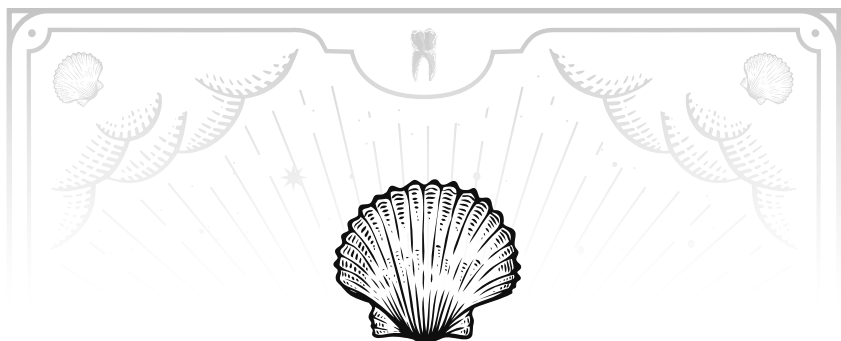




SEA CAVE

JENNIFER LISS



Chapter 1

WARNING

Wisps of fog swept the sand across Eric's shoes as he and his cousin Tate slowly walked along the beach. Eric wore his heaviest coat, a puffy red one with brown stripes. Yet he was still cold. He didn't care, though. Eric was just excited to be at the beach. Finally, he was old enough to come down to the shore alone with Tate. It was just the two of them. His parents, aunt, and uncle had stayed at the house.

Eric and his parents lived in the city. The drive to visit Tate's family only took a couple of hours. But

when he was here, Eric felt like he was on another planet.

Eric's aunt and uncle lived in a hundred-year-old house with chipped gray paint. It was perched on a cliff above the frothy ocean. He thought the house looked like a setting out of a movie. Most days, the moan of the foghorn was constant. The sound reminded Eric of the trains that crisscrossed his neighborhood. He barely even noticed them anymore.

Tate was chattering away as they walked on the beach. It was low tide. The boys stepped over clumps of seaweed as they made their way along the shore.

The green strands were knotted together. Eric untangled one with his fingers. "Look how long this is."

"Wow!" Tate said. "You could wrap it around a person, and he'd disappear. He would be like a seaweed mummy!" Tate squatted down to pick up

half of an empty clam shell. He used it to dig a small hole in the wet sand. As he focused, Tate tucked his chin toward his chest.

Tate often said weird things. Eric thought it was because of the isolation. On this remote part of the coast, there weren't many people. The nearby town was barely a speck on a map. There was no one for Tate to hang out with. He didn't have any siblings. Eric thought his cousin's imagination was kind of wild, like the ocean.

"Whoa! Look at that!" Eric pointed to a small opening in the cliff face. "It looks like a sea cave."

Tate looked at where he was pointing. Quickly, the boy popped to his feet. This startled Eric. His cousin didn't usually move that fast.

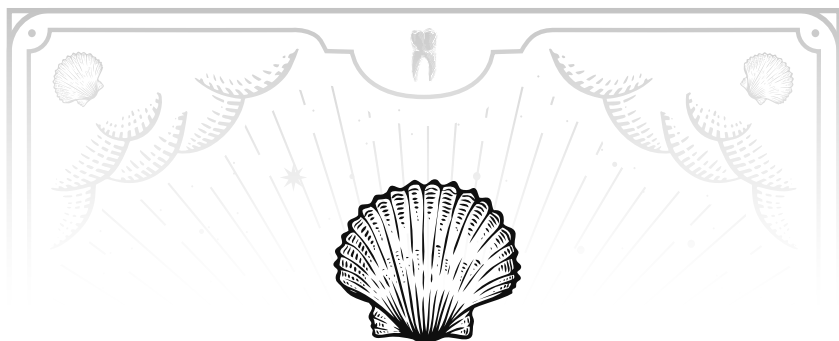
"Don't go in there," Tate warned. "I mean it. Don't even go near that cave."

Eric smiled. His cousin was a wanderer, so he must be joking. It seemed like Tate always went wherever he wanted. He liked to climb high into the

trees on his property. Together, Eric and Tate had walked down long gravel roads that led to abandoned barns. Exploring was fun. Neither of them was a don't-go-in-there kind of guy.

“Why not?” Eric asked.

Tate stood tall and looked Eric in the eye. “Because that cave is haunted,” he said. “If you go in there, it will ruin your life.”



Chapter 2

URBAN LEGEND

Eric laughed. “Ruin my life? Really?”

Tate nodded and sat down again in the sand. He leaned against a large piece of driftwood.

“Haunted by what?” Eric asked, crouching next to his cousin.

“A crazy, dead man,” Tate said with a slight shiver. “There was this guy who lived around here. He was totally normal, a good guy. You know, like your dad or mine. Then one day, he snapped. He

started telling everyone that he could see into the future.”

Eric played with smooth, blue pebbles in the sand as Tate spoke. “Of course, nobody believed the man. But he insisted. He said that the future would come to him in dreams. It terrified him. He stopped sleeping. People would find him wandering around their property in the middle of the night.”

“What does that have to do with the cave?” Eric asked.

“The guy lost his mind. Afterward, he went to live in that cave. At first, some folks tried to coax him out. But they finally gave up. He never came out again. No one knows what happened to him. They assume he died in there. The cave has been haunted by his ghost ever since.”

A blast of chilly air made Eric pull up his collar. “When did that happen?”

“A really long time ago,” Tate said. “Way before our parents were born.”

Eric stood up and brushed the sand off his

pants. “Tate, it’s just a legend! People have probably told that story over and over again for years. Sure, maybe there was some truth to it once. But stories like that get all messed up over time. I don’t believe in ghosts. Do you?”

Tate avoided the question. “Here’s a fact. I’ve lived here my entire life. Nobody who lives around here will step foot in that cave. And I mean nobody!”

A tingly feeling crept up Eric’s arms. Tate was making his point very clear. He did not want Eric to go in the cave.

After a moment, Eric shook his head. Tate was being silly. Besides, Eric didn’t really think anything would happen. Maybe the cave had treasure.

Eric glanced at his cousin. *If I do go in, what is Tate going to do? Nothing.*

He took a few steps toward the cave.

“Seriously, don’t do it,” Tate said in a hushed voice.

Tate’s fear had a strange effect on Eric. It made him feel brave.

“I’m going in for just a quick look,” Eric said. “You stay here. I’ll come right out. What could possibly go wrong? I’ll be just a few minutes.”

Before Tate could protest, Eric took off toward the cave. He reached it in less than a minute. When he looked back, he saw that Tate had not moved. Eric ducked his head under a rocky ledge and stepped inside the dark cave.

SEA CAVE

When Eric visits his cousin Tate, they stumble upon a mysterious sea cave. Eric goes inside to explore, ignoring Tate's warning that the place is haunted. Soon after, Eric realizes he should have listened. Will Eric ever find a way out of this nightmare?

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