

Grandmother's House

So we're visiting the beach? Marina asked her mother.

"Unfortunately. It's the only way to Abuela's house is past the shore." Mami said, focusing on the road, driving just below the speed limit.

The first and last time she'd asked, she was nine, and ended up spending the night at auntie's house. Once, she overheard her mother mention the devil's sea after her papa had come home with a pound of Tilapia from street vendor. For the next month, their prayers before each meal were in remembrance of Abuelo. More than anything, Marina dreamt of the sea.

Yes! Marina thought to herself with a grin. This would be the second time she saw the ocean. The rough gravel roads lead them from the eastern border of Ecuador to the northern coast also treated them to a view of the shoreline.

"You have your hairclip right?" Mami said, frowning in disappointment, barely looking back at Marina.

"I have it with me" Marina replied flatly, rolling her eyes and looking out at the green blurred foliage pass by.

"Don't lie to me." her mother replied as if sensing Marina's eyeroll. It was a gold hair pin with a dog's head. A

family heirloom. Each family member had one and would bring it everywhere.

"How can I trust you? You tell me to stop reminding you, you say you'll bring it - you don't bring it." Tightening her grip on the wheel, Mami continues, "Your brother always..."

A breeze through the open passenger window blew into Marina's face past her hair, a distraction from Mami's stale lecture. Marina could smell the ocean from her last visit to Abuela six years ago on the wind. For the past six months she'd follow the hum of the ocean in dreams and walk along its beach. Where the sounds of nearby motorcycles from the cocky mafia guys faded into roaring waves. In her dreams, there were always a few aggravated shouts in the background, but nothing, too stressful. Nothing she couldn't handle with a wink, glare, or a signature "smiling-all-the-time-is-for-beauty-queens-and-last-I-checked-I-wasn't-trying-out-for-a-pageant" face. Sinewy German Shepherds with red-speckled fur, would growl from time to time. Sometimes a bark would pierce her blissful hum -- "Marina," and momentarily intercept her from the peachy shoreline sunlight.

"Dogs are a sign of good luck. Dogs are wise." some said. But these barks were easily ignored and forgotten as the roar of waves could always grow louder.

"Marina!?" Mami said twisting back, snapping her fingers to get Marina's attention.

The deathly screeching of tires and piercing clash of steel brought Marina back into the world of shouts and orders. She lost familiarity with gravity and became weightless for two whole seconds.

When the scrape of the spinning ceiling finally stopped, her mind spun with vertigo for another 10 minutes or so, before she heard the echo of shattered glass. Still blinded from a dizziness, she instinctively reached for the buckle pinching her left hip to no avail. Her limbs stiffened in anticipation.

"Mami?!"

Only Marina moved. Only Marina could breathe.

Wailing lights and flashing sirens came into earshot. Her tears mixed with the clumping blood on her face. Her pulsing temples silenced any new thoughts and her newfound headache blurred the already dark faces of the EMTs running towards her car.

The peach-white glow of sunlight behind her eyelids forced her to squint and she awoke from her fifteen-hour sleep in a hospital bed. Her eyes soon adjusted to the light after a couple

seconds of discomfort behind her eyes, and in the window to her right, she could see both suns: the bright one in the sky and its shimmering reflection on the distant shoreline, eclipsed by a small figure.

Marina heard a familiar bark. Looking at the flickering light brought into focus a shadow of a German Shepard through the window. Instead of hearing those fantastical seagull calls, barks seemed to consume the sky and distort the ocean's strong call.

Maybe the barks in her dreams were warnings and not distractions. Maybe the "Marinas" were loving bays, not spiteful yaps. Regardless, the dog's shadow seemed to trap her gaze, and taint the sunlight. The pink reflection now only stirred a remembrance of her family's "Marinas" and regret for not appreciating her mother's active concern.