

## Stealing Rain

They stole the light blue Cadillac Fleetwood from the Alaska Ferry Terminal parking lot and raced it down Main Street, a road that stretched eighteen miles north and south of town. Rain came down in a flood that summer night. Jack flashed the high beams and honked the horn, singing along with the radio at the top of his lungs. The car propelled through standing water on the road like it was meant for the sea. They hit the graveled end and barreled their way back the other direction, past the one grocery store, two gas stations, nine tourist shops, the cannery, the Coast Guard base, three churches, and five bars, down the stretch twelve miles south of downtown peppered with a few homes built on stilts, hit gravel, and turned to do it again.

Lolli popped her head out the window—eyes shut, hair drenched, Jack’s, *Dark Side of the Moon* t-shirt stuck to her skin, fists in the air—and screamed, “Just let me go,” out through the thick rain that stung her face. Trapped between the edge of pavement and ocean, she felt the island tightening its familiar hold.

When they hit the end of the north stretch again, they parked off the road under a line of evergreens, pulled each other over the front seat in a hurry, laughing the whole time as their wet skin made sucking noises on the white leather.

Jack had found the key to the Fleetwood tucked into the vanity. “Don’t think of it as stolen,” Jack said, “Just borrowed.”

Since they were kids, Jack had been a fun distraction. In the morning, he was moving south to work construction with his uncle. She loved Jack, or she told herself what she felt was love.

Jack tangled his fingers in Lolli’s wet hair, “Well, we did that. What’s next, kid?”

She didn't say anything. She thought, if she stayed quiet, he wouldn't leave in the morning without her. Jack gave Lolli's leg a squeeze, slid over, pulled his phone out of his pocket and checked the time.

"I'm pregnant," she yelled. The level of desperation and volume surprised her even more than it did Jack. He didn't skip a beat and doubled over with laughter, swept hair out of her face and said, "Don't be that girl." He created a few more inches of distance between them. Lolli winced.

Shirtless, Jack jumped out of the car, "Let's see what's in this boat's trunk."

She didn't move but knew that if they didn't do what Jack wanted to, he would take her home. Ever since her dad had moved to Anchorage with his new wife and their new daughter, her mom went to bed promptly at eight every night. That's when the third dose of Valium usually kicked in. She didn't want to go home.

"Holy crap, Lolli! You've gotta get back here and see this."

Rain forced its way into the car when she stepped out.

The trunk was open. Juggling a large rainbow-colored golf umbrella and a flashlight in one hand, Jack pulled a blanket out and wrapped her in the scratchy wool, and then handed her the umbrella.

Tightly packed into plastic milk crates were hundreds of jars. Jack picked one up full of mossy light green liquid with what looked like a sea cucumber floating on top. He shook the jar hard, nothing happened. Picking up another that held a white spotted minnow, he gave it a shake. Again, nothing happened. Each jar glowed green against the light and something from the sea floated inside, some with eyes pressed close against the glass. Jack picked up a jar with a small crab and threw it to the ground. The glass broke, releasing a strong, pickled smell.

“Formaldehyde,” Jack said, throwing another.

One jar at a time hit the ground hard. With each pop of glass, Lolli jumped. Cold mud splattered her bare legs. The wind blew harder, and the umbrella buckled and ripped out of her hand. She watched it somersault across the road back towards town. Jack turned to the jars and continued to break each bottle with more force than the last.

The shelves in their science teacher’s classroom were lined with jars of oysters, mussels, red and green urchins, waiting to be dissected by some giggling kid. He had a tank of live cold-water corals and lectured on the differences of tropical ones, the levels of light, and how they lived in large colonies. Unlike the solitary cold-water ones that died, their delicate skeletons washing out to sea.

The teacher died years ago, and she knew this was his car. Lolli reached out to stop Jack, but the flashlight swung wildly across the gravel, through the trees, and illuminated the underside of his chin, which changed his face from childish antics to a man possessed to free every creature bottled in the pickled brew.

“Jack, stop!”

“What does it matter to you?” Dark hair stuck wet to his face and rain poured from the tip of his nose.

“They matter to someone.”

“Well, releasing them matters to me.”

Lolli held tight to the soaked blanket as the wind blew harder. With the trunk emptied, Jack was breathing hard. Glass and sea-life carcasses littered the muddy ground.

Looking down, his face softened, “Who does this? Trap something alive in glass until it suffocates and dies.” Holding the last trapped sea star close to his face, he shined the light

through the glass. Its bright, red spiny arms were stiff and straight as it bobbed back and forth in the liquid. Jack shook it gently again, but nothing happened.

"Here," he said, handing her the jar.

Lolli tried to remember what her mother had said about sea stars before her father left—when her mother was still happy—a story about sailors setting out to open water, something sentimental about love. She pressed the jar to her chest. Jack offered his cold hand to lead her back inside the car, out of the rain.

Shoving the wet blanket under the seat, Lolli crawled into the back. Jack slipped into the front, cranked the engine and turned the heat on full blast. Lolli's teeth chattered. They stared out into the wet dark in silence. She wanted to drive as fast as she could to catch the ferry in town. Jack seemed too tired to move.

When she tucked the sea star under the seat with the blanket, empty glass vials clanged their way out. She pulled out the black stopper of one, rolled down the window, and extended her arm.

"What are you doing?" Jack asked, glancing over his shoulder.

"Stealing rain," she said.

"You can't steal rain. It doesn't belong to anybody."

Lolli held out her arm until the tube was full and replaced the stopper.

"This rain will always belong to me."

Crawling over the seat into the front where the heater was warmer, she laid her head in Jack's lap. His breathing slowed as he ran his fingers down her cheek and the length of her arm. She shivered.

"It's only going to be a few months, right?" she said.

“Sure, kid,” Jack said.

Hours later, Lolli listened to Jack sleep. The way his mouth hung open, the soft rattle at the back of his throat, was childlike. His hand rested on her pale belly, and she lightly touched the ropey veins. His hands had changed over the last few years. They were no longer smooth and slightly pudgy. Dizzy and a little claustrophobic from the heat, she sat up to turn the car off. Jack’s hand slipped off her body. He shifted, wrapping his arms around his chest. Something moved outside.

“Jack. Wake up. I think there’s someone out there.”

“What?” Jack said and barely moved.

Grabbing the flashlight from the dash, she opened the door as quietly as possible and stepped back out into the rain. The earth smelled of minerals and musk. There was no one outside of the car, and she couldn’t hear anything in the downpour. Light shimmered through the pine trees. Across the beach, a figure moved fast.

The flashlight beam faded as she scanned the shoreline. Once her eyes adjusted, she saw a large white dog feverishly digging. His fur glistened. Navigating the rocks in her bare feet, she moved towards him slowly to see what he had found. The hole was already a foot deep. Hundreds of broken shells and rotten unhatched sea turtle eggs were stacked in a pile. She grabbed a dead hatchling from the dog’s mouth. He bit down and took a chunk of skin between her knuckles on her right hand. Before she felt pain, she scooped up the egg and gently put it in her bra. The dog took another and darted away.

“Bad dog!” she said, pushing the wet sand around with her foot to check for more unbroken eggs. There were none, so she stood in the pouring rain and held her bloody hand in

the other. About thirty feet away from her, the dog was stretched out on his belly in a pile of kelp, tearing the hatchling gently from the eggshell with his front teeth.

Lolli thought about their moment of birth, motherless, digging their way out of sand, searching for the shoreline all alone—vulnerable—only the strong (or possibly just lucky) turtles finding cover in the open sea.

“Lolli,” Jacked yelled. “Where are you?”

She half expected to see blue and red flashing lights. Jack yelled something else that she couldn’t make out.

Back at the car, she found Jack on the ground with his legs splayed out in front of him. He laughed. She kneeled and brushed mud, glass, and pieces of sea life from his naked back.

“Where were you?”

“Please Jack, take me with you.”

“I can’t,” Jack said, pushing her arm gently. She winced again. He looked away. “Maybe after you graduate,” he said quickly.

Lolli watched her blood mix with the tiny streams of rain that ran off her skin into a half-broken jar. A bubble formed at the top of the mud. On her knees, she dug like the white dog, hoping the baby turtle wasn’t already dead. The hole refilled with every scoop. With each pull of her injured hand, mud flicked into her face. On her lips, she could taste the minerals in the mud mixed with the metal of her blood. Frightened, Jack watched. When the hole seemed deep enough, Lolli took the egg gently out of her bra and placed it in the wet, protective ground.

Lolli woke the next morning in the Fleetwood alone. The rain hadn’t stopped. With her sore finger, she wiped at the window and found the car parked in the same spot at the ferry

terminal they took it from the night before. The keys hung from the ignition. A floatplane buzzed overhead, and she would find out a few days later, that one spotted the widow's body on the rocks below the lot. A stroke, someone said. It happened sometime before they stole her car. She had a satchel full of empty jars. That's what Lolli thought Jack didn't understand, why the teacher's wife kept hundreds of creatures perfectly preserved, like she was collecting tiny pieces of her husband held tight beneath the lids.

The parking lot was full of vehicles, but there were no people in sight. No one bustled around in slickers on the wet dock. Each time there was a gust of wind, the long metal foot ramp shook a little. The link-span leading out to the commercial slip was empty. Lolli wondered if her mom was up yet, if she was worried that she wasn't home, or if she had started her first round of Valium for the day. She loved her mother but dreaded becoming just like her.

On the dashboard, the red sea star floated in the jar. In the morning light, it seemed to lose a little of its glow. The Star of the Sea is what her mother called it. If you ripped off an arm, over time, another would grow back in its place. After she spent hours sitting in the chilly car, her own wrinkled t-shirt still damp from the night before, she knew it was time to walk back towards town, to go home. She reached into her pants pocket. The glass tube wasn't there.

She placed her face on the cold window. It was hard to see out past the thick clouds, but she knew the morning ferry had come and gone. Rubbing her belly, she imagined her feet would ache from working extra shifts at the cannery in rubber boots filled with water and fish slop. The pink cheeked baby would bounce on her mother's hip as she sang songs of promise and romance. In outstretched arms, Lolli's mother would bring Jack's baby to her, yawning from the last dose of the day. Shaking her head no, she would refuse to hold her. Lolli wouldn't mean to be cruel. She would teach her daughter to be a baby turtle.