

*Where
Maryn
Goes*



Sierra V. Fedorko

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Cover Artwork: Emaline Westbrook

to anyone afraid their life season will never change.

Introduction

Originally written in 2019 and shared in October that same year, *Where Maryn Goes* is my story in allegory form. Before children.

Little did I know that shortly after completing *Where Maryn Goes* I'd be pregnant at last! Two lines on a pregnancy test. Laughter on the bathroom floor. It was hard to believe, and I would wrestle with fear and joy many times over. A story for another time which you can read in [*Swan Song of a Scarecrow*](#).

But before all that, I'd write this novelette of loud and vivacious victory. Not without grief, for I was still grieving, but with a true wholeness in my heart. There was life in my voice and in my very being.

Where Maryn Goes captures how real it was—the healing in my soul before children were in the picture. Life reverberated within even though my womb remained empty.

I've made no major edits in *Where Maryn Goes* as I've decided to leave this piece of my heart true to that time of my life. This novelette is a picture of my

womanhood from the ashes. It is me before motherhood.

How triumphant! How full! How seen!

May you see yourself clothed in the flowers from the Light-Maker, the ones specific to your story. May the words in *Where Maryn Goes* draw out the picture of your life where it has been hope, healing, and victory in God.

Chapter One

Young Maryn, Old Maryn

Maryn. I am Maryn, and I wear a dress made of flowers. Real flowers so far as I can tell, but nothing has felt very real for quite some time. But never mind that. I choose the prettiest flowers on my Island, and I stitch the blooms into the kind of dress I want to wear.

When the flowers wilt, I am already dreaming of another dress I can create in this paradise.

This is my life. Built from scratch. Every last piece of it.

Today, my dress is crafted with azaleas, all different shades. It wraps close against my skin and the flowery fabric skims the top of my bare feet.

The clouds overhead cast dark shadows on my dress, but I am determined to finish scavenging for tomorrow's garment.

As I rummage through the tall grass for wildflowers, I think about Young Maryn. Young Maryn is who I used to be. She walks around like a reverie and invites herself along when I'd rather not have her for

company at all. Her innocent, energetic words plague me, and I pull at the grass with frustration...

“I think I remember where the geraniums grow. It’s quite a long walk to the meadow, but if you start early, you’ll get there by dusk. Maybe even before this storm hits.”

I stare down at Young Maryn’s dress. A plethora of daisies weave in and out of dandelions with seeds that never seem to fly into the air. I criticize her garment and nervously bite my lip at this version of me. The part of me that used to be.

I don’t want to hear about the meadow. I used to treasure everything about that place, but it’s in my past and has been for many years. This Island is the best part of me now.

I hear Young Maryn changing topics and charging into all sorts of memories she will never let me forget.

“Remember when you watched the stars turn into morning light? Remember when you ran along the shoreline of Ocean and smiled for just a split second? Remember when you ran away from life out there and built an Island here instead?” My hands

grow clammy just listening to her rattle my memories back to me.

“Remember when you wore dresses you didn’t have to make? And remember how they lasted for years! Remember the meadow you loved? Remember when you admired flowers and danced to the music of sunsets? Remember how you sang off-key when you stared at the sky? Remember those times? Can we visit the meadow first, then go to Ocean?”

I glance down at the waistline of my hand-crafted dress. I need her to stop reminding me of so many things. My hands grow tired of searching for wildflowers as I listen to Young Maryn’s incessant chatter.

“STOP. JUST STOP!” I scream. I yell at Young Maryn, “I DON’T WANT TO GO TO OCEAN. If I go, I may never make it to the other side. I’ll stay here in what I know, and I’ll love life because of it!”

I shake with rage and disappointment until I can no longer see Young Maryn anymore.

When the reverie of Young Maryn finally dissipates, I feel the first raindrop sink into my clammy skin. I’m proud of who I am. I love the things I make. I love this place built by me. I trudge forward. I can

sense the geraniums are close, and though I silenced Young Maryn, I still want the geraniums she talked about.

I climb over the last huge rock to see the old meadow of my past. The meadow that Young Maryn never lets me forget. The meadow I used to love. The meadow I haven't visited in years. It looks more real than any other part of my Island, but the meadow is far in the past so the thought is ludicrous! I'm not even sure how I found it so easily, because I've kept it away like an old buried secret.

I force my eyes to focus, but I'm haunted by care-free twirls and orangey sunsets. I wish Young Maryn and all her memories would go away forever.

I stomp my way through the meadow, angry and uncomfortable. The ground is peaceful, unshifting, and I lose my balance because of it. I land next to a body which I assume belongs to Young Maryn. I scream at her to move, but all I hear is silence in return.

I get up and my brittle heart jumps into my throat. This is not Young Maryn.

My whole life lurches forward, and I see an old woman lying at my bare feet. Her eyes bore into

mine and I scream with fear at the resemblance between us. Her eyes are my eyes. Her dress is my dress.

This is Old Maryn.

Future me.

Old Maryn is outlined by wilted geranium petals. She looks damp and decrepit—tangled between dead things. I turn to run. Out of the meadow. Away from Old Maryn—away from future me. But she grabs my hand. It's cold and tired. I despise it.

Old Maryn whispers something, but I refuse to kneel down to hear what she is saying. I cover my ears because this is not what I want to see—not who I want to become or anything I was hoping for.

But Old Maryn's hoarse voice reaches through the rain and meets my ears, anyway.

I hate what I hear.

Chapter Two

Ocean Is a Season

Her raspy voice pleads with me as she points her finger to my heart and waves her hand as if to shoo me away. Every word is bitter to my ears.

"Go to the ocean. Go to the ocean."

"Into the ocean. Into the ocean."

And I know what Old Maryn is asking of me.

To walk into the waves and lower my whole body into the water. To walk until I cannot touch the ocean floor. To go where I do not want to go. To be where my flower dress falls apart. To exist where I have never wanted to exist. To turn away from the Island I have made.

"Go to the ocean. Go to the ocean."

"Into the ocean. Into the ocean."

Her rasps come repeatedly. It's all she can say—all she is willing to say. I ask her why. I scream at her. My voice is anger and fear combined. Still all I hear is Old Maryn rasping constantly,

"Go to the ocean. Go to the ocean."

"Into the ocean. Into the ocean."

I run from the meadow. Dead geraniums fall from the sky and into my skin. I cut my feet on rocks as I go. I return to my house built securely in the trees. Echoes break as soon as I begin climbing toward comfort.

“Go to the ocean. Go to the ocean.”
“Into the ocean. Into the ocean.”

A fire consumes the entirety of my house instantly. All that’s familiar burns with it. I watch the structure splinter apart but instead of ash, it lands in a pile of dead geranium petals. My azalea dress is wearing thin, and I’ve barely worn it at all. The destruction piles around me and mounts high like a skyscraper.

I have no control, and I cannot avoid Old Maryn's whispers still echoing in my ear.

“Go to the ocean. Go to the ocean.”
“Into the ocean. Into the ocean.”

But I don’t want to go. I don’t want to fall apart. I don’t want to go where I cannot touch the floor. I don’t want to go into a place of mysterious and inexperienced chaos. I fall on my knees. I will stay here. I grasp the shoreline sand. If I let the waves brush over my feet then it might be enough to keep

me safe, to keep on this Island. I see her then. Young Maryn.

The part of me I have already been.

She holds a geranium, but this one's alive. It looks nothing like the ones outlining Old Maryn. This geranium must be the last living thing on the Island. Young Maryn whispers three simple words—louder than the echoes and louder than my own thoughts.

She pleads, "Please, please go."

I notice her dandelion seeds have drifted away. Perhaps, by the force of the storm. Perhaps, because she truly wishes me to walk into the waves. She cradles the last living geranium to her chest.

It's all she has left, but she walks to Ocean and sets it loose on the lapping waves.

"No!" I scream and run to the water, but the flower is already out of reach.

I scream again.

I yell at Young Maryn over and over, but see she has disappeared too. My heart plummets. My soul sinks.

The geranium is floating on the soft waves—the only gentle place of this entire Island now.

I am the barest form of me now, and the only sign of life floats into the expanse of unexpected things. Dead flower petals have swept around me. I am clothed in the ugliest garment I have ever worn. It crinkles against my skin and makes me want to jump out of it.

I brace myself for the soft Ocean waves, and feel the smallest sense of relief when it washes against my ankles. I don't want to be here, and I never wanted a dress like this, but the last living thing is barely in sight and I know I must go now.

The water swirls around my waist and my hands trail along deepest shade of blue. My heart lurches in my chest. I feel suffocated and free. I feel scared and brave. I feel nothing at all.

My chin hits the surface of the water. My bleeding feet can barely touch the Ocean floor now. One more step forward. I take it. But I sink. I am overcome by every unwanted emotion pushing against my body. My dress of dead things hangs loose and soggy. Winter. Spring. Summer. Fall. Ocean.

Ocean is a season.

How long does Ocean last? How do I get out? I was forced in by destruction and sorrow and hope. I stay encased beneath the water for hours. Drowning forever. My feet have yet to touch the bottom. There's got to be more than this. I force my hands above my head in one last desperate cry for help.

I feel something strange like Grace grab hold, and I'm pulled above the surface. A glimpse. A rescue. I open my eyes to sunrise. To wide expanse, to bright blue water, to dead flowers, to still here. My heart breaks but the weight of Ocean keeps it inside my chest somehow. Still here. Still here. Still here.

I expect silence to be my companion forever. I force all my broken-heart pieces to receive this crushed and terrifying life. I get into a position to become the pain, and then I hear her.

"I'm Aneta."

The unfamiliar voice shocks me and punches vulnerability into the pit of my stomach. I look to the left side of me, and see a woman bobbing up and down in the Ocean with me. Innately I know she wasn't the Grace that hoisted me to the surface, but she is someone. She looks like an expression of joy and light. I thought this Ocean belonged to me. But Aneta is here. Aneta is right beside me.

Chapter Three

Dress of Dead Things

I stare at Aneta. I try to speak. But I haven't used my non screaming voice for days now. Aneta is patient and happy and unassuming. She just floats next to me. I attempt to coax my vocal cords into single syllable words. I can't remember how to form a sentence, even though I readily know how to scream. I drift there quietly—silently convincing myself to talk, to trust. Words finally escape between labored breaths, "I am Maryn. Just Maryn."

She grins and replies immediately, "Hi, Just Maryn."

Before an awkward silence can fill our ears, she launches into nonstop chatter.

"Well, Maryn. It's so good to meet you. I've been floating here just beyond your Island for awhile now. Well, it feels like forever. I saw the storm over there and could see your shadow. Well, at least I think it must be your shadow. And anyhow, you were so brave to walk to the end of your shore and embrace the great wide open. Well, I'm sure you felt like you were plummeting. I felt that way too. Ocean took awhile to get used to, but well, Ocean is turning out to be a beautiful kind of place. It's the only place I

can safely be. My Island wasn't safe, and well, that's a long story."

Her words are tumbling out faster than I can keep up and I never knew anyone who could say, "Well" so often and between so few words. Either she really is joyful about this Ocean-place or she's out of her mind. It could be either one. I'm not convinced of anything yet. My thoughts are interrupted by,

"Well, do ya?!" Aneta is staring at me expectantly.

"Uh, um, do I what?" I stutter, embarrassed to have missed her question.

"Do you want to see your new home? It has a name and everything. It's called Peace. Isn't that pretty?"

My cheeks grow a deeper shade of red as a long pause follows her question. I am unfamiliar with a name like Peace. It sounds odd and awkward to my ears, almost like a silky red theater curtain ready to pull back and exploit my wounds—wounds so deep and dangerous that I would rather not expose them even to myself.

But Aneta doesn't let me answer and pays no attention to the deepening shades of

red—embarrassment, anger, hopelessness. I am all three openly.

Aneta grabs my cold hand and I hope it doesn't feel the way Old Maryn's did. If Aneta's shocked by its clammy coldness, she doesn't say so. Instead, she lets out an excited, "I'll lead the way."

I don't want to follow her, but her strength and sense of purpose pulls me through the depths of this unknown life called Ocean. As we move through the water, I notice Aneta's hair is curly-blond and dry. My stringy hair, more brown than anything else, is plastered in sections down my back.

I am nothing like Aneta.

Before I can work through any more of my troubled thoughts, Aneta abruptly stops at a clustered pile of seaweed skimming the Ocean's surface. "Well, this is Peace", she exuberantly states.

Disbelief colors my blue eyes with shock. This is Peace? This? It's nothing but a green and yellow smashed together tangled mess of things that should stay underwater.

I watch as Aneta stares at Peace with old, familiar eyes of home. And I wonder how she could view this

as anything good or right or well. Before I am able to swim out and away to the emptiest part of Ocean, Aneta places her hands on the edge of Peace and lifts her body to the top of the pile.

Her dress is intricate and undeniably pretty.

It is not made of dead flowers like mine.

It is gorgeous, unscathed by the salty water, vibrant, hope-filled (if that is possible at all), and filled with flowers in the prettiest shade of violet, turquoise, and sunflower yellow. It is undamaged, free-flowing, and made more beautiful by the contrast of the seaweed which I now notice sparkles in the sunlight.

Ocean is the strangest mystery to me. Ocean has ruined me. Ocean has pulled me away from myself, all I made, and who I thought I was.

Ocean is terrible.

Ocean feels like loss to me, but Ocean may be my only chance for a dress like Aneta's.

I reluctantly pull myself onto the floating seaweed. The sparkling effect only seems to highlight everything my garment lacks. I wear dead

things—old hopes and dreams, forged realities, deep losses, and apathetic years.

Aneta doesn't seem to notice my unease or my dress of dead things, and I'm thankful.

Again before any awkward silence can stretch between us, Aneta begins speaking.

But not to me.

“Well, thank You for Peace, for this gentle home on Ocean. And thank You for the sparkling way it glimmers in the sunlight. How I love all the light you make! And thank you for Maryn, my new friend! And for the way you safely brought her to Ocean and for how you rescued her from the depths. You know I couldn't get there. I tried. And well, You reminded me I can help but I can't rescue...just You, the Light-Maker. Well, I'm going to enjoy the sun now and pass the hours until sunset.”

Aneta ends her conversation (cheerful yet deeply genuine) and turns to talk to me, but I'm not listening. I used to know the Light-Maker, but I can't remember a time I genuinely shared myself with Him like Aneta just did.

An uncomfortable dawning spreads through my heart, and I realize the Grace that rescued me from drowning belongs to the Light-Maker too. But why would His rescue require that I stay here on Ocean?

And yet, listening to Aneta speak to the Light-Maker beckons the thought that maybe there's more to Ocean than the loss I feel. Regardless, I want this dress of dead things gone. *I hate it.* And I have no confidence how any part of this awful dress could change out here. My Island held all the flowers—all the beauty and all the good. Why did I stay on this clump of seaweed? I can't possibly turn back to my Island now. Aneta wouldn't let me jump off Peace if I tried.

Sunset seems far away, but I've so much to think about. I lie on Peace, feeling hope, feeling numb, feeling like I have no idea how this dress of dead things is going to be anything else.

Ocean is scary.

But Ocean is my whole life now.

Chapter Four

I Welcome What I Would Not Choose

Sunset bursts through the sky and glistens on the water. It has felt like minutes, but we've been floating in this unlikely place named Peace for hours. Before I can drink in the colors I could never describe or verbalize, waves boil to the surface throwing me from Peace. These are not the soft waves of the shore...these waves feel like grief. I'm swallowed up. *These waves are grief.* Unwarranted. Brusque. Relentless.

The waves throw me around, and in the tossing I see Aneta still admiring the sunset on Peace. These waves were meant for me. Meant to swallow me. A part of Ocean for me alone. Like water swirling to a drain, I'm spinning through the places I've been and the places I never hoped to be.

Pain masquerading as water stings my skin and pulls me under. I am forced to a depth of Ocean that causes me to grieve. The grief is so layered, so intimate that not even I can fully describe the heartache of it.

And so I drain just like the water emptying through one. I grasp my flower petal dress of dead things, because these pasty, cold hands are desperate to

hold tight to anything that feels familiar. Even if it's old and ugly.

But in these tumultuous waves, relief for my aching bones and gentle comfort to my weary soul swells beneath me. I relinquish the grasp I claim on my dead dress. Can relief and comfort belong deep in the drain of grief? Or in a place like Ocean?

As the swirling slows, I notice the dead petals from my dress are flying away like dandelion seeds. And I can't believe it. I could never climb out of all these dead things myself, because they were stuck to me, fitted tight against my skin. But now it's flitting away as though it was never anchored here—on me.

The presence of Grace pokes at places long numb, and I wake up to healing on the Ocean floor. My lungs fill with fresh air as I lie here and then the water around me and the waves above me shoot into the edge of the sunset and plunge below the surface again. Everything is still, but healing holds tight.

With my head above water once more, I see Aneta is gazing upward just as before. Without the weight of my dead flowers, I swim forward. I am hesitant to climb on our haven of seaweed, because my old dress is gone, and I don't know what kind of dress I'm wearing now. I am in Ocean and even with a

covering of fragile healing, I am still certain that beautiful things don't happen in the expanse of nothing.

I grit my teeth. My breathing is shallow. Grief has stripped me of everything familiar and the nightmare of Old Maryn is nothing compared to the pain I just endured. Although healing pushed me to the surface, mistrust is the sum of all I feel. I climb onto Peace, bracing for whatever horrible response Aneta will have to my vulnerability.

Instantly, Aneta glances away from the sunset and exclaims, "Orange flowers, Maryn! Look at your dress! It's like nothing I'd ever seen before!"

A thousand thoughts seem to scurry through her mind, before Aneta rushes on, "Oh Maryn! The waves got you too! I thought you were here, but well, you were there. That's Ocean for you! Unexpected and often lonely. I never even got the chance to help you, because the waves are all so different and always take us at different times. Waves never warn anyone and are silent to everyone except the person it's taking under! But well, look at your dress, Maryn! Those flowers are alive! You look alive!"

I've been staring at my dress since Aneta shrieked about my orange flowers. I finger the petals, unsure

what they are called. Breathtaking, every last one. Orange. Alive. I am here. I am less numb and more numb all at once.

I am sorrowful. Orange is not a color I would have chosen or even desired in a dress for myself. I am happy. Orange is breathtaking and vibrant, and I am alive with young hope slung like a dress around my body.

I settle into Peace all over again.

I slowly sit down beside Aneta. Her dress is fuller than mine, but the thought doesn't bother me. I am just thrilled I no longer wear a dress of dead things. My fledgling happiness stays for mere seconds, and then a tiny fear of the unknown creeps into my chest. I bury my feet farther into the seaweed of Peace and stomp out the intrusion. I am here. And I am alive.

It's mid-sunset and somehow the color in my dress seems more vibrant than the colors in the sky. I am wound tight with life, dressed expectantly in hope.

Ocean stretches far in front of me, but I keep my focus to the sky instead. I am content to sit in silence, but Aneta places her arm around my shoulder. Her voice is gentle, so unlike her usual

outbursts of happiness. “So, what was it like? Your waves of grief, Maryn?”

She must see the way my eyes have changed. The joy and sorrow present. The two living side by side but the sorrow threatening to take over. Aneta waits with understanding in her own eyes. She knows what grief is like. The waves of grief are unique and terrifying, but the way of grief has been a place for both of us.

The sunset moves to brilliant pastels and soon dusk begins to conquer the glittering surface of Ocean. Only now do I finally answer Aneta. I share about my deep terror and how the dead things I held so dear flew away. My voice shakes as I speak, but it's getting stronger. I feel more whole than hollow.

So I welcome what I would not choose.

I welcome orange.

I welcome Ocean.

Chapter Five

Mirages and Memories of Me

In a season like Ocean, it's hard to tell whether you are moving forward or backward or in circles all around. This torment of not knowing gnaws at any healing being done in me and I fear these orange flowers will wilt and disappear. But every day, Aneta teaches me how to look at the sky and admire the water without looking ahead to what I cannot control. She shows me how to soak in every sunrise and sunset. She says to enjoy what is right here and expectantly wait for more goodness to come. She says the Light-Maker sees us here and creates all sorts of glorious displays just for us.

When I asked Aneta how long she had been drifting on Ocean, her voice came out jagged and sharp, "I've not been drifting, Maryn. I've been living."

Living not drifting.

What was the difference? I could barely understand her answer then, but I'm starting to see now, because Aneta keeps showing me the difference.

Watching the sunrise takes my mind off Ocean even though I am in the wide expanse of it. I gaze upward as the soft colors grow vibrant, the birds come alive,

and the blue of Ocean becomes more pronounced. The Island I used to love is like a shadow. If I look very carefully, I can see the blurry yet destroyed images rustling in the water, but then the light moves and I am eased back into the present. And hope expands right here in the middle of Ocean.

As the sun moves into the sky, Aneta wakes up to the morning, but she is immediately intent on something in the distance. She jostles my shoulder, “Maryn! You should have woken me up sooner. Look!” I follow Aneta’s urgent hand motions to see another Island.

My heart leaps in my chest. Maybe Peace is taking me back! Maybe Ocean is over! But as I stare more intently, I notice the Island is shaped differently than mine, and it’s exploding in darkness and disarray.

A thousand flashbacks to the life I used to know freeze my whole body.

Frantic breathing replaces my gathered hope. I can only think about myself and all I have lost. For agonizing seconds, my whole heart is being thrust between the past and the present, the things I desired and the unasked for beauty that’s a part of me now. My body stands still in shock. My heart

plummets and dances and sinks and swims in circles around my mind. Aneta is shouting, “HELP ME, MARYN! GET OUT OF YOURSELF!”

Her words are harsh, deep, still kind. I look down to see Aneta grasping hold of another woman, battered like I had been. The weight of Ocean—grief, pain, and suffering—grips her body tight as Aneta uses all her strength to help the unconscious woman onto Peace. The storm has subsided, but the darkness persists.

I grab Aneta’s waist, and we work together until the sinking woman lies unconscious on Peace. I see her dress of dead things. Her body is marked by wounds and scars and pain unimaginable. I am not the only one to know suffering. Even still, all I can see is my old Island and my old dresses—these mirages and memories of *me*.

I cannot take my eyes from the scars littering this woman’s arms and face, but I hear Aneta say, “She is in for beauty. I can’t wait to see the gifts she’ll receive and the dress she’ll get to wear.”

I shrink to my knees, taken aback by Aneta. I remain transfixed with my pain, but Aneta sees what cannot be seen—the hope of beauty, the surety of life remade into something good. I marvel at Aneta’s

kindness for everyone, her love for living, and her never-ending anticipation of sunrise and sunset. To Aneta, Ocean is a canvas which holds more light than pain.

Aneta tends to the unconscious woman and I stay quiet, eyes steadfast to the sky. Humility cloaks my gaze, and I'm urged to look down. When I do, I see manzanita leaves weaving with the orange flowers on my dress. Pink blossoms pop through. Thousands of them. I don't deserve to be dressed in more beauty. Not after today. Surely not. After all, I'm still here thinking about myself while Aneta helps the dying woman. And yet, the manzanita blossoms keep popping through bright and vibrant.

This must be Grace grabbing hold again.

Chapter Six

This Is Peace. You're Safe.

The woman has been motionless for a few days. When the Ocean storms rage, we cover her with our hand-made seaweed blankets. The seaweed is sun-dried, abundant, and surprisingly warm though lightweight.

I watch as the dying woman breathes. Aneta's shift is about to begin. Our time is devoted to this woman's lungs. Keeping her warm, shielding her from the sun, making sure her shallow breaths get through and begin again.

My Island is barely a shadow in my memory now. I contemplate Old Maryn. Is she still about to die? Is she still ragged and desperate? Is she still in the meadow or was that destroyed too? I shake my head to rid the questions. I do not want to get lost in the nightmares of my Island...it is enough to endure Ocean for another night.

Aneta places her hand on my shoulder to signal her shift has begun. The sunset is glorious, but my eyes are heavy. Our home adheres to the gentle cadence of the water. No storms tonight. I exhale, relieved. At dawn, I wake instantly and my breathing becomes like the whitewater rapids. Is another grief wave

coming? I turn my head in every direction, watching for any sign of one. I notice Aneta has accidentally fallen asleep. Nothing else looks out of place.

“Where am I?”, the gaunt woman’s raspy voice tells of trauma.

My pulse returns to normal and my body slumps forward. No grief waves...just curious, uncertain eyes desperate for understanding.

I smile with relief and hold the woman’s hand.

"This is Peace. You’re safe."

She glances at me, stares at the seaweed, screams at the expanse of Ocean, then wraps her arms around her body.

I squeeze her hand and say, “I hated it too. Still do sometimes.”

She falls against my shoulder and though she is no longer dying, her vacant eyes reveal her life is fledgling. I wonder if my eyes look like hers.

“What’s your name?”

The exhausted woman answers me like a robot. “It’s Stella.”

I use my cold, aching fingers to comb out the knots in her hair. I am ill-equipped for this, but I remember the manzanita, and I push through the discomfort of caring for another.

“Hi, Stella. I am Maryn. Aneta and I are here. Ocean feels like forever, but I’ve seen some good things happen in the span of forever.” I can hardly believe these are the words leaving my mouth that harbors so many screams, so many angry, bitter cries.

But here I am.

And here is Ocean.

And it’s true...I’ve seen good things out here.

Stella’s stiff body suddenly convulses with the need for reassurance. “AM I SAFE? AM I?” Her robotic tone now cracks with passionate fear.

“This is Peace. Yes, you’re safe, Stella.”

I am gentle in my reply, because her world has changed and she loathes Ocean and she can’t feel anything good yet.

Stella’s body relaxes. Her breathing finds a better rhythm and her vacant eyes glimmer with

acceptance as she lies on her side to sleep. I adjust Stella's blanket. The Ocean air rifles with Stella's hair, but it looks more like a dance than a tangled-up mess.

I quietly step to the edge of Peace and avoid the grand mirror made of gentle and tumultuous water. Stella and I are so much alike, but how do my eyes look now? I close them tight, too afraid to look down into the Ocean mirror. I don't want to see the eyes that will stare back at me.

As the sun pushes itself further into the sky, the rays of light shelter my body and enhance the unchosen beautiful orange of my dress. Courage pulses through me as the light gets in and I finally look down.

Staring back is hope...fierce and gentle...old and young. These eyes do not speak of life barely holding on; they whisper of life learning to live again.

Ocean is more than grief, terror, and foreverness.
Ocean has split me open to new life.

Ocean is giving light a home in me.

Chapter Seven

Making Space

I stare at my reflection, mouth gaping open. This couldn't be me, right? But it is. It is me. I kneel on the edge of Peace and lean closer to the water. My fingers tap at Ocean and it echoes with ripples that sparkle in the morning light. Or is that light from all that's new in me?

“You've seen it then?”

I jump at the sound of Aneta's voice, but have no chance to reply. Aneta always has so much to say.

“You've finally seen the life in your eyes. Oh, Maryn! That changes everything! Because when you finally see the life in your eyes, then you can finally see life well.”

I nod my head at Aneta's voice, not fully grasping what it means to see life with life-filled eyes. But Aneta is proof that life-eyes are real and true. She defies this wilderness of waves with her vibrancy and passionate enjoyment of each day.

“How's she doing?” Aneta nods in Stella's direction, and I explain all that happened just a few hours ago.

Aneta is quick to reply, “Well, Stella is a pretty name. I almost wish it were mine, but if I had Stella’s name then I’d have Stella’s life and only Stella can live Stella’s life. And well, she’s doing the best she can. That’s plain as day. Evident just by looking at her. And her gentleness and resilience. Can you see that? It may be broken in two, but it’s there.”

Truth is I can’t see anything Aneta’s talking about. I just see broken and ragged. I see a body holding on for dear life, but hating every minute of the struggle. Even with my new eyes, I can only see old things. And even though I’ve been taking care of Stella I can’t see her the way Aneta sees her.

I shake my head at Aneta. “I don’t see any of that. She just looks worn thin.”

It frustrates me that I can’t see Stella the way Aneta sees her. I have been like Stella. *I have been Stella*. So why can’t I see her?

“Aneta, how do I see her?”

My voice is urgent and desperate, because I have life-eyes now...so shouldn’t I be seeing life? Aneta stands up and faces the sunlight, shielding her eyes to the intensity, but courageously welcoming in all

the light she can. “Oh Maryn, it’s the simplest thing. You just have to be willing.”

I am equal parts relieved and uncertain. But I let my chaotic heart find a softer beat, and I wonder what it means to be willing.

Aneta catches fish for our breakfast while I tidy up our home on Ocean and check to see if Stella is still breathing. Her body is so thin that I can almost see the outline of her heart. What kind of devastation has ripped at her body so hard that her insides are becoming her skin?

As I think about Stella's pain instead of my own, compassion mixes with the light inside me. The emotion is foreign, but I let it reside. Clueless to all that’s going on in my heart, Aneta loudly dishes out our simple breakfast. She accompanies the task with her constant chatter.

“I think we should take turns caring for Stella throughout the day. Same as last night. Maybe, at sunset we can wake her up and help her eat soup. She needs to eat soon and, well, if we do it at sunset, at least, she’ll see something beautiful and the harshness of Ocean’s foreverness won’t be abruptly in her view. The sunset will be softer. She needs to

see a gentle thing.” Aneta’s thoughtfulness amazes me yet again.

How can she have been on Ocean so long and be this kind? Shouldn’t Ocean make you bitter? Isn’t life out here more painful than anything? More lonely than one can imagine?

Yet Aneta shows me the opposite.

I have no room for this opposite kind of life. I wear alive things, yet long for my old, worn-out things. The light swirling around the insides of me prompts me to welcome new things...things I don’t understand yet. Things like this dress of unnamed orange flowers and undeserved manzanita blossoms.

And it would seem the expanse of Ocean is teaching me to make space.

Space for light.

Space for people.

Space for the opposite things to hold a lot of life.

So I make space for Stella’s pain, and I store up hope for the gifts she will receive. I make space for the kindness of Aneta, and I hold gratitude for her there.

I crack the wall protecting all my dead things, and I make space for future things instead. Things I cannot control or possibly understand. The new space in me feels uncomfortable and unruly, but I let the space take up residence anyway.

And it is here I finally understand what being willing means. It's not mysterious or hard or unattainable.

It's just one simple thing.

Being willing means making space.

So I do.

And my life-eyes are finally ready to see life well.

Chapter Eight

Grace and Horror

Morning gives way to afternoon and the reality of Ocean meets up against my heart in a heavy way. But I'm resolved to make space...to be willing. I don't chase away the heaviness, but I don't let it choke my mind. Fragile joy is growing in the new spaces and light fills in all the inconsistencies.

I glance to the other side of our floating home and notice Aneta is picking flowers from her own dress. She gingerly plucks at the sunflowers and violets. She chooses the prettiest ones and thoughtfully makes an arrangement.

I don't understand.

Doesn't she know picked flowers become dead flowers? Why would she take her own beauty and make it die? Aneta sings to herself quietly while rearranging her bouquet again and again until it meets her approval. She is happy, undaunted, but I instinctively pull my knees to my chest, protecting my own beautiful things.

Aneta plucks at the edge of Peace and collects a handful of seaweed. I still can't believe this seaweed

is home. I can't believe it has a name like Peace. It's hard to believe a lot of things out here.

Aneta braids the seaweed with a deft hand as though she's done this many times before. She wraps the finished braid around her bouquet of sunflowers and violets and ties an intricate bow.

I'm taken aback.

It looks more beautiful than Aneta's own dress.

The afternoon sun glints off the flower petals and Aneta smiles in approval. "This will do," she says to herself.

My knees are still bunched up against my chest, my hands clasped tight, my fingers intertwined like deformed prison bars.

Aneta stands to her feet and walks over to Stella's broken, recovering body. She places the bouquet a few inches from Stella's eyes, blocking the intensity and initial terror of Ocean.

Aneta whispers quietly, "Just in case you wake before sunset." Then she tiptoes away to sit at the edge of Peace, back turned to both of us, facing the light again. Just as she always does. My legs ache,

but I won't dare move. My life-eyes are learning to see, and I don't want to miss a thing. I am almost certain Aneta's flowers will die before Stella wakes up. Here I am...still expecting death. Even with life-eyes!

An hour passes before Stella's slight frame jerks awake. It is painful to watch, but just as Aneta planned, the bouquet of sunflowers and violets are in Stella's full view. She can't see Ocean, not from her angle. Stella can only see flowers...beautiful flowers glistening in afternoon sunlight and gently sprayed with Ocean water.

Stella's face relaxes and her twisted fingers touch the flowers ever so timidly. The small action blankets Stella with the tiniest burst of strength. In one second, Stella's body looks more whole than ragged. I never knew such a big offering of self and a timid reaching out from self could look this beautiful. More breathtaking than a treasured dress. More stunning than a bouquet of sunflowers and violets. More profound than I can understand. The scene captures every bit of my heart, and I make space to remember it.

Stella finally closes her eyes (less vacant than before), and the ghost of a smile touches her face. Her skin

looks more like skin and less like her broken insides are trying to escape.

I stretch out my legs and see the skirt of my dress is made of crumpled flowers. Each orange bloom is so tired of being without air. The manzanita is wilting. Everything on my flower dress is closer to death than Aneta's offering of sunflowers and violets.

I pick at my dying flowers, hoping it's not too late to give something worth giving. Maybe they'll come to life again if I arrange them in a bouquet and give them away.

Before I can pull any of the wilting blooms from my dress, a cold Ocean wind freezes my fingers and the gusty air pushes me to my knees. I'm crumpled now... in the same position I had been while trying to keep all my beautiful things to myself.

Just as quickly as it began, the Ocean winds stop. My fingers unfreeze. Stella looks undisturbed. Aneta is still facing the light, savoring up the day, I assume.

I stand up to unwrinkle my dress and shake out my hair. But when I reach down to fix the damage, I see my orange flowers are in full bloom. So full, in fact, that I can clearly see they're marigolds. Between the marigolds rest the tiniest lilies and free-falling

manzanita leaves wrap along the entire length of the dress.

I stand breathless in the grace that got me again.

Every flower and burst of color on this dress has been given not contrived, received not striven for.

I walk toward Aneta. I'm impatient to tell her, to share the grace that keeps on getting me. She'll see my lillies and rejoice with me. We'll laugh, exchange our grace gifts, and take care of Stella while watching the sunset. These are the profound delights of Ocean.

I tap Aneta's shoulder and as she turns around, I gasp. Who is this? Immediate horror takes hold of my heart and my tongue. Aneta's face is gaunt. Her eyelids blink rapidly and dry tears fall out. I feel my voice returning, my horror being replaced by a deepening awareness of friendship, but before I can say anything to help her, Aneta screams.

And screams.

And screams again.

Chapter Nine

Map of Sorrow, Evening Sky

I wrap my arms around Aneta and listen to her scream. It pierces right through me and my ears begin to bleed. Her screams tell a story...a story impossible to tell with words. Aneta has spent years on Ocean. She has been lonely... unbelievably hurt by those who belonged in her life before Ocean. For months at a time, her mind has been attacked and left to shreds.

Every hurting part of her has been invisible to me before now. But I see her terror in this moment. My life-eyes have opened to the parts of life that need healed and helped and held.

Aneta—the girl who offers sunflowers and violets, plans soup for sunset, and asks about my grief—needs to be seen past the love she holds for others and the hope she shares just by being alive to life.

I help Aneta sit down, taking care that no Ocean water touches her skin. Her dry tears have made deep pathways down her face. It is the saddest I have ever seen her...the saddest I have ever seen anyone. I pick a handful of new lilies from my dress and use the petals to ease the pain marking her face. And

though there is a defined map of sorrow, her eyes are still filled with life. Hope has remained through the worst of her anguish. And I know light will soon break all that's breaking her.

But Aneta must grieve. She must make space to be human.

Ocean does hold the best of all beautiful things, but it also exposes the heartache that must be felt.

I gently nudge Aneta's head to my shoulder. The beginning of sunset fills the sky, and I check to make sure Aneta's eyes are open to the glorious, comforting display. Light is her favorite thing, and though she'd rather let her whole body go numb, I hold her securely to face the sunset.

Aneta's eyelids are half shut, but I know light is getting in. While Aneta leans against me, I admire the gentle blues and differing hues of yellow and purple. The colors deepen, and I'm breathless, because the colors are just like Aneta's dress. Every shade is a perfect replica, every swirl and wisp, a reflection of Aneta in motion.

I finally exhale and drink in the kindness of the evening sky. I notice Aneta's eyes are wide open now. She sees the gift too. The map of sorrow

outlining her face is accompanied by landmarks of healing and joy and otherworldly strength.

The sunset lasts half a lifetime it seems. But I don't mind. Aneta needs to see it. She needs to know she's seen. I help Aneta lie down and cover her with our best seaweed blanket. She is spent and peaceful sleep washes fast over her.

I breathe in slowly and try to process this wildly hard, delicate, and lovely day. Yes, life-eyes see life well, but I didn't know it meant I would see heartbreaking things like this. How can I explain the sadness and the hope combined? How can I put into words the terror and the triumph?

I prepare soup for Stella while the events of the day tangle my thoughts. Even though I'm floating on a cluster of seaweed, my life is so much bigger now than it ever used to be. Could it be possible that an uncontrollable Ocean is better than a self-made Island? And will I ever see my old meadow again? I spent so many years hating it, but I've begun to miss the meadow that was made and meant for me. I used to sing and dance to every meadow sunrise and sunset. And each glorious song of light practically reached from the sky to touch me. I chuckle to myself. Young Maryn isn't even here to badger me about this, and yet I'm remembering it of my own

accord. It must be all the new space I've been welcoming in.

The soup simmers, disrupting my thoughts. The moon is vibrant and the stars poke through the dark as I wake Stella to eat. It isn't sunset like Aneta planned, but the air is calm, and tonight's sky will be a gentle thing for Stella to see.

Stella opens her eyes slowly, looking more rested and at ease than when she first arrived.

"Hi, Stella. Are you ready for soup?" She nods yes with a smile, then looks up and takes in the soft evening sky.

Chapter Ten

Thirty Years or So

I open my eyes to sunrise. The colors melt together in an unbelievable display of oranges and pinks, vibrantly soft in every hue. I glance at Aneta who is already standing toward sunrise, savoring every bit of newness that comes with another day.

I see Stella sitting on the edge of Peace, transfixed with how the light plays on Ocean water. She looks stronger today. I sit beside her and only then do I notice the tiniest blue blossoms weaving in and out of the greenest leaves I've ever seen. Aneta said there would be beauty for Stella.

Aneta was right.

“That is the prettiest shade of green I've ever seen, Stella. I'm so glad it's yours.”

Stella smiles her thanks, still speechless by whatever journey brought her to this point. I'll ask her about it another day. Stella needs time to process and heal, to discover this new gratitude welling within her.

I give Stella a quick hug and remind her to look at the sunrise before it's gone for the day. And she looks up immediately, anxious not to miss it. Aneta

yells across the small width of our floating home, “Well, it’s stunning isn’t it? Maybe the best one I’ve seen these last thirty or so years!”

I nod in agreement, but Aneta’s admission causes my heart to sink all the way to my feet. Thirty years or more? I double over, and my pain whispers to me the potential years and years I may spend out here. Ocean is no short season.

And yet, Aneta’s reality has been revealed with her voice overcome by wonder. I look at Aneta framed by the softest morning light and cannot understand how her harsh reality has no power over her. Instead, Aneta radiates life. Even yesterday when she screamed so loud my ears bled, there was still a presence of hope and light in her eyes. As if she knew help was on the way.

I think about last night’s sunset being the picture of Aneta herself. I think about the glorious sunrise this morning and Aneta responding with genuine shouts of happiness. I think about Aneta’s conversation with the Light-Maker the first day I came here. I recall every other time I saw her lips moving while she faced the sky, savoring every minute of a conversation always belonging to them. I exhale sharply having no clue I had been holding my breath since Aneta’s admission of thirty years.

The last time I spoke to the Light-Maker, I was just a girl in the meadow wearing a dress I loved but didn't create. All the thoughts about my meadow and Young Maryn come rushing back full force.

Suddenly, I understand why Young Maryn would send out the last living geranium to Ocean. She was the tiny part of me that could remember what real and true life felt like, and she knew Ocean held what my Island could never become. If Young Maryn hadn't pushed the last sign of life out to sea, the gut-wrenching loss of the beautiful Island I made with my hands would have driven me to despair.

Instead, the deep Ocean has exposed the apathy in me and true life has begun to emerge. I smile, relieved. Ocean is better than my Island! But relief is swiftly replaced by a shaky, haunted gasp when I recall Old Maryn. She makes sense now too.

Old Maryn was a glimpse of who I'd be if I stayed. My casket would be made of all my unfulfilled and empty things. The dead geraniums around my body would be all I could see—the sum and demise of my own hand-crafted world. Seeing Old Maryn felt like a nightmare, *but it was actually a moment of grace.*

Oh yes, Ocean is terrifying and barren, but it is the best place to see the most light. Ocean is unpredictable and unexpected, but Peace is always

there and flowers are made and given without even a hint of soil to house them. These are miracles...*gifts*. I'd rather be in terrifying Ocean than in a casket I made for myself.

I miss my days in the meadow before I naively escaped to an Island built with my idea of better things! I miss singing and dancing to the light in the sky! I miss the Light-Maker and all the conversations we used to have. But He's filled the terrifying Ocean with a thousand displays of light and given me a million moments to wake up to life.

I hear Aneta and Stella talking over breakfast. Laughter mingles with their conversation and if I wasn't so intent on speaking to the Light-Maker, I would join their banter. But a conversation with the One I have ignored for so long is pressing deep into my heart.

I don't want to be overcome by Ocean, but I do want to be amazed by the light and life that happens here...despite how uncontrollable and scary this Ocean is to me. Aneta's happy exclamation this morning is proof to me that conversations with the Light-Maker is the strongest way to talk back to the fear of terror and time. My dress is vibrant this morning. Better than it's ever looked before. Every experience of grace, every moment of slow healing,

every choice to make space, every small action of loving someone else, and every day I've admired the sunrise and sunset enhances the undeserved beauty present.

But I'm nervous to start a conversation. I'm nervous to speak.

I clear my throat. Why am I nervous? I used to not only talk to the Light-Maker, but sing to Him! I can almost hear the old tunes of our sunrises and sunsets. I command my breathing to slow down. He still knows me. Every flower on my dress is proof.

I hear Aneta and Stella cleaning up from breakfast. I have no courage, but I offer myself to the Light-Maker anyway. I will no longer build my own casket kind of life. My words are choppy, but they finally break loose.

"I'm here...and I'm back for good."

That's all I am able to say. Every other word in me has dried up, but I feel no pressure to force anything else out. I feel no anxiety at my simplistic words of reunion. And I remember all over again how the Light-Maker doesn't expect a flowery expression from me, but He does delight in hearing the voice of the one He gives flowers to.

Chapter Eleven

It Won't Be Long At All

My small conversation with the Light-Maker bolsters my strength to endure the wild, unruly Ocean. When my voice breaks fully free again, I'll offer more words, but for now, I revel in the Maker's response to me. Joy that rivals the expanse of Ocean spreads between my heart and soul. Peace becomes a part of me rather than just the place I stand and sleep. An entire world of radiance has been gifted in response to my words that came out small and flat.

Aneta's strength makes more sense to me. Her perseverance is a result of a thousand great gifts, not her own ability to strive and overcome. There's another side to thirty years...the side where you see healing and joy and a bigger life than you could imagine on your own.

"Well, look at that! You have daffodils now." Aneta's voice cuts through the thoughts that have claimed my entire morning.

I look down to see the skirt of my dress replenished with manzanita and lily blooms, yet overtaken by soft yellow daffodils. The marigolds stretch the entire length of my dress but the daffodils gracing the skirt are prominent, bold. "I guess I do." My

reply sounds more like laughing than speaking, but I can't help it. I'm stunned in the best way all over again.

I see Aneta's eyes shimmer in the heightening light, and somehow I know the shimmering is akin to tears of gratitude. She grabs my hand and whispers the quietest, most heartfelt thank you.

I squeeze her hand in return and reply, "Anytime, Aneta. Truly."

Stella joins us on the edge of Peace and we welcome her with questions of care and concern for her well-being. How we love her!

"I like your blue flowers, Stella. So pretty! You'll have to tell us the story sometime." I admire how quick Aneta is to rejoice in the good things that belong to someone other than her.

Stella sheepishly replies, "I don't know what they're called yet, but I've a feeling I'll find out one of these days."

"Oh, you will." My words are emphatic, certain. My marigolds and Aneta's sunflowers are the proof for my statement. Gifts like these always get a name. Comfortable silence accompanies the Ocean air and

we bob up and down as the waves swell softly beneath us.

The hours pass, each one clothed in its own kind of contentment. It's a gentle day on Ocean, a day for reveling in all that has taken place, a time for savoring the tiny displays of light debuting on the water's surface.

As the afternoon ends, I stand to stretch my legs. Sunset is happening soon and I have learned to pause and let these life-eyes take in every second, storing away each color in the sky. I know when the storms come and the waves attempt to suck me dry, I'll need the reminder of every display the Lighter-Maker's ever made.

I walk the length of Peace and let my body move before I settle in for another sunset. But when I reach the farthest edge of Peace, I see something I've never seen before. What is this?

A thick shower of green vines rustles in the breeze. I approach cautiously. My hands hold more courage than my heart does and my fingers push back the curtain of vines hanging from nowhere, yet swaying securely.

I step over the divide. The coarse seaweed floor continues but slowly begins mixing with the lush

green grass of my once beloved meadow. Can this be real? I walk faster. How does my meadow look now? Will Old Maryn still be here? I begin to run, but the ground is stable and unlike Ocean. My legs are clumsy and my breathing is rapid. How am I here?

Even though I've been running for miles, the meadow is still and unmovable. Just like it's always been. My urgency is fruitless, so I force my feet to stop moving. Instead, I take in the meadow with my new life-eyes. I turn my head in every direction. I sink my feet farther into the dewy grass.

And I breathe in deeply.

Oh, the music that used to play in the sky. Each sunset and sunrise a different tune! I'd dance in fearless joy and sing off-key and my childlike heart to the Light-Maker's rhythm pleased Him very much. The meadow memories don't haunt me now, instead they pour over me like happiness.

I become like Young Maryn again.

I look around and see that while the meadow is pulsing with memories of life, it remains fixed and unmovable. This old meadow holds the tale of my Maker's love for me and a time I truly lived in it. This place has been made for me with songs and

sunsets and dances meant for us. This history of the Light-Maker's faithfulness isn't going anywhere even if Ocean is my home for awhile.

I realize there is no Old Maryn to be found. She truly had been a moment of grace, and a thousand living geraniums swaying in the meadow breeze tell me grace is holding on and healing has had its way.

I drink in the exquisite scenes of my history. I can see the faithfulness of every sunrise and sunset in the meadow of my past, but I know new sunrises and sunsets wait for me on Ocean. No more running away from new life. No more building something big and beautiful and empty.

I am resolved to return to Ocean, but I feel weak. I wish I could stay right here in the good things that have already been. The unruly desire to build a new Island off this meadow splits my heart in two. I want to get rebelliously stuck in the debris of my lovely fantasies all over again.

Hard-learned wisdom gleaned on Ocean holds me back softly. I'm desperate for the Light-Maker to help me cross the curtain of vines once more.

I clear my throat and lift my voice to His sky. "I want to stay safe in these good memories, and I want to

build another Island with my own two hands but I know, at least for now, it is the Ocean where my life with You is loud and clear. And I desire every bit of light and flower bloom you are making for me, but I also don't want to go back.”

My sob-like words are more an admission of how I feel rather than a request for help, but I wait, heart sinking fast, knowing my cry was enough.

In response to my desperation, the shower of glistening vines falls into my view, but it's much thinner now. I see hints of the evening sunset through the spaces in the vines, but the curtain obstructs the fullness of the sunset. All I have to do to see it all is step through the divide and return to Ocean—to new and real life.

The beckoning of light is a good invitation, and I go.

The floor beneath my feet is now more coarse than lush, but I'm too busy looking up. The sky is swept with orange and splashed in manzanita hues. The wisps running softly throughout are lily white, and everywhere I look are beautiful interruptions of daffodil yellow. A replica of my dress. A sunset made for me. I see that I am seen. I sing a quiet chorus of off-key thank yous to the Light-Maker before running to join Aneta and Stella. As I sit beside

them, I realize how profound it is that my sobs and screams have vanished into a voice relearning to sing. I'm discovering how to be that child-like girl from my meadow days. New memories are being made. Perhaps, a new meadow too.

The music of sunset claims the whole sky, and I recall every unskilled, yet joyful dance number of my history. I wonder how long it will take until I remember how to dance like that again.

I grin slowly, because I know what Aneta would tell me...

“Well, if the Light-Maker has anything to do with it, then it won't be long at all.”

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