

## Octopi Sky

by Taneesha Davis, Victoria

Along the horizon, a fisherman gazed longingly at the sky. The brilliant hues of gold and orange began to wake the navy sky into its more familiar, and much less foreboding, lighter counterpart. It created a glimmering path to the seemingly never-ending horizon, paving his way out to the vast beyond.

His day had just begun, a quest to bring home food for the town, to in turn, bring food for his family. The familiar routine. He was always the first out here, but he didn't mind. These quiet moments stole the day away from him. Before the noise, before the town would wake and the world changed. It was just him, the sea, and the sky. When he was younger, that had been enough. The ocean had once seemed so inviting—so intriguing. Wonders of the deep had filled his child-like mind at one point. Now, he just got the job done.

The stars still scattered in the west where the light had yet to reach. They were visible only in the quiet moments like these. Before the fluorescent lights of the town would steal away the beauty from above. It was so vast and never-ending. Was there another creature out there on those stars that saw beauty in this wide universe? Not bogged down by the trenches of a civil society, of expectations, of money, and all the stress humans self-inflicted on themselves. What lay beyond that indigo sky and into the beyond? There had to be something better out there, surely?

The engine was warm enough to give it some life, and he pushed the throttle forward with his ragged hands. If you looked at them long enough, they could tell the story of a long life out on this very boat. Rough skin showed the mark of a man who worked with his hands. The faded bumps of a scar, a constant reminder of the world below he had dedicated his life to, not always loving him in return.

As he ventured further out to see, the salty air with its stinging briskness whipped his face, even in the warmer mornings like today. The anxiety rested uneasiness in his chest today. The catches had slowed, the money drying up as quick as it flowed in. The unknown was why he had fallen in love with this job all those years ago. The unknown now kept him awake at night. This was the life of a fisherman, the blue sea that defined him.

He brought the boat to a slow stop, happy with his position to search for his next great catch. Wasting no time, he set out his anchor and casting net within minutes, lowering them both down to the dregs of the ocean floor. The boat wobbled recklessly underneath him, but he didn't seem bothered. Sea legs were long a thing of the past.

He waited not long, eager to see the rewards of his early morning. Another fisherman had recommended this spot, and his hopes were high. They were quickly shattered as he peered into the mesh. *Empty*. But not quite. There was a crab struggling against the ropes, looking as frustrated as the fisherman felt.

It was smaller, much smaller than the crustacean he would usually catch. There wouldn't be much point in bringing it to shore—there were only pennies in its capture. But something else, something entirely, made him lean down and start to carefully untangle the creature. The crab was trying to survive out here. Not much unlike himself. He watched it wriggle out of the net's grasp and swim frantically away until it was so far out of sight that the only thing he could see was his reflection in the water below. With a sigh, he looked back up to the sky, now so light you couldn't make out the stars in the beyond. The town would be awake, bustling with people eagerly awaiting his next round of seafood for their burgeoning appetites. There was not a cloud in the sky this morning. Even so, the frigid sea air was a reminder of how unforgiving the sea was. Maybe something out there was a better life.

But he didn't see a better life.

He just saw blue.

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Deep below the green hull of the boat, an octopus lay asleep between the folds of vivid red coral. Legs wrapped around itself in a way that could either be to defend itself in its slumber or to keep itself some comfort in the lonely deep sea. Its white-grey body was no longer blended into its surroundings. Until, of course, it was startled awake by the dark shadow above. Its body shook awake with a jolt, colour flushing its skin into a brilliant rusty red. If you blinked now, you would surely miss it. He could not see this change, but his body knew what to do.

With the fluid precision only reserved for a creature like himself, he hurried forward, bringing its large eyes upward for the source of the dark shadow. He stared at it for some time before the idling of this shadow assured him it was not a predator.

The breaking water above seemed like a barrier to another world, a realm it could barely comprehend. Was there something greater than the endless blue that defined its entire life?

He had woken hungry. He was sure there were other animals out there that had woken with the same appetite. He crawled along the seabed floor, its skin softening in colour as it calmed down, the alert of danger evaporating. He started his familiar routine of extending its tentacles through the tiny traps and enclaves the coral made to ensure none of his favourite meals were hiding. However, he struggled to keep up these days. A body wrapped in scars, telling a life of near misses. A tentacle shorter than the rest, a constant reminder of the long regeneration process he had undergone after a particularly nasty encounter. He tried to hurry along, not wanting to stay anywhere longer than he had to. It was eat or be eaten in this world. Hunt, be hunted. Hide in the colours but never see the beauty yourself. The life of an octopus.

He felt the ripple of water before it saw the cause. His body reacted before it even realised what was going on. He faded into the aqua, matching even the timing of the waves reverberating across him. With a mix of curiosity and caution, he started toward the source of the ripple, ready to propel at a moment's notice.

It was a crab, fast descending to the depths where the octopus waited wearily. It landed on the sand, unaware he was being watched. He didn't look calm, though. The sheer panic was recognisable as the same the octopus had had moments earlier. But the crab could not camouflage himself in the open ocean.

The crab would make a great breakfast. And he could manage it, there was no doubt about it. It would be swift and lethal, a single shot of venom and all over for this little thing. The crab might not even see it coming.

The octopus lurked forward, edging slowly to the unsuspecting creature. To most, you couldn't make out the tentacles from the waves, they all seemed to blur together. As the octopus got closer, ready to make his move, the crab snapped his head in the direction of the octopus, locking eyes with him. Through the Coral Sea, he saw him. It startled him, unused to being seen. Caught out when he was about to capture.

The small crab took this moment of shock as an opportunity and scurried away, enveloping itself in the current of the water, and whisked away so quickly that even a sharp-eyed octopus couldn't keep up. A meal missed from a moment of weakness. He could only hope it would come across a dish as good as this as he continued along the seabed.

He looked to his aqua, wavy above. The swirls of water were intensifying as the large shadow moved along. What creatures lay beyond that shadow? Were there only monsters, those ready to injure it further? Or was there something else out there? Something more than the murky teal he had become accustomed to. Surely, there had to be something better out there.

But he didn't see better.

He just saw blue.