

Adventure in a Bottle

“Hey, Barbara, Clara, it’s not looking good for our surfing day,” I conceded to my two best friends on the phone after a moment of staring out my bedroom window, rain rattling on the panes like each drop was taunting us. The streams of wind from the storm crept through my shut windowsill, causing the sea glass mobile above my desk to sway and gently twinkle, disaccording with the harsh wind outside that forced the sheets of rain to the cement.

My phone in hand, I flopped down on my desk chair, which spun once around before Clara responded dryly with, “yeah, I don’t really feel like getting swallowed by the ocean today.”

“It’s supposed to clear up tomorrow, so maybe we can go then,” chimed Barbara, “but definitely not today. Sorry, I’ve gotta go. My tutor’s here.” She hung up.

“Yeah, surfing is *definitely* not a good idea, Jenna. Those waves are probably a churning mess out there. I’ll call you tomorrow, I have to go,” Clara settled.

“See you,” I responded, then slid my phone in my jean shorts pocket. Exasperated, I spun my chair towards the floor-length mirror on my wall. I flipped my auburn braid in front of my shoulder and tugged on the twine bracelet around my wrist. *Why not still go to the beach?* I thought to myself, concurring that, seeing as the storm was passing, I could at least walk down the coast. I pulled my window open with a dull creak and stretched my hand out past the overhang of my roof to feel the rain, which pattered against my palm less violently than the torrent that had battered my window minutes before. *Besides, I can practically see the beach from my house. If the rain gets worse, I can just run back home.* I texted my mom, who was working as a nurse, “*I’m going to the beach for a bit. Don’t worry, the rain died down.*” Slipping

on a sage green sweatshirt and a pair of flip flops, I slid out my front door and rushed across the street towards the beach.

My house was a total of thirty steps away from the sand, and a few moments after I dashed across the street, damp crystals of sand were trickling over the sides of my flip flops and I could hear the sounds of the waves crashing against the shore every few moments. Aside from the occasional drip of rain dotting my forehead and hair, the storm had subsided and the air was fresh and crisp, sun streaming through the passing clouds like a river weaving through trees. It was brisk out, so I stuffed my hands in the pockets of my sweatshirt and continued to stroll along the coastline, my flip flops sticking to the sand then flipping back up to my heel after a second's resistance.

My eyes glanced over the deserted Pacific Ocean inward towards the shore and stopped. The sun, its beams becoming more prominent through the shrinking storm clouds around it, had created a glare somewhere in the sand ahead of me. I tilted my head to try to catch a glimpse of it again, and a faint glimmer shone in the same spot ahead, like a piece of gold had washed ashore. I hurried towards the glint of light I'd seen, my flip flops annoyingly flipping sand up to chafe the back of my thighs.

When I'd reached the glimmer in the sand, it was half buried, but I could tell it was no piece of gold.

"It looks like glass," I breathed to myself curiously. Carefully, I brushed the grains of sand off of it and pulled the object fully out of the sand. It was a bottle with a cork lid and a rolled up sheet of paper inside. I could practically feel myself light up like a Christmas tree. *A message in a bottle. Just like in movies.* I kneeled on the coarse sand, which grated at my knees, and pulled off the cork. After a few seconds of trying to slide the paper out of the minute opening

at the top of the bottle, the note ultimately slipped out and into my palm, still wrapped by a strand of twine. I untied it eagerly and unrolled the note to find a diminutive map.

“No way,” I whispered, examining the detailed map in my palm. The map was printed out, and hardly battered, so it wasn’t too old, but it was still captivating to me. Suddenly I had become the main character in an adventure movie.

The map was detailed with locations all around Huntington Beach, with roads and paths colorfully dotted like a subway map around them. Instinctively, I located myself on the map. When I found the general spot, I noticed a bright fuschia line beginning there and leading away from the beach and towards *Pacific City*. Almost like a treasure map.

I must have looked pretty odd, wandering around the bustling beachside mall intently staring at a little slip of paper. When the line ended, my heart sank. I looked around and saw that I’d ended up at a perfectly ordinary spot that even *I’d* been to before: the benches that scaled down from the mall for a picturesque view of the beach. Hopeful, I noticed how close the map had led me to the light pole to my right and examined it. Running my hand down the pole, it caught on something. My heart skipped a beat. It was a piece of paper taped to the pole in the shade, nearly invisible if you weren’t looking for it. I gently pulled the note off the pole and unfolded it. Simple handwriting read two strings of numbers.

“Coordinates,” I beamed.

I had never been more excited in my life than when I was running, following the blue line my phone directed me by from the coordinates I’d plugged in. Disappointment is like an adrenaline crash for excitement. When my excitement crashed, it shattered. Into a billion pieces that skid off in different directions on the sidewalk. All when I reached the coordinates on the note...straight to the grand opening of a new grocery store. The “Open” banner above the door

was a daunting shadow over my dissipating elation. My 'adventure' had been an advertisement for a grocery store?

Ding dong! The door chirped cheerfully as I entered the store. I wandered around for a few moments, then determined that there was no treasure. Dejected, I began to leave the store. Then, something caught my eye just like a few hours ago at the beach. It was a piece of paper taped to the back wall, on it written, "*Last stop: The Public Library*"...