

The Echoes of Infinity

by Pamela J. Parker

Marilyn turned the kayak away from the target ship, barely visible after all these years, toward the shallow waters by the shore. She recalled her father holding her hand at low tide, as she looked up at him and he told her again of the practice firings there during WWII. Dad had been dead nearly two decades and Marilyn could still hear his voice and smell the antiseptic hint of his mouthwash. Squinting as she paddled, she could see the roof of the beach house behind some overgrown scotch pines. The tide was going out in Eastham Bay, carrying froth and seaweed with it. How many times had she felt the pull of the sea, the measuring of moments with high and low tides? Marilyn often wondered if the ocean knew that it carried the echoes of infinity. And that's what she craved, something as close to infinity as she could get. She wanted to spend a thousand more days on these waters, but the significance of this summer weighed on her sun-burnt shoulders.

The last summer of the matriarch — she knew it. Marilyn could smell the cancer eating her mother alive. There would be no more summers together. No cocktail hours with sushi, bottles of wine and laughter, toasting to family as waves provided background music. No sad smiles as Mother recalled some past adventure with Dad. No more gathering of children and grandchildren, as Mother sat, basking in the chatter, smiles and achievements, queen of all she saw around her. No more hurrying up the narrow spiral staircase to the upper deck to revel again as watercolor reds, golds and purples painted the sky with the sun's descent. Mother was shrinking, fading and would soon be gone, like the drifting sea grass striping Marilyn's oar.

Gracelessly, she stepped out of the yellow kayak, and began pulling it to shore. Looking down, Marilyn was mortified to find one breast sagging and adjusted her suit strap to hide the effects of time

on her own body. Wrinkles and weight made her appear older than she felt, yet she was confident many more summers awaited her.

Her nephew ran over, and Marilyn happily passed the kayak to him.

Grabbing her Wellesley towel from the sand, she shook it and placed it over her shoulders. Marilyn felt the scratch and berated herself for forgetting to put more sunscreen on before she took the kayak out. She would need lotion soon, before the burn set in. And she knew the lavender scent of Mother's favorite lotion would carry her back to her teen years, their battle ground time, thankful that was long ago, but wishing Mother could have become Mom again. Somehow they never got that back.

Walking past the familiar sandy dune with tall sea grass, breathing deeply the same salty air of every summer past, she beseeched the sky, the earth, the powers that be.

If there can be no more summers together, let it go fast.

Let it not hurt.

Let Mother be free.

And Marilyn trudged back to the beach house wanting the reminders again. Walking past the older cottages with their grey cedar shakes fading from the sun, glancing at colorful towels snapping in the breeze, Marilyn hurried home, wanting to see things that were etched in her mind, wanting to touch and smell them all -- the annual basil plant sitting on the windowsill waiting to adorn tomatoes and mozzarella on Mother's favorite salad, the framed photos, the lighthouse paintings, the glass cocktail table with driftwood legs, the barnacle-kissed conch shells from years ago -- before they disappeared from the bay, the lovely blue pitcher from the art fair in Wellfleet holding dried hydrangeas, the lavish lobster plate given by a colleague of Dad's thirty years ago, the memorabilia of countless summers. Marilyn approached the door of the beach house, stood for a moment before turning the knob and listened to the waves lapping the shore in the distance.

