The Crown Jewel

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“Don’t be gone long!” my mother reminded me for the hundredth time. She was always so worried about me going to the reef. I grabbed the green bag I made out of fishnets last week and opened our rusted front door, “I’ll be home for dinner!” I yelled back, even though I knew it was a lie. I swam through our dreary, overworked village of small homes to the beginning of the reef. My dad said it used to be filled with vibrant colors and sea life before the humans polluted it. I could only dream of what it looked like. I started scavenging for anything that popped against the cracking gray coral.

Ten minutes passed, then twenty, and suddenly I had been searching for an hour. I found nothing but brown trash left years ago by humans, and a piece of tin that read “Coca-Cola” in black bolded letters along the front. I swam further into the dark water and I realized the sun had set, leaving only a large yellow moon to light up my path. I was contemplating heading home, when something caught my eye.

Despite the darkness something was radiating the light of the moon. I swam down low to get a closer look, wedged in between discolored coral was something in the brightest shade of blue I had ever seen. I struggled to grasp it because it was quite small. What was it? A rock? More trash? Metal? My thoughts were wandering with all the possibilities when I finally dislodged it, breaking some of the dead coral in the process. It was shimmery on top but not perfectly smooth. It looked like it had been broken because it had four dull corners. It was beautiful, being the perfect shade of royal blue.

Royal. That's when it clicked. It was a jewel, one that had most definitely belonged to a princess's crown. My brain immediately started conjuring a story. Maybe it belonged to a

mermaid just like me. My dad used to tell me stories of the royal family, they used to rule over all of us but as our ocean got more and more polluted, creatures died out and there wasn't enough food to supply the kingdom. I started thinking of what the mermaid princess looked like. I imagined her to be around my age, fifteen or so and she had beautiful long blonde hair (unlike me, with my dark brown hair) that shined in the waves. Her eyes and tail were just as blue as the jewel I found that she wore on her crown.

But how had it fallen off? I started swimming home, while trying to think of ways to fill the holes in my fictional plot. She had been swimming out on the same reef as me except it was bright and colorful, but as she was admiring the sea life an enormous fishing vessel with a large green fishnet that reached the ocean floor started approaching her. She rushed away so fast that the crown fell off her head and onto a rock, breaking the jewel off while doing so. She never went back to search for it in fear of another boat like that one. After my story was complete I realized I was almost home.

Once I saw our small house covered in moss, I practically busted down the front door, my entire family was sitting at the dinner table eating fried kelp. “Look who finally decided to show.” my brother mumbled while rolling his greyish-blue eyes. Even with his snarky comment, I couldn't contain my excitement to show them my jewel and tell the well-fabricated story I had made up about it. “I found a jewel at the reef!” I said, they all watched eagerly as I pulled it out of my bag. “I think it belonged to the royal family." I said proudly. My brother laughed. “What’s so funny?” I asked. He couldn't contain his laughter while he said “That's a piece of sea glass.” With one sentence the life of the jewel that I had invented disappeared.

The next day I was back out on the reef as usual, when I saw something different. I didn't want to excite myself after the let down yesterday with the glass. But when I swam closer I saw a once extravagant rusted crown perched on top of a rock. It had one space for a missing jewel.