

## Out There

The water is cool in the morning.

She woke up much earlier than her father, so she swam until she was called in for breakfast. At first light, she was out the window, into the deep dark sea that surrounded her home on all sides but up.

The tower she called home would have been incredibly tall, if not for the fact that an indeterminate amount of it was submerged in the water. Only a handful of floors poked above the surface, and the number shrank with each passing year. The ever-hungry tides would consume all, with time.

She darted through the water with incredible grace. It parted before her more like the air than like a liquid. The gentle morning sun cut daggers into the depths, all hidden away beneath the smooth, glassy surface. Every single day, it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. The unearthly green-blue glow illuminated the claw-like protrusions of the shorter structures, eternally reaching for the surface that only grew further and further away. She can't help but wonder if the sea level was ever that low, if these towers were meant to be homes, who built them, or if they grew like weeds between stone. How far down did they go? How far does the sprawl stretch? Her community dwelled in a cluster of taller ones, commandeered from the seas generations ago.

Nobody knows if there's another community, or if there was one before. Nobody knows how far the Eversea goes. Only endless rain and abyssal waters.

How she wished she could dive deeper. To welcome the water into her like the sky. To chase the infinitely small and many pinpricks of color and light that danced fathoms below. Alas, her breath would run out, the pressure would crush her to bits. People had tried. She could only go so far for so long. What's down there? The lights screamed at her, *follow us, dance with us, you can be beautiful too.*

The old couple, the oldest in the community, lived a floor above her. They spun glorious tales, of krakens and leviathans; heroes and monsters and all manners of beasts that clung to the roots of the towers. Were those the eyes of ravenous creatures, trapped as much as she by the pressure? Or were they something kinder, like the warm glow of the fires in the winter. Those tales seemed impossible, anyway. It was probably more plants. Something boring and disappointing.

She had a feeling it wasn't malicious. The Eversea had always felt to her like a friend, her closest confidant. A veritable library of the past yet to be decoded, of a time when the towers may have scraped the sky. If the ocean could talk to her as much as she talked to it, maybe she'd get answers. Still, the waves stayed quiet, lapping without a clue as to what it all meant. She feared that she would never know anything more than everyone before her. That the secrets of the Eversea would remain just out of reach. That history would slip right through humanity's fingers.

Treading water, she gazed towards the seafloor, impossible to see and clouded in dark blue.

*One day, she thought to herself. One day, I'll find out what's out there.*

As she broke the surface, she heard her father call her name. She kicked her feet and sighed. Maybe tomorrow. She'll find something tomorrow.

The water is warm in the morning.

He woke up much earlier than his mother, so he swam until he was called in for breakfast. At first light, he was out the window, into the deep dark seas that surrounded his home on all sides but down.

The tower he called home must be incredibly tall. It stretched far upward, out of sight. Towards what, he didn't know. It was the largest out of the many buildings in the area, the largest thing he's ever seen. Whatever's above keeps running further away as the light wanes.

He shot through the water with impressive speed, reaching for the warm beams kissed by the light from above. A peaceful moment, a wonderful recurring miracle. The golden glow silhouetted the skeletons poking upwards like gilded and broken ribs. Every single day, it was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. That pastel wash falling over his world painted the towers in mystery. He couldn't help but wonder what they were originally for. His community had inhabited them for centuries. Were they meant to be lived in? Were they meant to be worked in? Were they art? Were they natural?

Nobody, not even the other communities, had a clue. The Eversea was all they ever knew. Only infinite currents and abyssal darkness.

How he wished he could go higher. To ascend and grab the light back with both hands. To chase those decadent talons of life and heat and love that sliced away the darkness like the luminous spots on people's skin. Alas, his breath would run out and the pressure would cleave his body apart. People had tried. He could only go so far for so long. What's up there? The miniscule shadows that dashed through the light taunted him. *Don't you want to know? Don't you want to be like us? Come with us. You can be happy too.*

The old couple, the oldest in the community, lived a floor below him. They spun wild and treacherous tales, of a barrier, an end to the water and the start of something... else. Something so incredibly other that it was indescribable. Was something other than water even possible? Were those shadows from above the water? Probably not. It was probably more plants. Something boring and disappointing.

He had a feeling, whether the shadows be in the water or the not-water, that it wouldn't be scary. The Eversea had always been something of a friend, a brother even. An ancient tome waiting to be opened, of a time drowned out, like that myth about people who had no tails wielding sticks of burning heat. He had a fleeting thought of the faint orange dots that replaced the glow at night. How wild would it be if those were the armaments of people with one too few limbs? But the silence of the ocean never responded to his wistful riddles. Only reverberated and bubbled vaguely, leaving him just as clueless as before. He feared he would never know anything more than those who came before him. That the Eversea would keep carrying the truth up and away. That the past would rise right out of humanity's grasp.

Gently drifting, he gazed toward the distant surface, impossible to see and shrouded in light blue.

*One day, he thought to himself. One day I'll find out what's out there.*

As he floated back down, he saw the glow of his mother's spots signaling him home. He flipped his fins and sighed. Maybe tomorrow. He'll find something tomorrow.