

## BLOOD RUNS FASTER THAN WATER

*The fin of my board sliced through the blue waves, cold mist penetrating my bare skin like tiny bullets. The stench of saltwater burnt my nostrils. My leg rope tore my ankle like children playing tug-a-war. The thundering of waves breaking along the coastline was deafening. Seagulls soared over me with a flash of silver, the sparkle of my childhood dreams, crying out triumphantly on the breeze. The flaming red sun was slowly lowering to where the ocean abyss meets the sky, its intense glare blinding my tired eyes. I was the sole occupant on an endless stretch of sand besides shoals of evanescent fish and green sea snakes in the deep blue depths below me. For as long as I could remember I'd been finding refuge from the real world, by the water. The tranquil beach was a Garden of Eden. The isolation created a sense of calm within me, and I felt at peace. It was heaven. Why would I want it any other way?*

I wrench my mind back to the present. BEEP BEEP BEEP. The sound reverberates off the sterile walls of my confines. Plain white walls, a blank canvas for my solitary mind to whirl with thoughts, memories and fragments of a past that seems as distant as the line where the ocean meets the sky. The rumble of thunder growling on the horizon and dark clouds rolling over the abyss of towering buildings dimmed the blinding bright lights above my bunk. The stench of hospital-grade cleaning products set my nostrils aflame. I was the only person in the room, surrounded by futuristic, foreign technology. Where the hell was I?

*My mind soared back. A blur of red filled my conscious. The deep red sunset collided with the gushes of crimson red liquid pouring from my ripped flesh and penetrating the sleek blue water. The ebb and flow of my own blood against my fingers, as I shakily gripped the open wound. Blood drained from my face until I was as white as a blank canvas. My brain empty, foggy like the coastline on chilly winter mornings. My head was quiet; I was oblivious to my own screams of pain as if it was a silent theatre production of no importance. Darkness engulfed me as blood stained my only refuge from reality and trickled into the wailing red sirens of the ambulance, becoming merged into an indistinct haze of terror, clouding my vision.*

Terror consumed me. My body was convulsing in violent tremors, as I lay alone in the prison cell that was my bed. Recollections of the last time I was in heaven, eating away at my brain. My room was growing darker and darker, as the storm drew closer, the clouds heavier and the drumming of rain against the windowpane drowned out all outside noise. Still, no one else to be seen or heard. I was alone. My head felt heavy, and my heart felt like a dead weight in my chest, lethargically beating in uneven rhythms. Cords and tubes tightly secured to my limbs restricted my movement away from the bed, reminiscent of my leg rope on my board, keeping me safe from drifting away alone. However, these cords were incommodious and stymied my ability to remove myself from this sparse, isolated room. Where were my friends? My family? What had happened to my life?

*My heart thudding against my ribs, the feeling as familiar as old friends. Visions of the ocean lifting its arm towards the shore and the silhouettes of meaningless figures waving and yelling out indistinguishable words flood my mind as my helpless body is submerged in the wake of the waves. The sensation of tiny tingling bullets dancing along my icy skin, causing my nerves to erupt in panic.*

In the beginning, I was overwhelmed by support, gratitude and attention from those who I thought cared. But, as the days passed by like driftwood on the current, the number of visitors dwindled until they trickled into nothing. NO ONE. The only human contact I made was when the doctors came and droned on with medical terms and nonchalant nurses kept my heart beating. The days merged into months. And still no one. No phone calls. No text messages. NO ONE. In a different time, I used to enjoy being secluded, in my own faraway land, living my own fairy tale. I used to have too many friends to count on one hand, a loving family. I had an invite to every party and was the dux of my cohort. Despite having everything, I never ceased to run to my haven by the water and isolate myself from everyone. I relished space and emptiness, having no thoughts running through my mind. But now, I was trapped like a helpless prisoner within the confine of a hospital cell, with no one, with nothing. My mind was empty, and my heart was dark.