

Shore: Chapter Three

III

Wheels spin as we drop the bikes on their sides and head for the shore. The path only comes so far down, and then it's gravel, grit, sand, until the ground soaks into the slow green water. Dad is off ahead, and we're moving quickly. Got to keep up the sweat from riding so that the sea will feel like bliss on prickly skin. We hit the sand and we run, down the narrow bay and off to the side, to the rocks. Panting, I pull off my shoes, pile my shorts, my socks and my shirt on a ledge without hesitation, thinking of nothing but the crystal waves. Ha, I barely stop to suck my tummy in. Dad reaches the water and I take off, kicking sand into the boots behind me. I meet the Atlantic sprinting, until it slows me into an eager wade. Arms swinging round like an aerobic exercise I carry on my charge into the water, until my thighs twitch with warning and I throw my shoulders in. Getting in slowly was never the way to do it. This was the delicious jolt I wanted.

Dad swims further out near the mouth of the bay. I drift and tread until my toes can't scrape the sand. I lean back, and feel my hair spread, the back of my head cradled by the cold. Further back, letting my feet float to the sunny surface, my ears go under and it's quiet. I can hear the muffled whooshing of my circling hands. My eyes fix on the blue sky. Not a wisp in sight. I stop paddling with my feet and let my body be held by the salt water. The rocky walls of our secret bay climb into my peripheries each time the swell falls away. My hands start making swirls in the water again as I work to keep my face in the sun. I always do, or my makeup will wash away. I see Dad diving under, resurfacing, shaking the droplets from his lashes and swimming without a care. I think of Jo diving into the waves in Cornwall. Without a care. Then I think of all the pages of notes, folders, past papers and flash cards sprawled across my desk. The lists of things still to learn. The dates in my diary, underlined and crawling closer. So I close my eyes and push the sea above my face. Surrounded by it, completely, for the first time in years, I swim without my cares. And I don't collect them again until we come laughing back to the shallows.