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Senior Entry
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Tidal Waves

The six o'clock alarm rang soundly next to her head. She had already been up for an hour reading, but she still scrambled to silence it. Her mom was still sleeping in the room next to her and she didn't want to wake her. Carlin quickly put on an old t-shirt and her ratty jeans then ran down the stairs to the refrigerator. She grabbed the first thing she saw in the almost empty door, and slammed the screen door behind her as she skipped out the door. She could never get out of the house fast enough on those warm summer mornings. While everyone else was sleeping off the night before, Carlin liked to start the day early. She felt as though she would be left behind if she didn't get up and do something. That is why ever since she could remember, she would wake up and ride her horse Evie.

When Carlin was with Evie, she could free her mind. She could look past the rolling irrigation green pastures for miles and still find something new everyday. The days of early summer were her favorite, she could wake up earlier than before where she could taste the warm sweetness of the air. The mixture of dairy, horse, cut grass and alfalfa swirling in the air made her feel right at home. She felt Evie's body move beneath her and she could see the endless possibilities before her. She had the possibility to forget how her dad left. The possibility to forget how she barely speaks to her mom. The possibility to straiten everything up in her head. When she was alone with Evie in the sunshine, everything was perfect. She had no worries and it was as if time stood still.

This is why she woke up at "ungodly hours" as her mother would say. She could finally feel at home. The old squeaky house she and her mother moved into four years earlier never had the feeling of home. Maybe it was because there was no longer a family to fill it, or maybe she was just growing up.

She wasn't quite sure what was exactly different but one thing was certain, and that was that things simply weren't the same.

Nobody would suspect the emptiness that haunted Carlin. Nobody knew how she felt when her dad just up and left. Everyone just figured he and her mom just got a divorce one day, but he wouldn't even do that much for them. Nobody knew that Carlin had to sneak by her mom everyday just to avoid the strange man who would surely occupy her bed, and the foul mood she would most likely be in.

From the outside, Carlin looked like a nice girl, a girl who anybody's parents would be proud of. She never got in trouble, never went to parties and avoided the gossip that her friends thrived on. The only thing others couldn't understand was why she had to be with that old horse every morning. Carlin would never take anyone up on their party invitations. She would go for a while but make some excuse shortly after it turned eight o' clock. Every morning rain or shine, she would be found somewhere in that 107 acres of land between her house and the river. Nobody seemed to understand that was the only peace that she could find, and soon she would have to give it all up.

Carlin's aunt Sandy offered her a summer job working at her restaurant Tidal Waves "Where you'll always find a friendly face to wave at." Her aunt had said it would "bring family together, something that this family has needed for a long time." Carlin had never been away from home for long before and wasn't sure what to expect. She had heard her mother say numerous times that her Aunt Sandy was crazy, but then again her mother thought that about just about anyone. All Carlin knew was that in about an hour and a half she would be half way to her aunt's house in Ilwaco, and on her way to a new start.

Carlin had only visited her aunt's house a few times before and that was when she was barely old enough to remember. When she pulled into town the memories flooded back and, everything looked more familiar than she expected. When she saw the numerous shops that claimed to have the "best salt

water taffy around” and the “greatest clam chowder in the world” she knew that she had reached her destination. She followed the scribbled notes that she quickly scratched onto an old napkin a few days ago.

“Oh I’m so sure you will just love it here, we are going to be so busy this year. I’ve got this theory...” Carlin continued to listen as she heard breaking plates and bells in the background.

“Sam! Hurry it up, how do you expect people to want to come here if you are spending all your time watching the clouds go by?” she yelled at some poor kid in the background.

“So anyway... what was I saying? Oh yeah, so I’ve got this theory that this summer is going to be a busy one because of that new marina they put in not too long ago... well its not all the way in yet but pretty soon, pretty soon those customers will just be pillin’ up. Oh boy! Yes Siree’ that’s why I’m going to need your help, I just can’t wait, you’re gonna love it here.” A huge crash rattled over to Carlin’s end of the phone and Aunt Sandy sighed.

“Oh dear not again, well Hun I’ve got to go... I’ll see you in a few days, drive safe.”

“Okay thanks Aunt Sandy, it was nice...” the dial tone quickly cut her off. She had no idea what to expect out of this “crazy aunt.”

When Carlin pulled into the driveway of 7213 west Iris Street, she was sure she had found the right house. Only her aunt’s yard would be filled with so many wild flowers. Flowers of every sort and color found root in any patch of soil that they could find. The house was the only one on the block that had flowers poking their heads up in between the cracks of sidewalk. Wildflowers weren’t the only thing found in large quantities in the front yard. In between almost every patch of flowers, there was a flamingo shaped windmill. There were countless flamingos and windmills, and yet none of them were the same. Some were the same color, or size but when Carlin looked closer, she saw that each one had something that set it apart from the others.

Carlin gathered her small bags from the back seat of her beat up 77 Chevy pickup and slammed the door shut, sending five of her aunt's cats scurrying for cover. She walked up the steps of the shaded front porch and knocked on the door covered in peeling white faded paint. She waited for a few moments and began to look for the key that her aunt hid "just in case." She looked around for the pink bird feeder that her aunt previously had told her about and found a neon pink birdhouse complete with lounge chairs and a miniature barbeque. She looked in the tiny hole filled with spider webs, dead pine needles, and moss. Finally, she found the key lodged into the back of the house that could never house a bird even with the special accommodations. She got the house off its stand, shook the pine needles and moss free until the key fell to the ground.

Carlin went to the front door and wiggled the lock open. She opened the old door and piled her bags right in front of the door. When she looked around, she remembered all of the furniture with the exception of a few new pieces of junk, well actually a lot of new pieces of junk. The yellow painted walls in the living room were the same but everything else looked different. The loveseat was covered in empty shipping boxes and there were various contraptions that promised a tight tummy or Paul Bunion arms. Work out videos of every type were scattered across the floor. There were videos with celebrity guests, Richard Simmons videos, step workouts, fat camp videos, yoga, palates, even workouts that she had never heard of like zumba. Carlin figured this was just another "theory" her aunt Sandy had and she knew it would soon pass, causing the house to be filled with even more junk.

She made her way past the kitchen filled with potted plants and dirty dishes to the back bedroom. When she walked in, she was surprised to find the only room in the house that wasn't a pile of never used fads that her aunt had ordered then forgot to use. She saw a made bed in the corner and an empty dresser and she began to unpack her things and found a spot for everything down to her hairbrushes and

ponytail holders. When she was finally finished, she just sprawled across the stiff bed and let her mind wander for a moment.

Carlin thought of her mom, and wondered who she was with. She thought of her dad wondered what state he was in, what kind of person he had become, but most of all she was thinking about what would happen for her this summer. She had never spent much time with her aunt and wasn't quite sure if she would fit in with her crazy lifestyle. The only people she would probably meet would be her aunt's friends and they were bound to be crazy also; she wondered if there was anybody a bit like her in this small town. She doubted it since her whole life she had never found anyone like her, she was too mellow, she went with the flow but never really quite fit in.

As she sat there with her wandering mind, one of her aunt's cats, probably the fattest of them all, jumped on her stomach and made itself at home. Carlin petted the purring fur ball and tried to remember how to get to her aunt's restaurant. She vaguely remembered what the streets looked like but figured if she wandered around long enough she would find it, after all the town was only so big.

Carlin picked up the twenty-pound cat and set him down on the ground. He had an annoyed expression as if she were crazy to move him in his lounging hours, but she just slipped on some flip flops and made her way through the cluttered house. As she got to the front porch, she stepped over three cats and she could instantly smell the ocean just blocks away. She wasn't sure where her aunt's restaurant was but she knew it was on the pier somewhere. She wandered down a few streets heading west taking in all the seagulls and vibrant colors.

When she walked in front of a bookstore claiming to have "the best variety around" an older man waved to her. She just smiled and waved back to the stranger when he asked her if her name was Carlin.

"Yes my name is Carlin how are you?" she asked.

“Oh well I am doing just great. I’ve heard all about you thanks to Sandy. She told me you were about my daughter Jazzy’s age you will probably see her around. Anyways... so where are ya headed?” he asked.

“Well I’m not really sure to be honest with you. I was trying to find my aunt, I just got in town.” she replied.

“Oh well I see how that could be kind of difficult finding Sandy she is always all over the place, but you’re best bet would probably be at the restaurant. Just head down this street until you make it to the pier then take a left and go to the very end it’s called Tidal Waves.” He told her.

She made her way down to the restaurant and was surprised when it was easy to find. As she walked in, she saw a nerdy kid who looked about fifteen dropping plates and tripping over himself who she assumed was the Sam that her aunt was yelling at while on the phone. She made her way past the tourists and local fishermen, to the back of the restaurant where she found her aunt frantically dashing around. She just stood there for a while waiting for her aunt to stop the conversation with herself. Then she finally looked up and saw Carlin

“Oh my goodness! When did you get here?”

She threw everything down and wrapped Carlin up in a huge hug.

“I am so happy you made it here safe. Later I will show you around but first I need to get all these customers out of here you don’t mind helping do you?” she asked.

“No of course not, I’m going to need to learn sooner or later what do I need to do?”

“Well you see that girl over there?” Carlin looked across the way to a girl teasing some customers in a corner booth. She was a short, curvy girl with long and crazy black hair. She was wearing the most colorful outfit that Carlin had ever seen and it completely clashed with the apron that she was wearing.

“Yes I see her, what about her?” Carlin said.

“Well that is Jazzy, she is a friend of mine’s daughter she helps out around here. She is part of the reason why we’ve got so many of the fishermen in here, she gives em a hard time. If you have any questions you can just ask her, I’m sure you’ll like her. Well anyways better get to work, here’s an apron and a pen and paper just write down the orders and bring em back to Aaron, he’s the cook. Sam is supposed to pick up after you if he could manage to walk strait but don’t worry about him usually Jazzy keeps him in check.”

And with that her aunt Sandy was back to talking to herself. Carlin wasn’t quite sure about this new job she was given she would have rather had Sam’s job or even a dishwasher would have been better. She was never one to go up to random people and make conversation. Strangers would always come up to her complementing her long blond hair and her always changing eyes but that was the only time she would talk to strangers and that was because it was forced onto her. She would rather just keep to herself and think about things, not put herself out there for the whole world to see.

She reluctantly put the apron on and walked to the other side of the restaurant. The first couple of orders weren’t as bad as she expected, just simple things that she could get down on the paper, but the third order got a little crazy. An old man who had set his dentures on a napkin, ordered a simple cup of clam chowder but when she brought back the steaming cup of soup, he flipped out.

“How do you expect me to eat this!” he shouted. “If I were to just put my face over it, it would burn my lips off. This is way to hot what are you trying to do? Kill me!?”

Carlin sat there in disbelief she knew something like this would happen it was just her luck. Not even seconds later, Jazzy came over and quickly silenced the old man.

“Chester, how many times have I told you that when you order clam chowder it is going to be hot? We don’t serve iced chowder. Get over it. Now I hope you stop harassing this new girl that just got into town today, you certainly aren’t making a good impression.”

He just sat there looking down; when he finally looked at Carlin he smiled.

“Oh you must be Sandy’s niece how nice is it to meet you. My name is Chester. Sorry for my previous behavior sometimes I just forget the simplest things.”

“Yes my name is Carlin, it’s nice to meet you too. I hope you enjoy your chowder.” She quickly walked away and Jazzy followed.

“Don’t worry about those old farts, they get testy sometimes you just gotta keep them in line. I’m Jazzy by the way if you want Aaron and I are going to a bonfire on the beach later tonight when we get off work, you’re welcome to come along.”

“Oh it’s nice to meet you, but no thanks I think I’ll just head to my aunt’s house after this I’m kinda pooped after today. Thanks for the invite though maybe tomorrow.” Carlin replied even though she knew that most likely she wouldn’t accept that invite either.

“Okay well it’s almost closing time I just have to clean up after Sam then were heading out if you change your mind just let us know.”

“Okay I will thanks again for the invite” Carlin said then she looked up from the dirty table she was cleaning. She finally saw the Aaron that they were talking about. She imagined him being a short acne faced boy who played dungeons and dragons but he was the complete opposite. He was tall with dark hair that just fell to his eyes that were the bluest eyes that she had ever seen. His smile just about blinded her and she almost forgot to answer him when he introduced himself. She now had a legitimate reason not to go to the bonfire and he was it. There was no way she could go; things were bound to go wrong with a boy that gorgeous around.

Carlin quickly got her things together said goodbye, and met her aunt at home. Later that night she thought about what would have happened if she were to go the bonfire. Would she like these new people? Were they as crazy as she thought they might be? A part of her wished she would just step out her boundaries for a while and be a free girl, but she told herself that she couldn't do that. If she were to let loose everything would fall apart, there would be nobody to take care of her mom, and she would probably end up crazy just like her aunt.

This is why for weeks everyday after work when Jazzy invited her to something new, she continued to make up excuses to stay at home. She felt as if things were to change everything would go bad, just like when things changed when her dad left. Things never were the same and she was never as happy as she remembered being before. That night, when she was walking home just like every other night, she decided to walk down to the beach to see what it was that Jazzy and Aaron were up to every night.

She saw the huge bonfire on the sand, the blue flames were almost as high as the kids gathered around the fire. She heard the country music in the background and she remembered when she and her dad used to go horseback riding. She sat there for a while looking out into the endless ocean waves and wished that for once she would go out and have some fun. Instead of walking towards the commotion, she just turned around and began to make her way back to the cat-infested house.

After walking only a few yards, she heard her name being called from behind her. "Carlin! Carlin!" she turned around to see Aaron running towards her. She felt the butterflies in her stomach but didn't quickly dismiss them like usual.

"I saw you sitting there are you sure you don't want to come hang out with us for a while? You've been around for weeks and I still haven't really gotten to know you. Ya know that? I would really like it if you were to come, but of course you don't have to" he said.

With him standing there looking at her with those beautiful eyes, she suddenly wanted to go be a kid more than anything in the world. She couldn't remember why she had turned down all those invites before anymore.

“You know what, I think I would really like that” she said with a smile.