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## Shaped by the Water

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*Shaped by the Water*  
**Taya Buehler-Reagan**

I can feel the crisp, glass-like water lapping against my feet. I take another step forward, my feet dancing with the fluid motion of the waves. I gaze out to the sun rising just over the horizon, painting an array of glowing yellows and oranges in the glass. The water is so welcoming, and the slight, salty breeze wisps the stray hairs from my ponytail. I look out at the coast, shimmering as the sun rises slightly higher in the sky, a sliver of light peeking just over the horizon. The bluffs glisten and shape themselves to the water. *Shaped by the water*. This setting ignites me. I feel alive here. A brief moment of sleep runs throughout my body, and then awakens at the quiet slap of the next wave. I look back down at the water, suddenly level to my bruised shins. I feel the cool water against my suit, and shiver.

I've never felt connected to one specific place. Beneath the waves feels the closest to a home I have ever felt. My mind begins to wander as I think back to a time I had felt this at peace-- *utter bliss*-- like a mantra on a loop, replaying in my mind. I look out at the incoming tide, which is now mildly disturbing the smooth ocean surface. I can't remember a moment I've felt this way, aside from ever being in this place. All the pain of my life fades here, dragged out to sea with the undertow. The feeling of neglect. The feeling of abandonment. The weight of abuse and misuse. I feel my knees tremble beneath the weight of all the gear on my back and in my belt. I look down at my feet and then back at the shore, from which I came. I think of how far I have come; how strong I am for bearing all this weight on my back; *alone*. I brace myself and walk into the waves, attempting to put on my fins. My shoulders are submerged now. The tide has picked up into a woeful surge, and I place my reg into my mouth. *My lifeline*. My only chance at a complete submerge, only to battle the current below. The waves swallow me, and spit me back to the surface.

I have a predisposition to shut people out when I feel they display any form of negativity. I fear it. I fear I will become it. Because it's all I have ever been shown. The fear of becoming like my mother. The fear of becoming cynical to everything surrounding me. *You're already cynical*. The constant raging fear that if I slip up for one moment, I'll become her. But I would never be like her. *You already are*. I press my feet into the

sand and step forward until I sink. I sink deeper and deeper. The surge rocks me violently back and forth.

The first time I tried to leave I was eight years old, “I’m going to live with my dad!” I didn’t have any more than a second to process what I had said, before spoons and cups were flying from the cupboard. I stood petrified. Steady streams of tears burning down my cheeks. My eyes watched, my body unable to move, as she stormed up the staircase, screaming words inaudible to my ringing ears. I heard the familiar creak of my bedroom door swing open, and felt my feet bolt up the stairs. In the next moment, I was in my room, beside her. She flung my closet door open as I fell to my knees and cried. She threw every-single-thing I owned out of my closet, landing from the lamp to the window, to the door. Hangers were left broken as I wept in the corner; alone.

I face the current and submerge further. I feel the pressure in my ears begin to burn. I feel the pressure behind my eyes start to swell. I raise up a foot to soothe the discomfort. Then I continue my descent. Will it ever end?

I often wondered if the torment and abuse would subside. I wondered if I had the strength to leave. But how could I leave my brother with such a monster. Of course, she had never treated him so harshly. *It’s because you’re not worth it.* I suppose she blamed me for her misfortune, and she acted as though I were the cause of her inability to “make it in life.” *Everything is all your fault.*

I was fifteen years old the moment I promised myself I wouldn’t live with her any longer. The moment I graduate high school; I’ll go off to college, move far away and never look back. A promise to myself that I would soon satisfy. She left my brother and I alone our whole life, for me to raise him on my own. He was nine at the time.

I approached the front door to my house, after coming home from school. Behind the door I heard the distant, familiar yell of my mother, calling my young brother an idiot. “Don’t call him an idiot! He doesn’t know any better!” Before I had a moment to step into the house. \*BANG\*. She had thrown the coffee maker into the sink, along with every dish on the counter. Without hesitation, a wooden ladle came hurtling in my direction. I dodged. In time to see her storming toward me, and behind her the window, where my sweet brother had been playing, now watching in terror. I was frozen with fear. I felt the burning sensation from the sting of her slap. My cheek was numb with tingling needles. Tears streamed down

my face, and I sensed the metallic taste of blood from inside my mouth. Without hesitation, I reflexively slapped her back. *Shit*. My dad picked me up not long after that, only to be dropped back off at my mother's again a few hours later. It would never end. It's a vicious cycle.

I find a sweet pocket in the tide. The surge has subsided. I feel my body now being caressed by the gently moving currents, as I attempt to nurture my buoyancy.

I was seventeen years old when I left my mother's house. She fought me for days until I packed my things and left. I hugged my brother good-bye. Unaware it would be the last time, for a long time. I didn't see, or speak to my mother for nearly two years. For the following months after I moved out, she threatened to take me to court. "I better still get my child support. If you don't send me a check for this month, you better lawyer up BABY." *As if she could afford a lawyer*. I called my brother every other day for a year. With no response. He didn't understand why I had to leave. And she told him horrible things about me. "She abandoned you sweetheart, just like your dad. Forget about her." He was eleven.

I was nineteen years old the first time I tried to reach out to my mother. I've never heard an apology. And I never will. But I spent Thanksgiving with my brother a month later.

The water is clearer now. I can see nearly fifty feet on all sides of me. The expanse of water surrounding me stretches to mountains of submerged stone. Schools of fish and jellies dance circles around the reef. I feel the pressure releasing as my body adjusts to this new, yet familiar environment. I glance down at my hands, cold and wrinkled yet excited by the sensation of floating. *I am floating*. I grow nearer to the reef; I begin to laugh to myself with excitement as seal swim laps around me. This is the place I feel free. This is the place that will never hold me. This is my serenity and my space of peace.

I have since forgiven my mother, but she will never be my mom. I feel this sense of freedom as I settle into the bliss beneath the waves, gazing outward as I am immersed in the life surrounding me. Beneath the waves in these deep waters, the pain of my life no longer abounds to me. A sweet sigh of relief. *Finally*. We pass around stories of the last two years spent apart and attempt to reminisce on beautiful memories of laughter, and my clumsy brother learning to walk. I swim through reefs and corals, dodging spines of urchins and lion fish. Absorbing the shape of the water.