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Seaglass

Erin A. Hopkins
St. John Fisher College

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The sign reads private road, 5 mph, as I make a quick left off the Ontario State Parkway and am welcomed by a sailboat mural marked Sandy Harbor Lane. My eyes run across the cluster of bird house mailboxes stalling on number 19--Riners. The pond on my left remains covered in a thick blanket of seaweed and cattails jut up through the water refusing to advance to dry ground. The smell of seaweed and the cool lake breeze attack me as I close my driver side door and advance to the back of the house. Awfully quiet, I think, the only sounds that touch my ears are the light waves and squawking seagulls awaiting their morning handout of week old bread."

Cover Page Footnote

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I pass by the back door and make my way around the right side of our brown lake house. I leave my shoes at the shift from the grass to sand and allow my toes to be nuzzled beneath the morning grains. The sun rests low to the East and the beach is empty. I'm thankful for the moment of peace. The pail and shovel, floaties and swim shoes all still rest in their storage bed. No activity this morning. I slowly make my way to the water's edge. The sounds of my papa's educated warning rings in my ears, "Lake Ontario rolls, baby. One day it's seventy degrees and the next day it can be fifty, you never know." Then he would go into one of his repeated stories about when he was a kid at the lake. My big toe is the bravest and it is that toe that dares the depths today. The surface of the lake is broken and a shiver darts through my foot and up the back of my leg. The lake had rolled, the mystery of silence is solved.

Mother spots me reflecting by the break from beach to chilled water. She makes her way from the screen porch with the green and white striped awnings towards me, coffee in each fist. "The lake's turned. Your father took the boys out on the boat."

She smiles and warm coffee stimulates my chilled nose. We both snuffle softly and watch the waves rhythmically pound the sand. I bend over and pick a rock out of the water noticing its cool, smooth surface and allow my thumb and forefinger

to warm it with their caressing motion.

"Another one for your rock collection Anna, or is this one a skipping stone?"

"Not flat enough to be a skipping stone," I offer with the air of a formal education in shoreline pebbles.

I drop the yellow stone in the front pocket of my khaki shorts. I know it will end up either in my car or on one of the window sills at my apartment joining the rest of my trinkets and treasures.

"Did Missy go on the boat with Dad and Noah and Jacob?"

"No, Missy still hasn't braved a Sunday morning with your dad and the boys. We've gotten her out on the dock this summer but the poor little darling still fears the water like none of you other kids ever did."

"Is she awake yet?"

"I think so. She's in her bedroom. Please talk to her Anna, I worry about her being so much younger than the rest of you."

I kiss Mom and pivot in the sand. I eye Missy's bedroom window and wonder what a four-year-old is doing in her room on a beautiful summer morning. Making my way toward the front of the house, I chuckle to myself. The front of the house is actually the back but proper lakeside vocab dictates the side facing the water is the front (I still call it the back). I open the screen porch door and smell the familiar almond coffee keeping warm in the pot.

"Missy?"

I call out to Missy letting the end of her name get a bit louder in my throat as to question whether she has braved the sunlight of a new day. I ascend the spiral staircase in the corner of our living room that leads to the second floor loft. Here the boys share the room on the left and Missy's is the one on the right. I rap lightly on her door and slowly push it open. Missy is rummaging through her dresser drawers, perhaps trying to find the perfect purple shorts to match her pink and blue striped shirt. Her summer streaked blonde hair is half in a ponytail--a Missy ponytail. She claims her independence by dressing herself in the morning.

"Miss, whatcha doin'?"

"Getting dressed."

"Need help, baby?"

"Anna, I'm not a baby."

"Why didn't you go out on the boat with Dad and the boys?"

Her sweet little voice informs me she is going treasure hunting. She slips her tiny feet into her lake shoes that allow her free run atop the rocks at the shallow shoreline.

"What are you hunting for?" I pry a bit, trying to build a little trust in our relationship this morning.

"Seaglass."

Missy eyes me, questioning my motives. I know company is what she most desires but would never ask. At only four years old, she is a Riner and is already very stubborn.

"Seaglass? Mind if I come with you?"

She cracks a smile and I am reminded of how important a partner is when you're treasure hunting--someone has to hold the map. Missy allows me to retie her sun-kissed hair on top of her head and leads our exhibition down the winding steps, across the heat-gathering sand and along the blue water of her calculated shores.

Seaglass is not a precious metal and is not very rare. Up and down the shores of Lake Ontario an array of seaglass hides about the smooth stones. The pieces of glass are no longer translucent and their rough edges have been worked smooth by the water and sand. Beer bottles, soda bottles, and Aunt Jemimah syrup bottles all produce the pieces of brown, orange, white, and green fogged glass that harmlessly decorate the beach.

Missy informs me the boys always bring home the orange and green pieces that are scattered every ten feet along the sand. She squats down as she speaks and retrieves a large orange piece.

"See Anna, here is Noah's favorite."

I gently reach for the continent shaped crystal, running my thumb along its smooth borders. The clouded orange piece is rolled over and over between my fingertips. I lift my gaze from the find to question its worth.

"Miss, you want to keep this one? I bet it's bigger than any the boys have found this summer."

"No, not that one," she lets out a short wine.

"But Miss," I try to argue, but Missy is already twenty feet ahead of me. I eye the piece in my palm and drop it into my pocket. Ahead of me, Missy is now down on her hands and knees.

"What is it, Miss?"

She rises with her small fist closed tight. Her eyes sparkle. I know she's satisfied. Missy juts her arm forward but keeps

her hand closed.

"What do you have there sweetheart?"

I try asking her again. This time her tiny fingers slowly unwrap to reveal the most magnificent color blue I've ever seen. Azure like ocean or sky but softened by its life in the lake. We both stare, admiring the small piece that rests in Missy's palm.

"Mama says they come from perfume bottles. Mama says they are the lake's sapphires."

We share one long moment staring at the gem the water has produced. I kiss Missy's forehead and she proceeds to drop her sapphire into my front pocket.

--Erin Hopkins

