**From Minnows to Seagulls**

As I approach the sink, I glance ahead into the mirror. I stand for a few moments looking at myself. As my short glance turns into a study, I remember my face. Even though the structure, features, and colors should’ve been burned into my mind by now, my mind’s self-imagery is never anything more detailed than a blurry outline. Looking down, I pull the quartz knob on the faucet outwards towards me instantly sending a stream straight into the sink splashing and violently flying out of the bowl. With my fleece now covered in small drops of water, I quickly push the knob back in stopping the water. As I look back up into the mirror to stare at myself in disappointment, a clear blue sky sits in front of me. As my eyes jerk and my head twitches in confusion, the landscape fills my view. I am on a boat motionless, anchored at sea. I can see small islands around me, but I am at ease with where I am. The quiet splash of water hitting the hull of my sailboat blends with the soft hum of speakers behind me. I can feel the sun against my face, its warmth molds it into perfect contentment. A humble smile, just barely noticeable, defines my face. My skin darkens and my hair lightens. I feel small nibbles at my feet—a group of minnows surround my heel. Each is the size of a small pebble with their eyes making up half their body. The beautiful blue stones swirl around effortlessly without end creating a small whirlpool around my ankles. The swirling stops as I watch my Dad’s hand reach under the water and plug the drain. I hear the gushing of water streaming from the faucet. The roaring sound, rather than making me burst into tears, soothes me as my mom picks my brother up and places him into the tub with me. A few yellow ducks float between us as the blanket of warm water continues to wrap around me. My mom's hand, twice the size of my face, reaches towards my brother's head engulfing his hair with white suds. Now with both of our heads shiny with bubbles, I close my eyes as my dad cups water with his hands and releases it onto my hair. I feel the warmth of the water passes over my face along with the quiet popping of bubbles. I look back down towards my feet—the minnows are gone. The music’s hum and the waves’ lapping returns. Gnats, like moths to a flame, start to swarm around my head. They must be attracted to stress. I swat at them, but they dodge my hand as if they know my exact movements. I stand up to get away from them. At this point, I’m almost flailing as they fly around my face. Swinging my arms, I start to slap myself. My arms are waving across and around my body. I slap my chest and shoulders. I bend over to touch my toes. I massage my arms. I slap my legs. I adjust my goggles. A familiar loud whistle pierces my ears. I place my foot on the step in front of me. With my foot against the grainy grip tape, I look up as my name sits in the middle of the massive display “STEADMAN, SPENCER.” Looking back down, my breaths become long with excitement. As the second whistle blows, I slowly step up and onto the block. The water sits still before me as the crowd’s cheering draws to a silence. With my head clear, my muscles relax completely despite the adrenaline rushing through them. My hands approach the block’s edge. With a careful but strong grip, my body becomes tense. The electronic beep sends me flying off the block with my hands locked together. Creating an arrow, my fingers enter the water with the rest of my body following suit. Without thought, my hands sail into the rubber pad against the wall. Immediately, I’m back. On the blocks, I look out in front of me with an uneasy feeling. The water sits still as the crowd’s cheering draws to a silence. The electronic beep crashes against my ears. My hands glide into the wall. I’m on the block. The electronic beep, louder than ever, pierces my skull. My hands drift into the wall. The cycle never ends. The machine, once my beloved hobby, churns and grinds me relentlessly. The gnats are gone. As I relax, I notice the sky morph into an orange and purple hue. With my returning smile, I stroll across the deck of the boat dodging the sail like a short door frame. Three seagulls sit quietly on the handrailing, momentarily glancing at each other, towards the sky, and then back down towards the water below them. Walking towards them, they acknowledge me but continue to sit unbothered. Following their lead, I glance towards the sky. The orange and purple hue soaks into my eyes entrancing me with its vividness. As I sit on the sand with my arms extended out behind me and my legs in front, a thin layer of water brushes across my skin. In silence, we sit together as we hear our kayaks occasionally knocking together in the distance. As I glance at each of them, the sunset beams from their eyes. The orange and purple hues become even richer with color and detail. Mixing with their blues, hazels, and blacks, an eternity passes as I am engulfed in each scene they reflect. The wind, gritty with sea salt, passes over my skin and hair. This indescribably intimate scenery is something I will never forget. I lay back, and I’m struck with stars brighter than the sun. The sand, cold against my skin, is a soothing contrast to the ninety-degree air. With my eyes immersed in the stars, a streak shoots across the sky. Instantly, my mind is locked on a wish. As I look to my right I see their pointer dragging against the sky, “Spence, did you just see that?” As I sit up, I feel the blanket I had laid on top of the fiberglass hull of the sailboat an hour ago under my thighs. Standing up, the sky has turned an inky black, and my company is the constant plashing of the waves and the sound of my music. My company is the three stars that lay in front of my sailboat. With the salty breeze against their bodies, the seagulls with the night sky in their eyes will never leave me. I am in the middle of the ocean with my brother. They warned me about this—sharks, jellyfish, rip currents, and drowning. I feel free. My brother and I, smiling and laughing as we tread water, look towards the shore. Our parents and grandparents, once double our size, are now ants. We float over each wave that approaches us. As the waves grow, we tackle them like the waves that came before them. I am alone now. Although I can see small islands around me, the previously visible ants are gone now. The sunrise wakes me as I sit up off of the blanket I had laid down earlier—with my future uncertain, I am at ease.