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## Salt Water



The beach is my life.

Hi, I'm Aelia Jones. My description of paradise would be the roar of breathtaking blue waves, salt stuck in my sandy blonde hair, getting the perfect tan, while also becoming a tomato for a few hours. Days spent reading on the coast line under the refreshing shade of an umbrella, wearing colorful swimsuits that make my eyes hurt, snorkeling in the clear, blue bliss, blasting music and dancing as the sun goes down, eating mouthwatering BBQ with friends, lying in a hammock, eating sickly sweet watermelon popsicles, and smelling my favorite scents: flowers, salt and sunscreen. This was my life. But not anymore.

After living in the Florida paradise for 14 ½ years, I was yanked away to a redneck, no sun, and most depressingly, no beach state I like to call "Redneck's Paradise," but as it is known to the world, Montana. Long story short, my dad's job needed him to move to this state, and it's an understatement to say I was upset when I heard the news. I was distraught, I wanted to cry my heart out into my salt smelling pillow with my best friend, Rio ( my golden retriever, who is more teddy bear than dog), beside me. My parents tried to comfort me by saying that I would make new friends and I would find things I would like to do there, and onward and so forth. Even with all of their reassurance I was still very skeptical.

But here I am in Montana in all its glory. Sure it's pretty with its mountains and wildlife, but after practically living at the beach my whole life, plain brown things hardly arouse my attention. Shortly after we moved, I realized really how different Montana is from Florida. Listen, I have literally never owned a hoodie ( ok maybe like one ), but now I can't even go outside without four of them on. There also, obviously, is no ocean. The closest thing to an





ocean is our neighbor's moss covered lake, which I'm pretty sure is home to the Loch Ness Monster. I am not that desperate for water to go take a leech guaranteed dip.

One of the only things that Montana and Florida are alike is school. School, it's the same boring algebra and excessively long essays about people I didn't know existed until last week. I get looks in the hallways a lot. I like to think it's because of my gorgeous tan, but most likely the reason they stare is because I'm a new girl who joined their school in the middle of February. Like who does that? Me, that's who.

Friends have been hard except for my new joint at the hip friend, Brooke Peterson. Brooke is the most chatty person I know. She can spit out words faster than a human calculator can solve two times two. I love her though. She makes me happy and I love to listen to her constant yapping; it helps me forget my homesickness, or rather beach sickness. One of the few things that Brooke and I have in common is that we both play volleyball, but very different types of volleyball. Back in Florida I played on a competitive, hard to get into, club sand volleyball team. I love playing it. It's the most fun I've ever had while still working my butt off and sweating truckloads as I'm at it. Brooke on the other hand plays the more common indoor volleyball; she's a setter and a very good one, too. Though it is very unusual to have players join sports teams in the middle of the year, the highschool coach, Coach Reese, insisted that I join the team because of my history in volleyball. I was excited to get to play again, but I knew there would be some learning curves. I was also just excited to hang out with Brooke more.

On the Friday of my first week of school in "Redneck territory" I was exhausted. I had only been there a week but already had an essay, a project, and a pile of homework to complete. I opened the door into our little gray house to Rio barking like a psychopath. Out of the whole





family, Rio has adjusted the best. He loves chasing squirrels and rabbits in the backyard, and I'm sure he feels more comfortable in the chilly air than in burning heat with his thick golden coat.

"Hi sweetie, how was your day?" Mom half shouted over Rio's havoc.

"It was fine, but I have loads of homework."

I glance at my favorite photo on the wall, Mom, Dad, Rio, and I sitting on the beach in golden hour, happiness basking off our faces.

"I have a surprise for you," Mom says, tearing my attention away from the picture," I got popsicles!" Mom holds out a box of watermelon popsicles, the ones I used to eat on hot days for as long as I can remember. This instantly lifts my mood.

"Yay! I've missed these guys!" I unwrap one and take the first lick of paradise. My tongue shrinks at the sudden rush of sweet, juicy watermelon. I head up to my room to start some homework.

My room is like my home away from home. I have an ocean blue bed in the corner with a white blanket that reminds me of waves crashing onto the shore. The pictures on the wall are beach scenes that are surrounded by shiny gold frames. On my desk are seashells of all sorts that I found on my snorkeling adventures. My room even smells like the beach. I like to spray air fresheners that smell like ocean waves to make that effect. I love my room; it's my safe space.

After my painful homework session, I head down for dinner. I can smell tacos.

"A-A-Aelia! What's up?" my dad calls cheerfully from where he is sitting on a bar stool. His tanned face has wrinkles forming from the stress of work and from just living. Though he might be getting older, his hair shows no sign of thinning out. He has a thick head of blonde hair that has white streaks both from sun and age. The lines around his eyes crinkle when he smiles, and his deep brown eyes sparkle in the sun's golden glow.





“Nothing much.” I say bluntly trying to cover up the smile that threatens to break out.

“Someone’s sassy.” Dad teases.

“Alex, she’s just a teenager,” Mom says pretending to swat him with her wooden spoon she’s cooking with. Mom has long shiny dark brown hair. It’s dead straight and glistens in the light. She has olive skin that goes well with her eyes. She has stunning green eyes that look like priceless emeralds. My eyes are the same way, but they have a ring of brown around my pupils.

All too fast, Monday is here again. I’m assuming that school will be the same old, same old, but at least I have something to look forward to. I have my first volleyball practice after school and I’m pumped to play again. School was the usual, class after class, lecture after lecture. There were a few breaks where I got to talk to Brooke, more like let Brooke talk. I don’t mind though. We’re sitting in the library eating lunch. Brooke’s talking about her favorite singer’s new release, when behind me I over hear two people talking.

“Just go, it’ll be fine.” one voice says. It sounds deep. I hear footsteps behind me. Brooke stops mid yap and her jaw drops, but then she closes it in an instant. I fight the urge to turn around.

“Hey Aelia. I like your shoes, they’re pretty cool.” Tall, blue eyes, red hair, freckles is looking down at me smiling.

“Um thanks, I like yours, too,” was all I could muster. I felt my cheeks go hot.

“Thanks, uh, see you around.”

Two seconds, more like two-hundred years. Brooke looked like she might pass out.

“Oh my gosh,” she stuttered, eyes wide, she slowly turned to me,

“Rorie Jack just said he liked your shoes.” I thought she was going crazy.

“The most popular guy at school came up to you, oh my gosh.” She spat out words faster than I could comprehend. She got up and now was pacing back and forth. I was still stuck in the moment when his eyes met mine. Brooke abruptly stopped.

“I’ve got it,” she practically yelled, “he’s in love with you.”

I was taken back,

“I don’t think so.” Brooke shook her head vigorously, and for the first time in a while, I laughed, really laughed.

The rest of the day was a haze. Volleyball went great; it felt so good to play again. And even though I’ve only been here a week, and even if I can’t touch saltwater whenever I want, I think I’m going to like this place.



