

A trickle of sweat drips down the back of the dark haired young man. He licks his dry lips and tastes salt, unsure if it is his or the sea's. He's never been this close to a large body of water.

His mother kept him landlocked. He wanted to swim in the lively water like the other children, but when asked she replied in her funny Gaelic accent, "I'm sorry Ronan, but you've sensitive ears. The doctor said never to submerge your head. No swimming lessons for you."

"But I'll wear earplugs," he argued.

Even though her face filled with deep pain when telling how his father died, thinking it would put an end to the pleas for swimming lessons, he asked again for his sixth, seventh and eighth birthday. He had to learn to swim. Ever since he could remember he was haunted by strange dreams that left him drenched in sweat, fragment images of underwater depths, but that was the ocean and had nothing to do with self-contained swimming pools. As manhood crept upon him, he stopped selfishly asking, unable to bear the look of fear in her face when he did.

Now, under his coat he clutches the laden box to his chest. A wave of grief and confusion wash over him.

*I don't understand. All these years of avoiding water, why the sea?*

"Come outside?" The little boy asks in a little voice.

"I'm sorry he's bothering you. He's too young to understand," explains the woman. She reaches for her slippery son, shifting her container from one hip to the other.

"His father was a fisherman. This is what he would have wanted."

"We...I mean, I don't eat fish." He recalls when he realized he and his mother were not like other people, always *fish out of water*. He smiles at the memory.

“That’s the spirit.” The woman smiles back, rushing off to the excited cries of her child.

The rhythmic progress of the boat chugs to a choppy stop between the islands. It’s time.

The quiet young man emerges from the cabin on trembling legs. The other passenger’s urns glisten in the unyielding sun, but all eyes are on the creature filled sea. Animals of all kind swim around the boat. A sleek eel slithers alongside, flicking its slim, dark body against the hull. A fish, glistening with rainbow scales jumps into the air and spreads its finned wings to glide on the wind before returning to its watery home.

Fresh rolling waves of nausea rock through the young man’s body. The sea looks like one of his nightmares.

“This be the damnedest thing I ever saw,” says the captain.

Behind the array of aquatic life, a fog bank creeps toward the boat. Clouds gather.

“We best be getting this show on the road.” The old salt clears his throat and begins, “To everything there is a season...”

Rushing through his brief sermon, the loosening caps are unheard over the cacophony of eerie singing. The fish join the lament. The captain pulls his own small container from inside his breast pocket, takes a swig, and looks up at dark clouds that have spontaneously formed. He shakes his head, wishing his passengers would hurry with their grim business.

Having seen a man on the dock get hassled and told by authorities, *you’re not allowed to do that here*, an idea came to him. His cronies had guffawed over their pints when he told them his idea, but who was laughing now. He had a steady stream of business and could take four to five trips a day, sometimes more in the summer. He charged extra for sunset and sunrise memorials. There was an endless supply of the dead. This is the first time in all his years that he ever felt the need to heed any of the old stories.

Fat drops of rain fall, tears streaking the deck in long slashes.

The grieving old couple, the two teens, mother and son, hastily dump their cherished ashes and run for shelter.

“Hurry about your business, son,” the captain calls out to the stunted young man.

“I’m not ready yet,” he replies.

He leans tentatively over and sprinkles his beloved mother into the roiling water.

Hundreds of tiny eyes watch and wait. He leans over further, stroking the boiling surface. He looks out across the water. A long buried desire rises. With a quick jump he dives into the sea.

The captain blinks twice and shakes his head in disbelief. He swears when the lad hits the water, he turns into a long black seal.