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I never thought Grandfather would come back on an ordinary day like a Monday or a Tuesday. He'd come on the kind of day when the rising sun is pouring its colours on the sea because there's not enough room for all its glory in the sky. Grandfather was like that kind of special day to me too. He was a fisherman, and from watching the drift of deep-water seaweed he could land a

net of fish full to bursting. He knew the journey of a past storm by what swept up on the beach, and could tell a thousand stories of extraordinary creatures from the deep. He said that the ocean had a long story to tell about all of us, full of signs of things that have happened and signs of things that are to come. I always knew he'd come back across the sea, triumphing over a few monsters on the way, but I was still waiting after two years for that special day to arrive.

I live on a small island in the Mediterranean. My home used to be with Grandfather in a little fisherman's cottage but now I'm in a flat with Uncle above his restaurant at the back of the beach. My open bedroom window is like an ear to the sounds of the water, and it was one Friday night that I heard the rhythm of the tide change.

In my underpants, I went downstairs and walked

across the beach to look out over the waves. The sea was black as simmering tar, and the moon reflected like broken glass on the restless waves. At the far end of the beach on the shallow rocks that divided the beach from the cove further along, a turtle was struggling hard to climb out of the water. Her shell was patterned like the crazy paving of our narrow streets, and I wondered what it felt like to carry her home on her back.

The turtle was clumsy on the rocks without the support of the water, and tumbled on her back to the sandy cove. I ran over. Turtles aren't good on land anyway, but her front flipper was caught in some fishing line round her neck like a sling, making it hard for her to move at all. I recognised the chip in her shell from when she'd been to our island two years ago. I wondered if she remembered me, because she didn't seem afraid when I rolled

her over. She was heavy, and as big as a shield, but I was strong and cut her free from the line. She lumbered off, digging grooves in the sand with her flippers, leaving a rippled pattern beside my footprints. Slowly she made her way to the back of the cove where she dug a cool hole, laid her eggs and buried them deep in the dark, just as she had before. I stayed with her until she was ready to go back to the sea, as the sun rose pink and gold behind a thin bank of cloud at dawn.

Grandfather had taught me that the sea could tell me a story. I needed three signs to let me know that he was coming home. The turtle had been the same one I'd seen the day before he left. Could that be the first sign?

I swam and dived with the turtle in the growing day, in the place where she was at ease, where I felt at home too, until I heard Uncle shouting from

the rocks, 'Azi! Get out of the sea! It's almost eight o'clock!'

I surfed in with a wave and followed Uncle up to the restaurant where he was already laying tables ready for the early tourists.

'Hurry up, or you'll be late,' he said. 'And don't forget your jobs after school!' he yelled, as I leaped up the stairs to the flat, two at a time, to get dressed.

I pulled on a T-shirt and flip-flops and I ran, feet flapping, all the way to school, my wet underpants seeping through my shorts. It was already hot and I hoped they'd dry out before I got there. I'd got used to people calling me names like sea boy and water boy, saying the sea had weed on me, but I didn't care today. It was the last day of term, a special and good day to feel that Grandfather was coming home at last. Three

whole months of holiday lay ahead of us – enough time for Grandfather to see the turtle eggs hatch with me.

After school finished, Dimi, Chris and three other children asked me to play basketball with them.

'Come on, just this once, Azi,' Chris said. 'We need enough players for two teams.'

I shrugged. 'I'm going to the beach. I want to swim.'

'You're always going to the beach,' Dimi moaned. 'You can go anytime.'

We'd been stuck like this for a while now – them asking me to play basketball, me asking them to come swimming – none of us wanting to do what the other wanted. The last couple of years as we'd been growing up, we had grown apart.

'You're a weird creature from the sea, Azi!' Chris

shouted. 'And you don't even belong here!' He slammed down the ball as I ran, trying not to listen to what he had said and to what people always told me, my flip-flops slapping on the tarmac that had gone sticky in the heat.

I swam, looking for the turtle, but she had gone, so I went to Uncle's restaurant to talk to him about it. The restaurant was busy, the tables on the deck almost full of customers, white tablecloths swaying under the shade of the vines overhead.

In the kitchen, Uncle's face was red and sweaty from the ovens and the scorching day.

'The turtle came back,' I said. 'Do you remember the one that came the day before Grandfather left?'

Uncle frowned but didn't answer. He was trying to take an order ticket from Maria the waitress, but she held on to it, her other hand on her hip,

nodding her head towards me, waiting for Uncle to answer me first.

'It must be a sign that he's coming home. Have you heard from him?' I said.

'Two calamari!' Uncle yelled to the other staff bustling and sweating around him as he tried to read the ticket between Maria's fingers.

'Azi is trying to speak to you,' Maria said.

'Two Greek salads!' Uncle yelled, snapping the ticket from Maria. She clicked her tongue on her teeth because he was yelling, even though he didn't need to, but she wasn't ever bothered by his loud presence and the fact that he was the boss. 'I don't know anything about turtles,' Uncle said more quietly and turned away from me to toss fish in a frying pan.

'What's the turtle got to do with Grandfather, Azi?' Maria said, filling in for Uncle.

'Grandfather taught me to read the signs from the sea,' I explained. 'Things that wash up on the sand can tell you a kind of story.'

Maria raised her eyebrows. 'Is the turtle the same kind of sign as those big seashells you found on the beach? Or those waves breaking out like seahorses, and all the other signs you keep telling me about?'

I'd said the same kind of thing before, but this time it was different. This time I was sure it meant Grandfather was coming back. 'Grandfather told me turtles are messengers,' I said, hoping she'd understand.

At that moment, Uncle yelled across the kitchen. 'How many times have I told you all of Grandfather's talk was nonsense? And unless you're bringing me a turtle to make soup, Azi, out of my kitchen and go get me some more customers!'

Although I was used to Uncle yelling a lot of the time over pots and pans (and I knew he didn't really mean that he'd cook the turtle), you could hear the uncomfortable silence among the rest of the staff behind all the clanking and sizzling and chopping. Maria shook her head at Uncle, pursing her lips.

It wasn't the right time to talk to Uncle. The restaurant was quite full, but not as full as Uncle would have liked it, and that made him crabby. He relied on having lots of customers in the summer to keep the bills paid throughout the quiet winter. I collected the flyers that I usually handed out to people who came off the ferries at the quay and was about to leave when Maria called after me, her foot holding the swinging door open.

'Uncle yells at everyone, you know that, don't you?' she said. 'It's just a lot of hot air.'

'Grandfather used to say that if all of Uncle's yelling

didn't come out, it would boil and boil up inside him and then one day he'd go *kaboom*!' I said.

'Wouldn't be good for business if Uncle went *kaboom*, hey, Azi?' Maria laughed. 'Grandfather made sense to you, didn't he?'

I nodded. 'We're two of a kind, me and him. Two creatures from the sea.'

'And what's the message the turtle has brought you?' she said.

'People send messages to say they're coming, don't they?'

Maria smiled. 'Yes, they usually do.' She reached out and tugged at the end of my hair lying on my shoulders. 'When are you going to let me cut your hair?'

'When Grandfather comes back,' I said, running off.

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At the quay, I called out to the tourists as they stepped off the ferries that brought them from the other islands.

'Come to Uncle's restaurant on the beach! Fresh fish. Hot chips and ketchup. Cold beer,' I told them, and handed out flyers, sticking some in the side pockets of suitcases as they were wheeled past. But most of the time I was checking to see if an old man in a blue cap would appear. When the ferries were finally emptied Grandfather hadn't come, so I headed off, not really sure when to expect him.

I went back to the cove and staked a fence made of driftwood sticks and chicken wire round the area where the turtle eggs were hidden. I stripped down to my shorts and swam, and from out in the water looked back to the land to see what the turtle must have seen when she'd found her way

to the same nesting place. Except for that one time two years ago, we'd not had any other turtles nesting on our island before. Surely it couldn't just be a coincidence that the turtle had come back now.

Uncle's restaurant was only thirty running steps from the edge of the sea, but neither he nor Maria knew the sea like Grandfather and I did. I might have got it wrong before, but this time I was sure Grandfather was coming. The sea knew this story and it was telling me so.