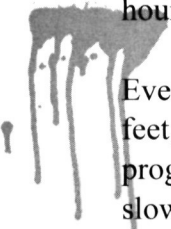


THE ROAR OF THE OCEAN

I SAT ON THE BEACH while I dug my feet into the hot, gritty sand. I had anticipated that moment for months. The ocean water collided with the shore, and the sea bubbled out its foam with the ebb of the tide. I wanted to find escape from the real world on that secluded, sandy beach on the Carolina Coast. With the end of spring quarter, all I wanted was a break. All I did was work to pay for college and the car that got me there, which left me with barely any time for schoolwork, a social life, and even less time for sleep. I had never swam in the ocean, so I could have sat and listened to the roar of the sea for hours, but Amber dragged me into the water.



Every step I took shifted the sand beneath my feet, and I sunk like anchors in the sand. My progression into the water felt weighted and slowed because of the tide. As I waded through lukewarm water up to my knees, and clobbered my way clumsily across sand mounds, I realized an unease building within me; the ocean scared me. The sand mingled with the translucent turquoise waters, and it caused indiscernible objects to appear on the sea floor. A cluster of seashells looked like a jellyfish, and I was curious what else prowled beneath me. I had seen a fisherman catch a rubbery-gray baby shark at the nearby pier, and I wondered if the momma shark lurked nearby.

Incoming waves pounded against me. The tide methodically sloshed water into my eyes. I felt the stinging water on my face and in my mouth. I could taste its saltiness as it went up in my nose and down my throat. I spit and rubbed my eyes with each collision of ocean surge. I stayed my course, and I made my way to deeper water where I could swim. I was so far out that the pier looked miles away. It wasn't easy wading in the water; I struggled with the incoming current and the salt stinging my face. Amber casually floated in the water all the while laughing at my demise. I tried to float like her, except I struggled to keep water out of my mouth. I sunk with each gulp. Swimming in the ocean failed to meet my anticipations. I thought I could just laze around in the sea, but I didn't realize the effort required to stay afloat. I couldn't grasp that the roar of the ocean carried with it such a heavy force.

For a while I found stillness further out into the ocean as I aimlessly bobbed in the water. I found that I liked how the water rippled across my skin in resistance. The burning sensation in my eyes was bearable compared to the scorching summer sun. I hid my body, and treaded beneath the water. We drifted closer to the shore; I could tell by the change in the surf. The waves sloshed water around us. I turned in an attempt to try to float. My

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back was to a swelling tide that crashed over me. I propelled forward into somersaults up to the shoreline. I inhaled a surge of water as my sides and back grazed the sea floor. As I came up through the water gasping for air, I realized that I stood in water up to my knees. I turned around and saw Amber still floating in the far distance. She saw me and started laughing so hard that she couldn't float anymore.

When I got closer to her she yelled, "Where did you go?"

A devious smile lit up her face.

As bright red scratches formed on my arms, I brushed off the sand that covered me, and I told her about the wave.

She told me something I feel will always ring true to my life in general.

She said, "You haven't swam in the ocean until it's kicked your ass."

I smiled at her frankness, and I swam back in the ocean for more.

—Deanna Bachtell