

DRIFTWOOD

by

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Chapter 1

This beach is a good place to vanish. It is a place of change. The waves endlessly remake the landscape, erasing my footprints moments after I've made them. A broken shell is here one moment and then gone, pulled back into the immensity of the sea.

Soon it will be my turn, and it scares me. Because, at eleven and a half, I haven't figured out how to stop time. It keeps coming, day after day, just like the waves.

I might be fading away. When I hold my hand up to block the sun, the tiny pockets of skin between my fingers look translucent. They glow faintly red from the blood pulsing beneath the surface. The skin there seems thinner, like my edges are disappearing. That could be where it's starting.

The rest of my hand is solid enough to block light. I still have time, a few days, no more. I move my hand away from the sun and back again. My spread fingers remind me of a sea star.

I remember sea stars from the only other time I've been to the Washington coast, when I was four. I remember their bright colors, purple and orange. Sometimes they'd be so hidden that I couldn't see them. Mom would squat next to me and point. I'd look down

her arm toward a wet rock. Barnacles would crowd most of its surface, and there'd be mats of seaweed too. Then I'd see the sea star poking out behind the seaweed strands.

Bella didn't need Mom's help to find sea stars. She was usually the first one to spot them, even before Dad. She tiptoed lightly over the rocky fringes of tidal pools while I kept a tight grip on a grown-up hand, trying my best to follow her path of discoveries.

Now here we are, my parents and I, on this empty beach, because of Bella. We don't talk about her. My parents pretend we're here to fix up that moldy old cabin. It's been in Dad's family forever, but he hasn't been back to the cabin for thirty years. Now we're here for some sort of fresh start. Who are they kidding?

I drop my hand and squint at the water surface, covered in thousands of shifting slivers of sky. The waves curl and thud and then ooze forward with hissing foam. I stand in the wet sand and feel the water lap at my toes, tempting me to go forward. But it's frigid. I step back and turn away.

Down the beach the driftwood gleams silvery white. There is so much of it. Huge trunks lie every which way as if scattered by a giant hand—heaps and heaps with logs poking out at odd angles. There is one spot, tucked back on slightly higher ground, where the wood looks different. The logs there are less jumbled.

It looks like the roof of a house. Underneath, there should be space, a room.

Who could have made it?