

The Big Loop
SURFACING

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Draft 1

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INT. ROOM

HANAKA

When you are born with something missing, you don't know you're missing anything at all. You don't know, that is, until people start telling you that something is missing...in you. But I never felt anything was missing. Never. Even when girls would pick on me in school. They would get bored, or if they didn't, I would beat them up. It gained me a reputation as someone you do not push too far. Maybe that's why I never felt anything missing. The world of hearing seemed like a noisy place. An ugly place. I didn't need to hear to know that. But I suppose that's what drew me under the sea.

Sound of ocean, gulls.

Music

HANAKA (cont'd)

When you are under water, you cannot hear much. There, you and I are the same. But nothing has changed for me. It's changed for you. In the ocean, then, I am more powerful than you. We came from the ocean, you see. And that's where I found myself. Again. In the depths, where things can hide in plain view. Where secrets are drowned, never to surface again.

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

From QRX you're listening to The Big Loop. I'm Michael Kim. Today's episode, "Surfacing." We begin with Part One.

INT. ROOM

HANAKA

It was my father who suggested I take up diving like my mother.

(MORE)

HANAKA (cont'd)

It was 1957. I was eleven years old. It was different back then, of course. This felt more like a large village instead of a city. Smaller. Everyone rode bicycles. There were cars but not like you see today. And oysters were not raised the way you see today with nurseries and laboratories and rows upon rows of floating farms.

HANAKA (cont'd)

When my mother worked, she did it the old way. Before they made us wear the white suits to cover our bodies. My mother went into the sea the way we came out of it: naked. Except for her loincloth and head scarf and goggles. That was before American tourists would visit. They were offended by our nakedness so the company made us cover ourselves. But...my mother.... she was legendary. Most divers went under for two, three minutes. My mother... she could be under for four or five minutes. I suppose that's where I got it from.

HANAKA (cont'd)

When my mother passed, my father never talked about it. I suppose he wanted me to go to college, but I would have to go away for that. To Tokyo maybe, which was another world to me. And maybe some girls would like that. Like my daughter here, Hanaka. Who went all the way to California for school.

Sudden break in tone from Hanaka.

HANAKA (cont'd)

(to interviewer)

Um...can we stop for a second? I'm sorry.

HANAKA (cont'd)

(to mother)

Mom, I moved there for you. To learn to sign. And I came back for you to bring you back with my family. Don't you want to be close to your grandchildren?

We hear signing.

HANAKA (cont'd)
Okay, I know. But...there was nothing
for us in Japan. Everything is here.
I can take care of you here.

More signing from her mother.

HANAKA (cont'd)
(to mother)
Okay. Fine.
(to interviewer)
I'm sorry. We can...um...maybe we can
pick up where we left off?

MUSIC TRANSITION

INT. ROOM

HANAKA
After my mother died, the amas took
care of me. They raised me as one of
them. I would wait for them at their
hut and even help separate the wood
for the fire. They would come in from
the cold. They would be out there, in
the freezing ocean, for up to four
hours, and I would have the fire and
their tea waiting for them. It was a
sisterhood. Like a holy place with no
gods but us. Sure, we prayed before
work, as we tied our hair under our
scarves, but there is a difference
between culture and spirit. The
rituals...that's for them. For the
village. For everyone watching. But
to us, we were our own family.

HANAKA (cont'd)
My father asked me over dinner one
night. He was staring out the window,
at the ocean. We had a small place.
Barely a room. But it had a view.
Which made everything feel larger.
And without looking at me, still
staring out at the ocean, he said
with his hands, Would you like to
dive with the amas? I don't remember
what I said, but I think I answered
right away. Because my mind was
looking into his.

(MORE)

HANAKA (cont'd)

My eyes following his. He was thinking of my mother. Of how she got sick after a dive. From diving so deep, from coming up too quickly. I wasn't there. The day on the boat. But I heard she seemed fine, until a few minutes later. She fell ill. I had a week to say bye to her in the hospital. Then she was gone.

Pause.

HANAKA (cont'd)

We cremated her by the ocean. Her ashes were buried in our family grave outside the village. I visited her grave the day before I began. Before I entered the ocean. Before I became a woman.

MUSIC TRANSITION

HANAKA (cont'd)

It was the beginning of a new life for me. I had been swimming since I was a child. I feel like I spent half my life in the sea. But I was always the best among my friends. I could hold my breath for two, three minutes. And I always wished I could stay under longer. Because of my deafness, I was always reminded I was not fully whole. That I was missing something. But in the sea, I am floating in a world made for beings like me. A world of silence. If people like you go into the water, it is disorienting. You lose your hearing. You lose a major sense. Not me. It is as if I suddenly have the gift of flight, over the ocean floor. And I could go deep. Deeper than anyone. By the time I was sixteen, I was going under for five minutes. Then six. Word spread of my talent. But my sisters protected me. Especially one of them. Hanae.

HANAKA (cont'd)

She was a little older than me. And she is the one who trained me. She showed me how to tie the barrel to my waist.

(MORE)

HANAKA (cont'd)

How to jump feet first from the boat in order. How to breathe properly. How to whistle out the air. How to grab the abalone five at a time. Where to find the best lobster. We communicated using hand signals. And with our eyes. It was like she could read my mind.

HANAKA (cont'd)

Thinking about her now, it's like it was from a dream. Do you remember words in your dreams? I have never heard the sound of her voice. Yet, I know what it sounds like. Isn't that strange?

HANAKA (cont'd)

One night she wanted to show me something. The moon was so bright, sending a beam of light across the water. We didn't have a boat so we waded in from shore, out past the last buoy. We dove down. It was deep. But the water was so clear back then. You could see abalone thirty feet down on the ocean bottom then. It wasn't cloudy like it is now. So I followed Hanae below. And she pointed to something shiny on the ocean floor. It was too deep for her, so I thought she wanted me to check it for her. I kept diving. And when I reached it, I saw it was a sunken ship. And the shiny thing was a metal statue of a mermaid. It was the remains of the bow of a ship. I touched it, and I saw Hanae smile. And I floated back up to her. And then...

Pause.

HANAKA (cont'd)

And then, we kissed. Under the water, away from the villagers. We kissed as if we were the only humans on the whole planet. We had this world to ourselves. Floating. In each other's arms--

Pause as Hanaka gathers herself. This is all obviously news to her.

HANAKA (cont'd)
(to mother, away from
mic)
Mom. How come you never told me this?

Pause. We "hear" mother signing.

HANAKA (cont'd)
(to mother)
Okay. Okay. I won't. You're right.
This is your story.

Pause to gather herself.

HANAKA (cont'd)
We were inseparable after that. But
because we were ama divers, everyone
called us sisters. It was not strange
to see women in the company of only
women. No one found it conspicuous.
And every month, Hanae and I would
dive in the moonlight to the wreckage
to visit the mermaid statue. I would
dive below Hanae and swim in circles
around the statue. And she would
smile. And we would remain in each
other's arms. Weightless, as if love
had unburdened us of ourselves. As if
we were only spirits, without bodies.

MUSIC TRANSITION

HANAKA (cont'd)
When I was nineteen, my father fell
ill. He had a stroke. He lost feeling
in half his body, and he couldn't
speak. What a pair we were. A deaf
daughter and her mute father in a
wheelchair. I had to start diving
longer to find the best abalone that
would bring more money at market. But
it wasn't enough. I could see the
pain in my father. He loved me so
much. And I thought of my mother.

HANAKA (cont'd)
There was a fisherman who worked with
us once a week. He had one of the
bigger boats. And he had always liked
me. He proposed to me once before,
but I shrugged it off. He was
handsome, and wealthy by our
standards, but I loved Hanae.

(MORE)

HANAKA (cont'd)

But now, my father was like this, and we needed money because he couldn't work. And this fisherman was so nice to him. To me. I wouldn't be the first woman to have an arrangement of convenience. I suspect most of the ama divers in my group were married to men they found kind and supportive, but not men they were in love with. And he understood what I expected of him for my father. So we married. And a year later, we had my daughter here. Hanaka.

MUSIC TRANSITION

HANAKA (cont'd)

This... this was hard on Hanae. She was older than me but I was always the more level-headed one. I told her we could still meet under the sea. Where no one would find us. No one would know. But she didn't like that. We had always been able to communicate through simple hand signals, our own private sign language. But now, it's like we suddenly spoke different languages. How do you explain to someone, without words, that it's possible to have your body with one person and your heart with someone else? Women have been doing this for ages. We wouldn't be the first. But... we didn't have the language for that. Because she didn't want to hear that.

HANAKA (cont'd)

And then, one night, we were having one of those disagreements. My daughter was almost a year old now. And Hanae was inconsolable. There was a storm and she swam out into the ocean. I swam out after her. She dove under, and I gave chase. But it was so dark. Our sisters tried to row out after us but the fishermen wouldn't let them take their boats out. When they explained what was happening, they rowed out themselves to help me look for Hanae. The waves were so big, the boats were having trouble launching. And I kept diving.

(MORE)

HANAKA (cont'd)

One dive. Another dive. Each one getting longer. I was under for four minutes. Five. Then six. One of the fishermen said I was under for eight minutes. They found me exhausted and pulled me onto a boat. And Hanae...

Pauses.

HANAKA (cont'd)

We never found Hanae.

Long pause. Creak of chair.

HANAKA (cont'd)

For the next three years, every time there was a full moon, I would go out by myself, and dive down to the wreckage, and float before the mermaid. I would close my eyes and remember what it was like holding my one, true love in my arms, weightless, in our tiny, solitary dance, where no one existed or mattered except each other. It was our universe. And then, one night, in the glow of the moon, as I floated and danced in front of the mermaid, something touched my arm. And that is the day it all changed.

INT. STUDIO

PAUL

When we return, the conclusion of "Surfacing," after these messages from our sponsors.

INT. ROOM

HANAKA

When you're deep under water, the one thing you never feel, is someone's touch. No one ever touches you. That's partly why dancing with Hanae under the ocean was so special, to share her embrace, silently with her. She was sharing in my world as I was sharing in hers. So when I felt something grab me by the arm, it shocked me.

(MORE)

HANAKA (cont'd)

I turned and there was nothing there. I searched below me, and on the other side of the wreckage, way by the stern, I could see something. I saw someone. I couldn't make out who it was, but I saw a human shape. With long hair floating in every direction. I thought it might be Hanae's body, trapped by the wreckage. So I swam closer.

HANAKA (cont'd)

I had never swam that deep before so I was careful to stay in tune to my body, to make sure I paid attention. And I got closer to this body. It was naked. Hanae had been fully clothed when she went into the ocean so I wasn't sure what happened. So I approached. Closer and closer. And I was about ten feet away from it, and suddenly, it started to sink. Like a large stone. It started to sink below the wreckage. And there was so much hair and it was covering the face. I couldn't see who it was. And it disappeared into the blackness of the ocean depth.

HANAKA (cont'd)

I returned to the surface, and I was coughing from being under for too long. My husband was there with his boat, and he pulled me out of the water. And I lost consciousness.

HANAKA (cont'd)

I remember so many dreams. Of Hanae. And strangely, of my mother. We were swimming in a field of flowers. In the air. My mother had one of my hands. Hanae had the other. And there we were, the three of us, swimming. And when we got to the other side of the field, there waiting for us was a hundred of our ama sisters. They were dipping and diving through the air like egrets.

HANAKA (cont'd)

In another dream, I was making love to Hanae. On a beach.

(MORE)

HANAKA (cont'd)

With white sand. And... and I felt like I could hear the ocean waves. I'm not sure if I did because I'd never heard anything before. But it felt like I was hearing it. As strange as that may sound.

HANAKA (cont'd)

And then I had another dream. Of Hanae, floating away from me, out at sea. The sun was high in the sky, directly above us. The heat was blistering, and the ocean began to bubble and boil. And I kept reaching out to Hanae, trying to call for her, but she kept drifting out further and further, and then out over the horizon. And that's when I woke up to my husband. He had his hand to my forehead, pressing a wet towel against it. He told me I had been feverish for three days. Asleep, restless with nightmares.

HANAKA (cont'd)

He signed slowly and clumsily. But I had always appreciated him trying to learn my language. But then he said, I mentioned Hanae in my sleep. Which surprised me since I don't remember ever talking in my life. I think it surprised him too. And he said they couldn't find her body. I told him what I saw. That I think her body sank to the ocean floor and the storm carried her away. Lost to me forever. And I could tell, he was thinking something, as if his body were here but his mind was elsewhere. If I did talk in my sleep, I don't know what else I said. But from that day on, a wall formed between us. A separation. He remained a good husband to me. A good father to Hanaka. And when the cancer came for him, I was a good wife to him. I stayed by his side the whole time, holding his hand. Caressing it. Thanking him for taking care of my father, of Hanaka. For me? I never felt I needed taking care of. So when my daughter left for California, it did not break me the way it breaks most mothers.

(MORE)

HANAKA (cont'd)

I had always kept my heart close to me. I would not let it go again. Because I let it go once. And it... it floated away. Carried off in a storm. Into the darkness.

HANAKA (cont'd)

One night, the moon came out. And I was standing by the water, thinking of a letter my daughter had sent me. About the new sign language she had learned and was coming back to teach me. I didn't see the use for it since everyone in my village who I needed to talk to understood me already. But it would be good to see my daughter again after so many years away. I was still working then. Diving four times a day still. And there I was, standing by the shore, staring at the moonlight on the water, and I saw something way out on the horizon. In the light of the moon, I saw something. I saw someone. And my heart began to race, and I knew immediately what it was. Who it was.

HANAKA (cont'd)

Does this sound crazy to you? Do you think of me as some crazy old woman? Maybe. I don't care. I undressed. I didn't even tie my hair. I walked naked into that water, and swam out toward my destiny.

HANAKA (cont'd)

And I knew where she was going to be. By the mermaid. On the ocean floor. She would be there now, because she was sorry for what she had done to me. For leaving me alone. For abandoning me for pursuing my sense of duty. For turning my back on our love. And I dove, and I dove, and I found myself there. Floating. Waiting. The moon light shone on the wreckage, casting it in a ghostly light. And from beneath me, something rose from the depths. Something. Someone. Hanae.

HANAKA (cont'd)

She came back. For me. I felt her touch. Along my arms. Along my back. My face. Her fingers. I felt them. And I brushed back her hair. And stared into her eyes. And we floated like that for what seemed like an eternity. And she held my face in both her hands, and kissed me. I closed my eyes, knowing this wouldn't last. Because eternity doesn't apply to us. All we have is what we feel today. So I kissed her trying to remember every detail of her body, her lips. Her face. And I opened my eyes. And she was gone. Forever.

Pause.

HANAKA (cont'd)

So, here I am. Alone in my village, but with my sisters of the ocean. Diving for abalone, seaweed. Sometimes one of us will find a pearl. When that happens we all share in the wealth. The sister who finds it buys us all beer and we drink in celebration. And then I go home. Alone. And it's fine. Because I have had too much love in my life. Is that strange to say? I have had an abundance of love, because she gave me everything. And when someone gives you love like that, it lasts only a moment. It's never meant to last forever.

Pause.

HANAKA (cont'd)

But I am glad my daughter is back to see me. She speaks for me, for a mother she barely knows. But I suppose it's time I start telling her my stories. About my life. About my sisterhood. About the women of the sea. About her grandparents. Her father. And the only love I have ever known. I will tell her about her. About how love was born in the ocean, and died there.