He raised his eyebrows high and looked Kay up and down.

“And what crime or incident preceded this misplacement?” the officer asked as he pulled out a paper map of the city.

“A shipwreck, Constable,” said Nim.

Kay looked up at Nim with disapproval. The officer wore a similar look, but he continued to write on his sheet of paper. “There’s been no wreck that we know of, ma’am, and there hasn’t been for the past decade.”

“I wasn’t shipwrecked,” said Kay.

Nim’s shoulders seemed to loosen, which Kay thought made her look smaller. She stood looking at the two in silence for a moment. “I misunderstood, then. You can tell us both,” Nim said as she gestured to the officer.

Kay had to think for a moment, so the officer tried to help him along. “Can you describe the crime or incident, young man?”

“Crime?” Kay repeated. “No crime. I fell off a fishing boat.”

The man stopped, placed his pen down, and folded his hands. Nim clicked her tongue and inhaled deeply.

“Lost your fervor?”

“You heard the boy, ma’am. Without a crime, there’s no one to apprehend. I wish it weren’t the case, but we haven’t the resources to spare on young wayward fishermen.”

Nim's eyebrows twitched. Her nostrils flared, and her upper lip lifted in the slightest of snarls. The look was not far off from her typical expression, but the subtleties sent a shiver down either side of Kay’s spine. His eyes flitted back and forth between the two adults. The officer, however, did not look at all perturbed. He fiddled with his mustache.

“I have all but one Officer running around the city trying to keep order with all this circus business,” said the officer. Kay’s ears perked.

“Circus business?” Kay repeated.

“A circus is why the streets are so busy?” asked Nim in disbelief.

“Oh, yes!” said the officer from the other room. She emerged and put a small notebook into her pocket. Kay could tell from the three pips on her uniform that she was an Inspector. “I shouldn’t be saying this, but they are wonderful. Don’t get me wrong, they’ve made a pigsty of the Port, but they know how to entertain.”

“Someone’s missing child is still here, and you all haven’t even asked where or who he needs to get to,” said Nim.

“Yes, I heard all of that,” said the Inspector. “Look, it’s good folk in the port. Plenty of people have information, and plenty more will do you a favor.”

Nim met the other woman’s eyes sharply.

“You will see them again, lad,” said the man at the desk before ripping the paper he was writing on in half and then in half again.

Nim argued with the Officers only briefly before Kay tugged on her shirt, a silent request to leave. She stopped her tirade and did not look back at them once Kay took her elbow, but she still muttered insults under her breath as she led Kay out of the building.

Chapter 5: Recounting

Nim was still grumbling as she and Kay stood on the side of the road. “I suppose we need to ask around,” she said more clearly. She looked in either direction, reading the signs of shops that were visible: a haberdashery, a jeweler, a bakery. The crowd thinned the closer it got to the Constabulary, giving them the slightest amount of privacy.

“You said you fell off a boat,” said Nim factually. Kay hummed an agreement. “What happened?” she asked.

Kay had to think to himself again. He pulled on Nim’s elbow to sit on the edge of the sidewalk. At first, he only sat and people-watched. Some of the ones he saw ate sweets and fried dough, while others window-shopped, looking through the large panes of glass on the store’s fronts. Eventually, Kay’s hands moved as though he were holding a fishing pole.

“I was holding the line. Papa was there,” said Kay. He closed his eyes and tried to remember the grey clouds and unsteady sway of the fishing boat. His body mimed being yanked forward. “Something tugged hard. It must’ve been a halibut because it almost pulled the pole right out of my hands. I was still gonna try to reel it in, so I stepped back, and I tried to reach for the crank. But I slipped, and I fell. And I…”

Kay opened his eyes again and found that he was on his back lying on the sidewalk. Nim was watching him. He sat upright.

“I can’t remember hitting the water, but my nose stung, and it was cold.”

They sat for a minute.

“I hope that means that you’re close to home,” said Nim eventually. “You couldn’t have drifted that far.”

Kay went back to people-watching to avoid thinking about his whereabouts. Most of the people simply melted into the hoard, but sometimes he allowed his eyes to linger on someone with gold rings on every finger or tight spirals of inky hair. Kay squinted against the sun.

“Nim,” Kay said. He looked up at her for approval before he continued. “Why did you become a lighthouse keeper?”

“Why?” she repeated the question, unsure if she had heard him correctly.

“I’ve been wondering. Not a shipwreck in ten years. Is that your doing?”

Nim massaged the space between her eyebrows, trying to iron out the wrinkles. “I can tell you all the whys and hows once we find your way back home. Does that sound like a deal?”

Kay’s mouth scrunched in dissatisfaction. “I don’t think that’s very fair,” Kay said. He tried not to pout. “Besides, what if I don’t make it home?”

“That won’t happen.”

“You should tell me all the stories now because you’ll be busy keeping the lighthouse once I’m back home.” Kay tried to sound convincing.

With that, Nim rose and signed for Kay to do the same. He did what she wanted and took Nim’s arm again. “I’m sure we can make time for one or two,” she said. “Are we ready?”

Kay nodded, and Nim led him across the street. Because there were fewer people, they crossed without any need to maneuver.

Eventually, the number of people and stands in the street increased. There was a circle of people gathered around a man standing on a tall box juggling metal rings. The man immediately

caught Kay's attention; he wore a red cap on his head and dark makeup around his eyes. The juggler threw all three of the metal rings high up in the air, spun around, and then continued to juggle them. Nim had to forcibly pull Kay through the crowd. He still tried to slow down and watch. Eventually, the man caught the rings and bowed with a smile as the crowd clapped for him.

"That's all for now, my friends!" yelled the juggler over the applause. "If you want more, the circus tent opens at five tonight!"

Kay tugged on Nim's arm and gestured to the man. Her eyes focused and she nodded her head in earnest. Kay followed her line of sight and could tell that she was looking entirely past the man to the grey stone building behind him. It had white shutters and a large white door at the top of a short flight of steps.

"Yes, an Inn is not a bad idea," said Nim with a false sense of understanding. "Outsiders, foreigners, travelers."

The juggler put away his rings and took off his cap. Kay turned around to see what Nim was referring to. After being jostled a few times by the dispersing crowd, Kay saw the building and the sign outside it that read "West Tavern". Nim stood for a moment in consideration before gently dragging Kay along with her to the building's small front garden and up its small staircase.

Kay allowed himself to follow Nim but then found himself imagining the interior of the building: a large poorly lit room with groups of muscular adventurers sitting on stools holding frothy metal beer steins. The thought made him nervous. He would most certainly be out of

place. Kay stopped at the top step. Nim stopped when she no longer heard little footsteps following her. She looked back at Kay.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

He thought perhaps he should be stoic. Grin and bear whatever crude jokes and drinking songs they throw his way. But his nervousness quickly won him over. “Can I stay out here, Nim?”

Nim looked up at the sky for only a fraction of a second before returning back to Kay. His apprehension was not well hidden. “I know it might not be a place for children, but don’t you reckon I should keep an eye on you?”

They heard a celebratory roar of voices come from inside. Kay said nothing but looked as though he would turn tail at any moment.

“I won’t be long, I suppose. Sit right there on the steps until I come back.” she said.

Kay agreed and sat at the top of the staircase. He tilted his head back to watch as Nim gave him a cold look before disappearing into the Tavern.

Chapter 6: Lefty

Kay did as he was told and sat at the top of the stairs. He watched the juggler leave and the mass of people disperse almost entirely. A group of young teenagers sat down on the side of the road and pulled out a deck of cards. A pile of coins quickly appeared between them.

They captivated Kay and reminded him of the shenanigans children got up to in his own town, but his legs fell still. One particular young man spotted him staring, and Kay tried to pretend as though he was looking at the group of multi-colored irises in front of the tavern. However, when Kay looked back, the young man still met his gaze. Kay felt himself stand, and to avoid looking awkward, he walked over to the group.

“You playing?” asked the particular young man. Once Kay was up close, he could see that the young man’s face was heavily freckled, concentrating around his nose and cheeks.

Kay tapped his pockets to demonstrate their contents. “Mind if I just watch?” Kay asked.

The young man handed him a small stack of silver coins. Kay tried to decline, but the young man insisted and said, “You can make it back for me.”

Kay took the stack, and the group started a new deal. Kay sat down in the circle next to the young man and watched as the dealer put three cards face down in the center. The backs of the cards were decoratively printed with a perfectly symmetrical blue pattern. Everyone ante up a coin, and Kay did the same. The dealer then flipped over the two cards on the outside: a Jack and an eight.

“Who’s in?” asked the dealer.

Kay's chest fluttered, and his eyes darted around at all the other players. He looked to the young man for guidance.

"You think that third card is between an eight and a Jack?" asked the young man, seeing that Kay was lost.

"I wouldn't know."

"Well, that's the point, you lune. Come on, give it your best guess."

The girl sitting to the left of the dealer put in another coin. Everyone else was out except the freckled young man, who matched the bet. The dealer then turned to Kay, who quickly said that he was out.

"You'll just lose all your money if you don't bet," said the young man.

"He'll lose it faster if he bets on a two out of thirteen chance, Lefty," said the dealer. He then looked around to address the group. "Anyone else?"

No one spoke, so the dealer flipped the center card. The six of hearts. Lefty complained but turned to Kay and nudged him.

"I can see you've got good sense," he said.

Kay furrowed his brow but smiled a bit in amusement. "Sense? It's chance."

A few of the other kids urged the dealer for another game now that the pot was bigger. Everyone anteed again. The dealer discarded the three cards and replaced them with new ones: a deuce and a six.

"Who's in?" asked the dealer again.

The girl left of the dealer put a coin in, and so did another kid who looked to be the oldest of the bunch. Kay thought for a moment and raised the bet to two coins. Even still, he looked

around at the older children as though he was expecting to be scolded. Lefty quickly slammed down two coins to match the bet.

“I’m telling you all. He’s got good sense, this one right here,” Lefty said.

The three others matched the bet, and the dealer flipped over the middle card. The five of clubs. Lefty slapped him on the back a few times, spouting praises and rambling on about ‘good sense’. The dealer counted the pot and divvied it up.

“An even split. A return of six coins to each player.”

Kay was thrilled to see his stack of coins nearly double. He tried to return the initial amount to Lefty, but he refused it. The dealer took all the discarded cards and shuffled them back into the deck.

“How come we’ve never seen you around? You could’ve been making me lots of cash.”

Some of the other young teenagers giggled, but the dealer eyed Lefty down. Kay frowned and said, “Making *you* cash?”

“Simmer down. We just like to joke,” Lefty said.

“Ante up,” said the dealer, preparing for another round.

Just as Kay was about to put in another coin, Lefty elbowed him playfully. “How you feel about spending some of that profit?” Lefty asked.

Kay tried to process what the other boy meant. He noticed that Lefty’s olive colored shirt was slightly too loose in the collar. “I wouldn’t mind something to eat,” said Kay tentatively.

Lefty chuckled in approval, collected both their coins, and told the group that he would be back soon. Before Kay was able to protest, Lefty tugged him out of the circle and into the

streets. Once they were both standing, Kay saw that he was only as tall as the other boy's chin, making him feel self-conscious.

“Wait, we can't go far,” said Kay, remembering that Nim was still in the tavern.

“You like fried dough?”

Although Kay did not respond, Lefty pulled Kay through the crowd until they met the stand selling exactly what he had asked him about. They took a spot in a rather long line where they stood for some time. Kay took comfort in the sweet smell around them, but he still kept an eye on the tavern waiting for Nim to come out.

“Did you say your name?” said Lefty as they waited in line.

“It's Kay.”

Lefty nodded to himself. “Well, it's good to meet you, Kay. We oughta get you a nickname, though.”

Kay could feel his pulse quicken as he tried to think of ways to make conversation. He built up some courage before settling on a question. “I heard the dealer call you ‘Lefty’. Is that ‘cause you're left-handed?”

“Oh, I see that you're quite the intellectual,” Lefty said sarcastically. Kay instantly felt embarrassed by the question, and he felt lucky when Lefty just began rambling. “Dev is always the dealer. Likes to be in control I think. But, you know, he never keeps any of the coin whenever we end with money still in the pot...”

Lefty's words began to mush together into incoherence. Kay glanced back over again to the tavern. A few people walked in, but no one exited. Kay's gaze trailed along the street's shops. One large sandstone building down the street caught his eye in particular. It had a large octagonal

tower, which Kay thought made it look like a fortress. Eventually, Lefty snapped his fingers in front of Kay's face.

“Do your eyes always wander like that?”

Kay looked back at Lefty sheepishly and quickly focused back in on the conversation. He apologized half-heartedly and listened to Lefty list all the other children who had been playing cards with them. Lefty stopped, though, when it was their turn to order.

Lefty ordered for both of them and paid the correct amount. Kay tried to look into the other boy's pockets but was quickly distracted by the worker taking a fresh batch of dough out of the oil and drizzling honey onto the puffy squares of pastry. The squares were then wrapped in a paper cone and given to each boy. Kay switched the hot cone from hand to hand, trying not to get burned. The man working then steered them away to make room for the next customers, and Lefty led them away to sit down on a crowded bench and eat their treat.

Kay held the dough to his mouth to feel the heat. He blew on it to cool it down.

“You came from the Inn,” said Lefty in between bites. Kay could see in the middle of the square and admired the soft webs of pastry. “Does that mean you're not from the port?”

“Yeah.”

“You got family here? Touring? Just here to see the circus?”

Kay did not want to answer the question, so he bit into his dough. However, it was still too hot, and he opened his mouth to release white curls of steam. “No,” said Kay once he swallowed, burning his throat as he did so. He could feel his lack of social finesse compared to Lefty. “I'm a runaway,” he eventually decided to say in a low tone.

Lefty's mouth widened in awe. "Not you! And here I thought you had such good sense," Lefty said. It was hard for Kay not to smile as he nodded, pleased that he had impressed his new friend. He quickly tried to think of a backstory while Lefty jabbered hushed tokens of worry and esteem. "Why did you do it?" asked Lefty, intrigued.

Kay pursed his lips and shrugged. "Home is boring," said Kay, trying to come off as nonchalant.

"Why, I wouldn't have the guts. The nerve. The gall. The audacity," said Lefty. He tried to think of more words but stopped there. "You picked the right place to run away to. Life's been much more interesting with that circus troupe in town."

"Have you seen them?" Kay finally started to munch on his cooled fried dough.

"Not in their tent, but I will tonight now that I got lucky playing Red Dog," Lefty said smiling. Kay glared at Lefty's pockets.

"*You* got lucky?"

"Oh, don't lose your crackers. There's enough here for two tickets." Lefty finished eating, crumpled up the paper cone, and pocketed it. "Besides, it's anything but boring."

Kay rushed himself trying to finish his dough as well, but he ended up choking for a moment and smearing honey on his upper lip. He wiped it away, composed himself, and agreed to the proposal.

Lefty beamed. "Good. It's not for another two... maybe three hours, though."

Kay looked back over to the building that had caught his eye before. Its irregular stones were placed in a seemingly random pattern. The top of the tower flared, making it wider than the

base. Kay thought it was ugly and beautiful at the same time. “What’s that building? I’d say it was a fortress, but it’s too small.”

“The library?” Lefty sounded disappointed, but those words grabbed Kay’s attention. Such a place was bound to have knowledgeable folks and big books of maps. Nim would be more than pleased. Remembering Nim made Kay glance back over at the tavern. There was still no one outside. He turned back to Lefty and pleaded to go into the library, but the other boy did not seem as enthused. “You can go and browse those shelves any other time.”

“Oh, please?” Kay begged. “I’ll owe you something. A soda, a favor, I don’t know, what do you want?”

Lefty stopped him and smiled devilishly. “You had me at a favor,” he said.

Kay regretted the offer, and almost tried to rescind it. “Does that mean you have something in mind?” asked Kay.

“No, but I’ll think of something,” said Lefty back to his lively self.

They began walking together to the library, and Lefty continued to gab. Kay had to remind Lefty to stop as they approached the entrance. Lefty reluctantly shut his mouth and followed Kay inside.

Chapter 7: Fun and Games

Kay and Lefty entered the building. As soon as the door closed, the sounds of the streets muffled into a low roll. Looking through a set of open double doors, Kay could see high shelves and volumes upon volumes of books. He smelled paper and mildew.

They went through the doors and into the reading rooms and were greeted by a librarian reshelving books. He was likely old enough to be Kay's grandfather, but he was still bubbly and well-dressed. Kay admired the red gemstones that the man wore from his ears. Lefty looked around, but his face kept the same expression of detachment. The room was three stories high and had a glass lightwell for a ceiling. Kay was surprised to find it nearly empty. He saw only the librarian who greeted them and two old women flipping through what Kay thought looked like business ledgers. Each section of the library was labeled with overhead signs: Botany, History, Town Records, and the like.

Kay did not see the section he was looking for, so he led Lefty up into the stairwell and up one of the two flights of stairs. He looked through each section while Lefty trailed behind him. Kay enjoyed noting the different colors, sizes, and thicknesses of each book; some were plain or unassuming while others featured ornate designs on their spines and covers.

"What are we looking for?" asked Lefty at a normal volume. Kay almost shushed him but stopped himself.

"Maps," Kay whispered.

Kay tried to keep focus, but he eventually found himself stuck in the Arts section looking through their books on woodworking. Lefty meandered through the aisles of bookshelves until

he turned a corner and saw a door along the wall left ajar. He looked through the opening and saw a girl sitting before a window, her nose in a book.

She was perhaps the same age as Lefty, but he did not recognize her. He impulsively opened the door, and its hinges creaked as metal rubbed against metal, alerting the young lady to Lefty's presence. Her head popped up from behind the book.

Kay soon realized that Lefty was no longer with him. He closed the book he had been looking at, put it back on the proper shelf, and began to search around. Eventually, he heard Lefty's voice and navigated through the shelves to follow it. Kay found him leaning against a doorway and once again speaking at full volume.

"...I thought I knew every kid in town, but apparently not," Lefty chatted. Kay walked up beside him and looked through the doorway to see who Lefty was talking to; he saw the girl sitting in a dim room. She closed her book and set it on the windowsill.

"I really spend most of my time in here. Who's this?" she asked once Kay came to stand beside Lefty.

"This is Kay, but that may change once I think of a nickname," said Lefty. "I got a few ideas, by the way. What do you think about Tea Time, Tea Cup, Artichoke, Ricky Puddles, Stork, Spud Bud, The Umpire..."

Lefty continued counting names on his fingers while the other two children watched. Eventually, Kay could not stop himself from chuckling. "None of those make any sense," said Kay, still trying to keep his voice down.

"No? Give me some more time, then," Lefty said. "Dawn, what's a good nickname for a runaway?" He gestured at the girl. Kay made eye contact with her. Her eyes widened with

surprise. For only a second, Kay swore that her pupils gave off a white reflection, similar to the way he had seen a cat's or sheep's eye glow in low light.

“A runaway?” she asked as though she did not believe it.

Kay was already bothered that he had to keep up with the lie. His reaction was lukewarm; he simply nodded and hoped that was enough to convince her. Dawn looked rather worried.

“Why did you leave?” she asked, the same question Lefty had asked him earlier.

Lefty answered for him. “Why? Haven't you ever dreamed of living on the lam? This one here yearns for freedom! Excitement! Adventure!” Kay instantly felt embarrassed by Lefty's loud and overzealous response.

“You really don't know how to keep your voice down, do you?” The girl glared at Lefty, her face contorted. Kay thought he saw Lefty's body go rigid. “I'm messing,” said Dawn as she dropped the face. “Hardly anyone's been in here for days.”

Lefty relaxed. “Don't scare me like that. That look nearly made me jump out of my skin.”

“I'd be serious if anyone else was in here,” she said.

“But there ain't. We could do anything we like. Form a choir, play a game...” Left trailed off, lingering on the idea of a game. Kay was successfully distracted.

“A game? Like what?” Kay asked.

“Hide n' Seek, Sardines, Ball of Wool. I can keep going if none of those spark joy.”

Dawn scratched her scalp and kept quiet. Kay decided to take the time to look around the small room. It was relatively empty, holding only a table, chairs, and a chalkboard. A stack of books and papers sat a few feet away from Dawn.

“Don’t tell me you two came in here to play games,” Dawn said, drawing Kay’s attention back again. He looked into her eyes again, and noted nothing except their warm hazel color.

Lefty smiled and started to wobble back and forth. Kay was just as excited, so he agreed to play first and find maps second. “We didn’t, but that’s the plan now. So what are we playing?” Lefty asked. “Forty-four, Metal Dragon, Cat n’ Mouse, Blind Man’s Buff?”

“I think I know the last one” said Kay, but his intonation made it sound as though he was asking a question.

“That one’s basically Tag. Whoever’s ‘it’ is just blindfolded,” said Dawn. “And it’s perfect for when you’re dying to smash your face into a wall.”

They let her statement stew for a moment. “Is that a ‘no’ to Blind Man’s Buff?” Lefty asked, disappointment evident.

“Absolutely not. It’s one of my favorites.”

Lefty smiled at the victory. She stood to meet the other two children, and they all went out to join the rows of bookshelves again. Lefty pulled his shirt up to cover his eyes. “Five seconds head start,” said Lefty, his voice muffled through the shirt.

Kay and Dawn ran away but still stayed in what would have been plain sight. They kept their eyes on Lefty as he began searching around in one direction.

“Here, kitty, kitty,” said Dawn, goading.

Lefty instantly rushed toward the sound, but Dawn dodged out of the way before Lefty could touch her. Although she tried to stifle her triumphant giggles, the library began to fill with the sounds of play. Kay just stood by and watched as Lefty bolted after Dawn each time she teased him only for Dawn to immediately change her direction.

Eventually, though, Lefty was able to catch up. He grabbed Dawn's shoulder and instantly pulled his shirt down into its proper position.

"And you're it!" he cried, a huge grin on his face.

Dawn did the same as Lefty and covered her eyes with her shirt. The two boys scattered during their head start, ducking between the aisles of books. Kay tried to keep his footsteps quiet, but the heels of his boots still clacked against the wooden floors. Dawn slowly began to pursue him, her hands trailing along the bookshelves; however, it was not long before Kay hid behind a pillar, keeping his breathing low. Dawn walked right past him.

"Come on, give me a sound," she said, feeling around her surroundings.

She was no more than five feet away, but Kay still decided to make the faintest clicking sound with his tongue. The girl ran and grabbed at him, and Kay ducked. His boots scuffed the floor as he slid away from her. He jumped behind the next column where he tried to stand perfectly still and hold his breath. Dawn followed him, holding her hands up to look for him.

Once again she got too close to Kay for comfort, yet she stood unaware of his location. He planned to sneak away, but as soon as he pivoted his foot ever so slightly, Dawn tried to grapple Kay. He dodged, making her miss the first time, but she had no problems grabbing him the second time as he tried to scurry away.

"You're a slippery one," said Dawn. Lefty looked on, smug that he was able to stay still for the entire round.

"My friends," came a firm voice. Kay looked over to see the librarian who had greeted them before. Although Kay knew he was there to reprimand them, the man looked rather placid. Lefty crossed his arms and walked over to join the other two children. Dawn tilted her head up

and squinted at the man. Kay, however, instantly felt a lump in his throat and considered hiding behind the column again. “I’m happy to see Miss Dawn do something besides reading, but might I still ask you to be quiet? Or perhaps you could play outside on such a lovely day?” asked the librarian.

“You mean a day like today? With no one in the library?” Lefty retorted. Dawn pinched the back of his arm.

“I am in here. And so are you three, not to mention the two magnates downstairs.”

Kay could feel his neck start to flush. He looked at Lefty and Dawn and marveled at how they seemed so collected.

“We can be quiet, Wan,” said Dawn.

The man seemed happy with her response. “I’ll leave you, but if I hear more tomfoolery, I’ll have to slap each of your wrists,” said the man, holding a finger in front of his face. He chuckled to himself and turned to walk away.

Dawn gestured for the other two children to follow her back to the small drab room. Although Kay was glad to avoid punishment, he did not want to let Dawn go back to the other room. Lefty stopped her before she could get too far away.

“What, we’re done?”

“For now,” she said. Lefty looked dissatisfied. “You both didn’t actually come here to play games.”

“Yeah, I’m just here for him.” Lefty pointed at Kay.

“I’m trying to find a map,” Kay said.

“That’s easy enough,” said Dawn. “Shall I show you?”

Kay agreed, and she began leading them. As she did, she continued to trail her hand along walls and shelves. Once in the stairwell, Kay touched Lefty's upper back and whispered to him, "You're it."

Lefty clutched at his chest theatrically. "Oh, you cruel boy!" he cried. Dawn glared at him and shushed him harshly. Lefty rolled his eyes but continued to follow her up the stairs, onto the top floor, and into an entire section labeled 'Geography'.

Chapter 8: Maps and no Games

The Geography section was not as crammed with books as the others. Instead, it had large desks with short stacks of atlases and globe models. Kay thanked Dawn and sat down to look through the thick books. Dawn looked a bit awkward, unsure if she should stay or go. Lefty spun a few of the globes, brushing his fingertip against the lines denoting the equator. He sighed and then looked at Dawn who was still standing there.

“You know how to play ‘My Father Went to Sea?’” Lefty asked, clearly already bored.

Dawn held out her hands begrudgingly. “Quietly,” she said, and the two began to clap and chant in unison. Although hushed, the noise distracted Kay. He could not help but watch them until they finished. They recited a few more verses than Kay recalled there being.

“Again?” asked Lefty.

“Definitely not,” Kay said as he turned the pages of the atlas, and Dawn agreed. Kay tried to turn back to his maps, but he had trouble recognizing any of them. “Can one of you help me, actually?”

Dawn slowly came to sit beside Kay, and Lefty followed her. “What do you need?” asked Lefty.

“I just don’t know what I’m looking at. I’m much more used to fishing maps,” said Kay.

Dawn leaned in very close to the large book. Lefty blinked as he watched her get only inches away from the pages.

“Well, where are we trying to find?” she asked.

“A place called Mansfield Point,” answered Kay. He maneuvered himself so that he could see past Dawn’s head.

“Is that close or far from the Port?”

Kay scrunched up his face. “I don’t know,” he said eventually. “I couldn’t have drifted that far, though.”

Lefty paid no attention and sat picking at his cuticles while Dawn and Kay went over different maps, discussing familiar rivers, waterfalls, and hills. However, Kay did not recognize any of the landmarks that Dawn showed him, and the larger the map, the more confused Kay became. He quickly felt disheartened.

“Right over here is Lake Blackwater. You know it?” she asked. Kay shook his head. She flipped a few pages and leaned in closely to look for other landmarks. Kay tried to look on, but her head was in the way. After a few moments, she leaned back and asked Kay how the Port was treating him. He had to think for a moment.

“Well. It’s certainly more exciting than home. It’s only been a day and I’ve gambled, got my winnings stolen-”

Lefty immediately interrupted him. “I’m holding it for you! It’s safer with me than with any bank.”

“And I’ve already had a run-in with the law,” Kay finished.

Lefty laughed in amusement. “There’s no way that you’re a runaway *and* a fugitive.”

Dawn had a disapproving look on her face. She turned back to look at the atlas. Kay quickly tried to think of a way to damage control.

“There was no trouble. Someone found me and was trying to get those coppers to bring me home.” The sliver of truth made Kay feel a bit better, and he felt quite cool using slang that he parents would usually correct him on. However, it led to more questions from the two older children. He dodged each one or answered with half-truths.

“Are you going back ever?” asked Lefty.

Kay had to dwell on that one. He thought of the lighthouse, Nim, and how quick she was to take him despite knowing nothing about him. He thought of gambling with the other little rabble-rousers and the new friends he had made, but his mind quickly drifted back to home. He thought of crabbing. He thought of fishing. He thought of his apprenticeship. He thought of the lanterns that would no doubt be gone if or when he returned home.

“That one made my head hurt,” said Kay as though he were joking. He held his head in his hands. Lefty let out a small laugh, almost in sympathy. Kay closed the large book in front of him.

“Does that mean we’re done looking at maps?” Dawn asked. Something about the question made Kay want to cry. During his entire time in the Port, he had little idea of his next moves. Blindly following Nim and Lefty had led him to become stranded in the middle of an unfamiliar town. Even if he wanted to return home, there was no guarantee that he could.

He willfully stopped any tears from coming to pour down onto his cheeks. While he was composing himself, Kay heard Lefty walk behind him. He poked the back of Kay’s head.

“You’re it.”

Kay smiled to himself, grateful to Lefty for unknowingly saving him from a rather embarrassing situation.

“Are we leaving now?” asked Kay as he turned around to look at both of his new friends. Lefty looked thrilled at the idea, so Kay shuffled out of his chair after he and Dawn made sure that all the books made it back to their original spots.

“What are you two going to do now?” asked Dawn, her face a bit solemn.

“Don’t know. We only have a little bit of time before we have to wait in line,” said Lefty. Kay remembered the circus.

“You aren’t coming with us?” asked Kay. He tried to sound chipper.

She shook her head. “I’ll stay here. I’d honestly rather you stay here too.” Kay had not expected her blunt tone.

“Lefty’s taking me to the circus. Don’t you want to come? I’m sure we have enough money for a third ticket,” said Kay.

“We don’t,” Lefty mumbled.

“I’ll win enough to buy you one.”

Dawn began walking through the rows of bookshelves. “Really, I’m happier with books. Besides, if I went, you’d have to narrate everything as it happens,” said Dawn as they walked back down the stairwell.

“That’s no trouble to me. Or Lefty, probably. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but he can kind of run his mouth.” Kay said the last part through the corner of his mouth. Dawn let out a short but loud laugh. She covered her mouth, and looked back at Lefty who was paying no attention.

“I have, actually,” she said.

Dawn bypassed the second floor and took the two boys down to the front entrance. All the while, Kay still tried to convince her. He bargained and bribed, but she stood still by the door to see them off.

“There’s more to a circus show than seeing it. I’m sure there will be music and popcorn and balloons,” Kay said.

“Ambiance,” Lefty chimed in.

Kay pointed to Lefty and nodded. “What he said.”

Dawn shook her head, and Kay finally realized that there was no convincing her. “How’s about you come back after the show’s over and tell me everything that happened? And you can bring me any leftover popcorn.”

Although Kay would have preferred Dawn to join them, he agreed to do as she asked. He and Lefty said goodbye and left through the door they entered through. The sun had sunk lower into the sky, and Kay saw a woman lighting the streetlights in preparation for the evening. The crowd had grown since he last saw it, and the people had become rowdier. A live band had set up, and couples danced to their rhythm.

Kay looked through the crowd. Despite having made a plan with Lefty, Kay began to feel hopelessly lost. He needed some kind of lifeline, so he began pulling on Lefty’s shirt, quietly leading him back to where they had first met. However, the group of children was no longer there laughing and gambling.

“Why are we back here?” asked Lefty.

“I need to check inside for something,” Kay said as he gestured toward the tavern. “Can you wait out here for a minute?”

Lefty leaned against a post coolly, which Kay interpreted as permission for him to leave.

As he climbed the stairs to the tavern, Kay heard unruly sounds coming from within. He felt that he was right to be nervous about entering previously. Even still, he took a deep breath, brushed off his shirt, and entered.

Chapter 9: The Sum

As soon as the door shut behind Kay, everyone turned to look at him. The room went quiet, although he could still hear whispering and the clanking of silverware. Kay was almost surprised how accurately he had imagined the inside earlier in the day. Two of the tavern patrons were standing to face each other, and a small crowd gathered around them. Although there were some folks in attendance whom Kay considered average, many looked burly and callous, dressed in fur capes and tall leather boots.

The two people facing each other convened for a moment before walking in opposite directions. The crowd was soon to disperse. Kay looked carefully through the crowd from where he was standing and was upset not to spot Nim.

Kay took small steps as he walked further into the building. He did not expect that he would be able to stay there for long. A long bar fitted with high stools caught his eye. Even though each chair was occupied, it was closer to the entrance and seemed less intimidating. Kay looked past the huddled group of bodies at the bartender who was busy taking orders and drying beer steins.

The man was extremely tall and lithe and spoke loudly over the raucous that had started once more. He turned and nearly tripped over Kay, whom he did not see sneak behind the bar.

“Kid, you can’t be back here,” said the bartender. He stopped what he was doing to try and shoo Kay away.

“Wait, I’m trying to find a lady.” Kay resisted the soft shoves to his shoulder.

“I’m sure a lot of folks here are in the same boat as you,” said the bartender humorlessly. Even still, the group sitting at the bar roared with laughter.

The bartender pushed past Kay, leaving the boy standing alone behind the bar. Kay looked at the people who were still pointing and chuckling at him. The top of the bar only went up to his shoulders, and he felt ridiculously short as the folks sitting at the bar stared at him. However, Kay tried to use their attention to his advantage.

“Excuse me. Have you seen a big tall lady? Short black hair?” asked Kay, trying to sound self-assured. Although they listened to him, one of the patrons slowly pointed at the man sitting at the end of the bar who somewhat matched the description if one did not notice his great bushy beard. The man saw his friend pointing at him and began wheezing with laughter. Everyone else was happy to join. “She’s the lighthouse keeper?” he added over the noise.

“You’re looking for the Keeper?” came a voice from behind him. Kay turned and saw that the bartender had returned. His eyes were wide, and his arms were held motionless by his sides. Kay confirmed what he said, and the man laughed.

“Now what are you doing looking for the Keeper?” asked a patron who had been listening in. Kay did not want to answer the question, and his face scrunched to show it.

“Unless she’s off duty, there’s only one place she would be,” said the bartender. “Can you guess?” Kay did not appreciate the condescension in the man’s voice.

“I know she was here earlier,” said Kay. “Come on, big tall lady. Looks a little mean, but she’s really nice. Couldn’t have missed her.”

However, the bartender and his cohorts just continued to tease Kay. It did not take long for Kay to grow tired of the treatment. He tried to hide any emotion as he walked away, jokes still being yelled at him. He walked out the way he came in, ignoring their crass goodbyes.

When Kay came out of the tavern, he saw Lefty running at pigeons to make them scatter. While some startled and flew away, others were fearless and stood their ground. Kay walked down the steps to meet his friend.

“Any luck?” asked Lefty.

“No. What a waste.” Kay was looking down at his feet, obviously bothered. He kicked at a pebble.

Lefty poked Kay in the forehead so that he would look at him. Kay swatted his hand away, but Lefty saw the slight smile that appeared on Kay’s face.

“You ready to go wait in line?” asked Lefty. Kay said he was ready and followed Lefty through the slow-moving but lively streets. Kay found that he could not see over the tall heads and therefore had no idea of their trajectory. He linked arms with Lefty to avoid getting separated, his only lifeline in the crowd.

Kay felt as though they walked for ages before they stopped in front of a red and white striped tent. It was exactly what Kay had imagined when he first heard the word ‘circus’. The tent assembled at the opposite side of town where the Port met the cypress forest again. Lefty led them beyond the city walls into a clearing where a line of people queued at a pop-up ticket booth. He followed the line of people, and to both his shock and comfort, he saw Nim standing next to the ticket booth, her arms crossed impatiently.

Lefty continued on as though nothing was amiss, taking a spot in line. Kay followed him and tried to will Nim to look in his direction, but she stood looking off into the distance. He said nothing and allowed himself to do nothing for a moment. After only a minute or two of not moving, Lefty let out an impatient groan and looked over people's heads at the ticket booth.

"Is there seriously no one in there?" Lefty complained. Kay barely heard him, still contemplating running over to Nim. Lefty soon noticed Kay's attention was elsewhere, and he waved his hand in front of Kay's face.

"You really need to stop doing that," said Lefty. He put his head right next to Kay's to follow his line of sight. "What are you even looking at that's so much more interesting than me?" Lefty turned his head to look everywhere except where Nim was standing.

Lefty spoke so loudly that Nim looked over, seeing the two boys standing in line. Her eyes went wide only for a moment, the rest of her features blank. She uncrossed her arms and marched over to meet them. Lefty looked surprised to see her come so close.

"Where have you been, child?" Her voice was thick with disapproval and worry but not a shred of anger. "I asked you to stay."

Lefty was unamused. "Child," he scoffed.

Kay began to stutter. "How? Why are you here?" was the only thing he could manage.

"You'd think the constabulary would find you first, those useless..." her voice trailed off into a growl. She then explained more clearly that waiting there was indeed a wager but referenced his excitement for the circus earlier in the day.

Lefty still looked utterly lost. "And just who are you?"

She turned to look at Lefty properly. "I'm the one trying to get this young man home. Who might you be?" she asked, trying not to match his flippant tone.

Lefty stepped so that he was in between Nim and Kay. "I'm the one who knows that he doesn't want to go home."

Kay instantly regretted his lie. Nim stared at Lefty and blinked, the only indication of her confusion. She turned away from Lefty to look at Kay and asked him if it was true. Even though her expression was gentle, blood quickly pooled in his face and both sides of his neck. Knowing that he was bright red only intensified the feeling of humiliation. He wanted to respond, but his throat felt tangled.

His eyes unfocused, and everything became blurry. It felt as though everyone in line was staring at him, not just Nim and Lefty, and all Kay wanted was to crumple into a lifeless ball. Instead, he felt his legs bolt, one after the other. He ran past the line of people, beyond the ticket booth, and into the circus tent. Someone yelled after him, and he ignored it.

The inside smelled like sweat and the wood chip floor. Empty chairs surrounded a circular stage, where a group of performers was in a stacked formation. They were all women who wore matching embroidered leotards and white stockings. Two of the women acted as the base of the structure, each holding one of the feet of a third woman, who splayed her arms out to keep steady. Finally, a fourth woman balanced herself upside-down on one hand atop the third one's head.

As soon as Kay saw what was before him, he stopped and stared in awe. He thought both the women and the shape their bodies created were amazing; however, the wonder only accelerated his heart rate. A group of other performers began gathering around dressed in their

costumes. They all chatted with one another while others took the time to stretch their arms and shoulders.

“You can come down now, ladies! We’re gonna have a little meeting before the show,” yelled a man from the ground. Kay recognized him as the Juggler from the streets, though now he wore thick white clown makeup. The woman on top was first to come down, quickly yet carefully climbing down her partners and elegantly landing on the ground. The others followed suit. The Juggler was in the middle of his pre-show encouragement when he turned around suddenly, looking directly at Kay.

All at once, the rest of the circus troupe turned to look at him, as though they were all part of the same hive mind. Their faces were expressionless in the most uncanny fashion. Kay’s body felt as though it had never stopped running. He felt his heartbeat in his hands, and his forehead began to perspire.

A voice calling his name came from behind him. Although his instincts screamed at him not to take his eyes off the mask-like faces in front of him, he forced himself to turn around. Nim and Lefty had followed him inside and now looked horrified by the performers in front of them. Kay’s chest felt full. He looked back and forth between the two groups only once and realized he had nowhere to go.

Noticing his state of distress, Nim approached Kay slowly. Lefty stayed where he was standing, looking on at the strange scene in front of him. As Nim got closer, the more intense the pressure in Kay's chest became. She pulled him to her in a protective hug, but Kay’s eyes stayed on the performers. The acrobats that he had found so beautiful now slowly crept toward him, maintaining graceful gaits.

The crushing sensation in his chest spread to his extremities, and he shrieked in Nim's arms. The pain made him feel faint. His muscles strained as he tried to keep himself upright. His peripheral vision went black, and his ears rang. Eventually, though, he could sense nothing but the feeling of his body slipping from Nim's arms and hitting the wood chip ground.

Chapter 10: Shock

Kay felt hard ground under his back. His senses were numb, and his body was still. Just as he thought he was going to fall asleep again, there was a hard blow to his chest, a dull pain coming from the same spot. There was another strike to his stomach, and he tried to open his eyes. His fingers began to tingle, and he could feel light rain on his face.

He tried to gasp for air, only to feel that his airway was full of liquid. His body curled and turned onto its side. Kay began violently coughing, filling his mouth with hot salty water. Another blow landed on his back, and he expelled a large spurt of water and viscous mucus. He tried desperately not to vomit and failed, spewing onto the rocks below him. Once he finished, his mind focused solely on inhalation. The air flowed against the raw skin of his throat. It stung, but he willed himself to breathe.

His skin felt too tight and unbearably hot. His small heart pounded. His breath was rapid and unsteady. He began to shake.

He opened his eyes, but his vision was still black. It was his hearing instead that was first to return, and he could hear a human voice, the ocean, and fine raindrops pattering. He was turned onto his back, and he felt hands fiddle with the buttons on his shirt. Kay was finally able to see dark, blurry images, and he followed the hands up the arms to the face of the other person.

“Nim?” said Kay between short breaths.

Instead it was his father’s voice that responded, but Kay could not understand it as language. He was guided to sit up, and his entire front ached. Kay’s shirt was taken off, and his

skin burned against the chill of the wind; however the shirt was soon replaced by a dry jacket. He forced his eyes to stay open as he looked more closely. Slowly he recognized his father's face.

“Can you stand?” he heard his father ask clearly.

Kay struggled as he held both his arms up. His father hugged him under his shoulders and lifted him to stand. Kay instantly felt dizzy. He looked out to see the ocean's rhythmic waves, which only worsened his feeling of nausea. Their boat was aground, and all their equipment was still inside and perfectly tidy.

It was only when Albin began walking that Kay realized they were both wet. His father was shivering while Kay's body stayed still. Kay was confused and could not keep his head up. He kept coughing, and the more he did so, the more he panicked, thinking that he would not be able to breathe. His father began dragging him to the main road in the opposite direction of the route they had taken to go fishing. Every so often, Albin would say something that Kay interpreted as 'be calm'.

They approached the main road, and his father shouted. His voice quivered yet was still commanding. Kay could not tell how long it took, but he eventually heard the clapping of hooves. He forced himself to lift his head and saw a speckled grey horse trotting up beside them drawing a wooden wagon filled with hay. The horse nickered as it came to a stop. Kay felt as he was abruptly tossed onto a stack of itchy hay bales. Being on his back made it even more difficult to catch a full breath. Simply moving his eyes or head was nauseating, meaning he had no choice but to look up at the same grey clouds that he seemed to remember so distantly. There was frantic chattering around him, but he saw no one.

His father sat next to him and began covering Kay in loose hay. The wagon began to move forward, sending vibrations through Kay's body as the wheels hit the cobblestone. Kay composed himself and tilted his head up at the driver, who was a man dressed in all black who he did not recognize. He tried to brush the hay off his front, but his father just replaced it.

"I'm not cold," Kay said, slurred.

Although he could still feel his heart thumping into his sternum, exhaust began to wash over Kay. He wanted nothing more than to sleep, but every time he closed his eyes, his father would tap roughly at Kay's chest, face, and neck.

The horse's clopping slowed as the wagon came to a stop outside their house. Kay felt as though the trip should have been longer. His father hoisted Kay across his shoulders and carried him inside.

Kay's back touched the soft bed, and blankets were immediately thrown on top of him. He felt conscious but not awake. Every movement around him felt like mud, slow and murky. His brain felt waterlogged, and his ears began to ring again. He closed his eyes and drifted away.

Chapter 11: Returning

Kay was surprised to wake up in his own bed. Its familiarity seemed so inappropriate that it disturbed him. He felt his heart flood with unease. He shifted in his bed only to realize the pain his body was in. His lungs and throat felt scorched on the inside, and his limbs were heavy. Merely thinking made his head throb.

Kay's mother, Greta, was on a chair next to his bed, still asleep. Her presence was jarring. The sound of Kay rustling had roused her, and soon as she came to, Kay felt himself being squeezed tightly in a sweet but painful embrace. She showered him with concern and pet names, which Kay thought should have comforted him.

His mother let go of him and quickly handed him a large mug filled with water. Kay took it and quickly began gulping it down even though it hurt him to swallow.

"Ease up, Kay," said his mother. "The last thing I want is for you to drown again."

He could tell from her tone that she was joking, but Kay found it difficult to follow. Once he finished off the glass, Kay took a moment to search through his memory.

Everything came to him out of order. The first thing he remembered was the cobblestone streets of the port. He remembered the red circus tent and the blank stares of the performers. He remembered the lighthouse and its keeper. He remembered waking up on the rocky beach for the first time. And then the second.

"How am I here?" Kay asked. His voice was croaky and slurred, and his mother looked as though she did not understand. "How did you find me?" Kay asked, trying to enunciate every syllable.

Greta explained what happened to the best of her ability. She had not witnessed it but had instead been told that Kay had slipped and fallen into the water while fishing. When he did not float to the surface, Albin stripped to his undergarments and dove after the boy.

“Papa said it was hard to find you in the water,” said his mother. “That’s what he kept saying. But he said once you were out, he pounded on your little chest, and you coughed and coughed, you poor thing.”

He felt as though she did not answer his questions. The fact that her story made no sense allowed Kay to start piecing together the timeline. A sense of melancholy pooled in his stomach. He was supposed to tell Dawn what had happened at the circus. He was supposed to go beg Nim to tell him stories about keeping the lighthouse. He was supposed to do Lefty a potentially ridiculous or demeaning favor. Instead, he was home with his parents, and soon he would go back to work, helping his father crab and fish in the way that he had always done.

Kay realized that he had zoned out and his mother was still talking. Her eyes were a bit wet, but she still looked relatively composed as she continued to recount what had happened. Even when she finished, Kay was silent.

“But you’re here, and you’re safe,” she said. Something about her tone made Kay think that she was more so trying to soothe herself. “I’m so sorry this happened, my love, and right before your big birthday.”

Kay had not even thought about his birthday for what seemed like days, nor had he thought of his impending apprenticeship.

“Your father and I don’t want you to worry about the apprenticeship,” said Greta, as though she had read Kay’s mind. Kay knew that her words should have been a huge weight off

his shoulders, but he felt nothing of the sort. Instead, his mind wandered back to Mellim and when he would get to go back.

Kay decided not to press her for details. He was more than happy to think to himself as he was brought cod cakes and toast, the former of which he forwent. While he ate, he remembered passing out in the circus tent. He tried to think of realistic ways that he could have gotten from the tent onto the beach mere minutes from his house. It was possible that his mother had simply not been told the full story. Perhaps his father would come home and explain the gaps in his memory. In a way, it seemed more reasonable to Kay. The faces were too detailed, the colors were too vibrant, and he could remember the distinct taste of fried dough and honey.

Almost in order to prove something, Kay spent the day in and out of sleep. Quick, shallow dreams came and went. Some were mundane, such as getting dressed in the morning or watching his father fish. Others involved swimming, struggling, breathing in water, which always forced Kay awake with small ugly gasps. Eventually, sleeping proved too difficult, and he opted to sit and daydream.

Later in the evening, the sound of their front door opening and closing woke him from his doze. The cadence of the footsteps entering the house let Kay know that it was his father that had returned home. He listened as the steps approached his door.

It opened, and his father came in to sit on the edge of Kay's narrow bed. Kay avoided eye contact, but Albin sat in silence until Kay looked at him.

"How are you faring?" asked his father.

Kay looked for the correct words but gave up after a few seconds. "I don't know what happened," he said.

Albin nodded, and he told Kay. It was nearly identical to the story his mother had told him. They were fishing, Kay slipped and fell into the ocean, and his father rescued him. The repetition almost angered Kay. He was sure that something was being left out, and his face quickly wore a look of indignation. Albin saw the face and allowed them just to sit together for a moment.

“Supper will be ready soon. Do you feel well enough to join?” asked Albin after a moment of setting the silence stew.

Kay turned on his side away from his father in a huff. Instead of dwelling on Kay’s fussing and fretting, Albin kept the invitation to dinner open and left, closing Kay’s door behind him.

Kay fell almost silent in the coming week. He spoke only when spoken to and spent nearly all his time in bed sleeping or wallowing in self-pity. Much to his parents’ dismay, he turned away most of the food they brought up to him. He asked his parents leading questions to try and get them to tell him anything about a lighthouse, its keeper, or a port. However, they never told him what he wanted to hear. Their story stayed consistent.

His condition did not get better, but it also did not worsen. Although the bruises on his chest began to yellow with healing, his lungs were still damaged, and he often had to cough up dried globs of brown blood.

His birthday came more quickly than Kay had anticipated. Waking up, it was no different than any other day, but his mother came in around noon to give him hugs and an apple fritter to celebrate. Kay put on a happy face, which pleased Greta and allowed her to relax a bit. Kay

looked down at the fritter and could not help but think of Mellim. He ate it without complaining and even made pleasant conversation with his mother.

However, most of the day was much the same. He slept, he dreamed of drowning, and he started himself awake. Now coated with a thin layer of sweat, Kay threw off his covers and rose out of bed.

He walked over to one of his windows and looked out to see the dirt road leading up to their house. It was now muddy with the amount of rainfall they had continued to receive. The sight was by no means pleasing, but it reminded Kay of looking out from the tall lighthouse before spilling tea all over Nim. The memory was bittersweet.

Kay opened the window and popped off its screen, accidentally letting it slide off the roof and land on the wet ground. His ribs ached as he clambered through the window and onto the house's roof. The day was cold, and Kay almost regretted not changing out of his pajamas. He tried not to make any sound, but the wood panels creaked under his weight. What little of a plan he had changed, and he instead decided to move quickly rather than quietly. He walked carefully to sit on the roof's edge, gathered his courage, and jumped.

Kay hit the ground and rolled, covering himself in cold mud. He was surprised not to feel any pain from the fall. Not even the delicate organs inside his ribcage were phased. He stood and walked along the side of the road back to the docks.

The trip was much longer on foot. He hoped that any of the passing carriages would not stop to question him or the messy state of his person, but one did. It was a group of other fishermen, and he almost froze with fear. They looked concerned, but Kay did not entertain any of their questions. Instead, he ignored them and continued on until he reached the docks.

He stepped on the wooden beams with his bare muddy feet. His ankles were beginning to ache from the fall, and his chest felt as though it was full of water. Still, he walked along the length of the dock and looked out onto the dark ocean. The water was still, and he draped his legs over the side of the dock to sit.

He had long since figured out that he was the only one to have experienced Mellim. His parents were telling the truth, but Kay still refused to believe that it had not been real. After sitting there for sometime, he heard someone call his name. Kay told himself not to look behind him, for he knew the voice was his father's.

He pushed his body off the dock and into the frigid water. His mind went blank for a moment in shock, and it felt as though his lung would not breathe. He heard footsteps on the dock, and his body inhaled without the help of his mind. Instantly, he regained all his agencies and began swimming.

He swam past the empty boats, his arms and legs making much the same motion as a frog. His pajamas felt heavy as they dragged through the water. His father pleaded with Kay before diving into the water himself. Eventually, Kay managed to get to about the same spot he and his father were fishing only a week prior.

"I'm leaving!" he yelled before Kay dunked his head, making no effort to hold his breath. His hair floated around him in the water, and he swam further and further down, not bothering to look back at his father.