

An Ocean Away

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Two best friends are by the shore.

For one of them, it's seven in the morning. For the other, it's noon.

Alessia lives in Salacia, on the east side of the Atarean Ocean. Caspian used to be Alessia's next door neighbor, but now lives in Tellus, on the west side.

They are an ocean away from each other.

One lovely morning in April, three months after Caspian had moved to Tellus, Alessia decided to take a walk down to the beach.

She made sure to keep quiet when getting ready so that her family wouldn't wake up. She pulled on her favorite dress, the color of clouds and speckled with little blue flowers. After grabbing her backpack, she set off.

The streets were lined with tall, narrow buildings made of limestone and bricks, painted in every color Alessia could think of. Salmon pink, sunny yellow, lime green. She strolled past them all, keeping her route in mind, and waved hello to neighbors & friends on the way.

After saying good morning to the fisherman, the tailor, and the baker, she reached the beach.

This was her favorite part.

The entire beach was lined with little pieces of seaglass, sparkling in the morning sun. She took in a breath and tried to drink it all in.

No matter how many times she came here, this beach never failed to amaze her.

The sand shifted below Alessia's feet as she walked along the coast. Wind ran its cool fingers through her chocolate-brown hair and swept it behind her.

She had been walking for a while when she noticed a particularly large glimmer in the corner of her eye. Alessia stooped down and picked up a particularly smooth piece of seaglass. It was green and shaped like a lima bean.

A memory rushed over her before she could stop it, cold and clear like waves sweeping the shore.

"Ready?"

"Yep!"

Alessia and Caspian both whispered incoherent words to the piece of seaglass they each held in their hands.

"3, 2, 1, go!"

They both threw their pieces of seaglass as far as they could. Alessia caught a glimpse of her sage-green piece glimmering in the sun before dropping into the water.

“What’d you wish for?”

Alessia rolled her eyes. “What I always wish for, Caspian. To do this again next year.”

Caspian grinned. His green eye caught the sunlight, standing out compared to his brown one.

“Happy birthday, Ali,” he said, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

She couldn’t help but grin back.

A slight smile crept onto her face, turning into a grin. It felt good to smile. Like the sun had finally shown its face after a lifetime of clouds.

She reached into her backpack and took out a little glass jar. It was filled with seaglass, but not just brown and green. It boasted colors like scarlet and mauve, electric yellow and pitch black. Pieces as small as her fingernail and bigger than her thumb.

To her, they were treasures. Memories. Days spent chasing Caspian along the shore with wet sand stuck to their ankles, watching the ocean polish the seaglass so it sparkled, the sunrise lighting up the island in a thousand shades of gold.

A small part of home.

Alessia popped open the lid and dropped in the seaglass lima bean. Then she took out two pieces. One was a small aquamarine piece, no bigger than a quarter, shaped like a heart. The other was a warm brown that melted into bright green. She held them up to the sun, marveling at the way the pale morning light made them glow.

This time, she let the wave of memories carry her off the beach and back into the past.

“I want to give you something, Ali,” said Caspian.

She scooted forward, eyes wide. “What is it?”

“Okay, you have to close your eyes first.”

Alessia did as she was told and shut her eyes tight. Something warm pressed into her hand.

“Open!”

She let the darkness lift from her vision and looked down at her hands.

Two gorgeous little pieces of seaglass sat there. Alessia gasped.

He pointed to the first one, his smile as bright and beautiful as the sun. “These reminded me of us. I thought it’d be a good parting gift. This one is my favorite piece because it matches my eyes and I found it the day I met you. And then the second one—this little blue heart here—reminded me of you.”

“I love them,” whispered Alessia.

Caspian blushed. “I’ve been keeping them as a gift for ages, but your birthday is ages away, and I’m moving before then.”

At this, Alessia’s smile dimmed a little. “Two weeks, right?” she said looking up at him.

He nodded, a little sadly.

"Are you sure you won't be able to call? Sure sure?"

Caspian sighed. "You know how expensive overseas travel is. We won't even be able to afford mail, let alone a phone call. My dad has to work for maybe ten years before we will."

The weight hanging on Alessia's heart got a little heavier.

So it was true. After he moved, they would never see each other again.

She got up from her spot on the couch, threw her arms around him, and hugged him with all the strength in her arms. "They're the best gift I've ever gotten. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Now it'll be impossible to forget you."

He hugged her back just as tightly and laughed; a warm, bubbly sound that made Alessia's heart lift. "Likewise. Not that I ever would."

As the memory came to an end, Alessia held the two pieces close to her heart. Unshed tears made her vision swim. She blinked them away and took a deep breath.

She was happy for Caspian. Really. It's not every day you get to move to the City of Evergreens. Big buildings, fancy cars, and all that.

So why did it feel like a part of herself was missing? As if Caspian had taken part of her with him all the way across the sea?

She turned her gaze west, in the direction of Tellus, knowing that neither of them could see to the other side. Not for the first time, she wondered if her friend was thinking about her, too.

Alessia slipped her shoes off and approached the place where the sea kissed the coast. Water rushed over her ankles, and a blast of salty air hit her in the face. She let it fill her lungs, a sense of calm settling over her shoulders.

The brown-green piece of seaglass, she slipped back into her pocket. Something to remind her of days past, of her times with Caspian. Then there was only the blue seaglass heart, sitting silently in her palm. She held it close to her face, her gaze tracing the little C-shaped grooves in its surface.

She whispered something to the piece, almost inaudible, even if you got up close. It wasn't a wish, though—it was a message, meant for someone else. Even though she knew it was nearly impossible it would reach him, she heard something singing inside of her, telling her to *try*.

Alessia looked out at the endless blue ocean, and then to the seaglass. With all her might, she threw the seaglass—and her message—as far away as she could, into the sea, hoping and praying that it would find its way into her best friend's hands.

Time went on. The sea did its dance, crashing and roaring and sweeping Alessia's words away. Far, far away.

A year later, the sun rose over Tellus and bathed it in its pale morning light. Birds began to sing their morning song. Tufts of grass living near the shore bent and danced in the wind. The world comes alive again at dawn.

The blue seaglass heart is carried once more by the waves. It tumbles and drifts onto the shore, eventually becoming half-buried by the sand.

A shuffle cuts through the silence. Then, a squelch of wet sand as a boy with strawberry blond curls kneels down to pick the piece up. His eyes, one brown and one green, sparkle with happiness as he lifts it up to the sun.

Caspian can hardly believe what he's seeing.

"Alessia," he whispers, remembering his gift to her.

The sea is an unpredictable, fickle thing. But sometimes, when it feels like it, it can carry a message. And that day, even an ocean away, Caspian heard Alessia's.

I miss you. Be happy without me, okay?