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Volume 27  
Issue 1 *Blue Apocalypse* (2018-2019 Issue)

Article 8

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5-1-2019

# An Ocean's Rage

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## CU Commons Citation

Gillis, Payton (2019) "An Ocean's Rage," *The Promethean*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.  
Available at: <https://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol27/iss1/8>

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# An Ocean's Rage

*Payton Gillis*

*The moon's gravitational pull is strong,*

On the tides and on us.

April 7, 2013, I ran with you from grandmother's small two-bedroom house, newly painted a soothing yellow, to the ocean. You always trotted behind me due to your bad knee that made it hard for you to keep up. I felt bad at times, but your joyful laugh that echoed behind me reassured me that you were having a good time. As the therapeutic humming of waves blended less and less, turning into crisp crashes, we were reassured our sprinting would soon come to a glorious halt.

As soon as we reached the clearing at the top of Division Street, we stopped to catch our breath. The wind splashed our faces, pushing your thick black and grey hair off your wrinkled, Native forehead. The horizon stretched so straight that day that the sunset glared off the smooth water into your dark brown irises. Blinding. Your wrinkled face squinted hard and glanced down at me. "Ready kiddo?"

"Yes!" I said excitedly.

We set off, down the steep slope until the gravel road met sand. As we began taking off our old, withered shoes that we dedicated to beach days you asked, "How far do you think we're going to walk today, P?"

"To where we always do, duh!"

"Okay, now, but you remember what not to do. Right?"

"I know... I know..."

"Well, what is it then?"

“Never turn your back to the ocean, Papa.”

“And why’s that?”

“Sneaker waves, Papa...” Having repeated this at least twenty million times in my lifetime, I thought I should get it tattooed on my forehead at this point.

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Perhaps I didn’t get the point, because your death was the only sneaker wave that wiped me off my feet.

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Our spot was roughly forty minutes from where we began our journey. We knew we were there when the plush sand shifted into dark lava rock. The smooth dark slate eventually built up into a skyscraper piled high with boulders that divided *our* beach and the beach of Depoe Bay.

The hill of rocks consisted of beautiful sea life, and at times the most suspicious deaths. Every trip, we ran into horrendous findings, from starfish and sea urchins to sea lions and seagulls, some of which had been ripped in half. Their graveyard lay at the bed of rocks at the bottom of the slope. Some days we found more death than life.

Of the few creatures that survived on our beach, sea anemones were my favorite. They huddled together in small pools of water that the lava rock cradled gently. Their complexions varied from oranges and greens to blues and purples, creating a beautiful image of life on a dark canvas. My curious fingers found their way into their cold habitat. Breaking the faint moon’s reflection on the surface of glassy water, my hands drifted in, brushing their whimsical string-like tentacles that flourished in their own rhythmic current.

Although numb, I could still feel the suction cups at the end of each tentacle latch onto my nearly purple fingers. They lured me in, as if calling me to join them.

I wish I could.

Like you did.

---

A week from the last time I saw you. April 15, 12:24 PM. A package arrived from you in a three by six, reused cardboard box. Its edges were no longer noble and strong, but jagged and beaten. You suffocated it in duct tape. Twice across horizontally and once over perpendicularly. Inside the flimsy box lay a note on top of two little gifts individually wrapped in white tissue paper.

The note was written on yellow lined paper, and was folded twice, hot-dog style. Scribbled in blue ink, it read:

*Mikayla,*

*Love you so much. Hope you are having an amazing tenth birthday. Can't wait to see you again.*

*Love,*

*Papa*

Twenty words were all you wrote before you drowned yourself in liquor.

It wasn't until 9 PM that we found out those were the last gifts you would ever send. It wasn't until 9 PM that the note, the silver sand dollar necklace, and that mood ring possessed a ghostly aura.

*Why is life so closely tied to death?*

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The days that the wind on the beach carried the putrid smell of rotting sea creatures, we knew we would find ourselves hovering over

every deceased animal to examine them. Once we arrived at the lava rock, we began trying to determine the story that led them there. You'd be my assistant at the scene of the crime. "What do you think happened to this unlucky fella?" you would ask.

I'd play the pathologist and began performing the autopsy with a nearby stick of my choosing. Pointing to the area that seemed the most grueling, I'd diagnose their cause of death. "Well, you see, Dr. Gillis, as of now I'm quite unsure, but my prediction is that Sally the Sea Lion must've run into a hungry Great White... Or perhaps she got so seasick she passed away and became a starving seagull's dinner."

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I'm sure the pathologist performing your autopsy had an easy time diagnosing you. She would jot down "a drunk" on her sheet of observations. I don't blame her. That's all I could see in you for a while after your death.

However, I hope somewhere within the fifteen minutes she observed you she took the time to acknowledge the crows' feet in the corners of your eyes and the deep creases that connected your mouth to your nose. Although you were an alcoholic, you sure knew how to laugh. You sure knew how to make *me* laugh.

---

Grandma insisted we spread your ashes at our spot.

It took me about two and a half years of punishing you by letting you sit in that small silver urn on top of Grandma's fireplace mantle before I found the courage to let you go.

November 20, 2015. I walked down with you one last time to our beach.

The air was oddly still that day as I began my journey. Every so often, there was a gust of wind that crashed onto my face and tugged my hair in every direction. Its strength made me hug the cold, smooth surface of the place you've called home for quite some time now. Occasionally, the lid to your urn rocked back and forth, warning me to hold you upright and to slow down a little more.

I walked deliberately and soaked in every detail, like I wish I had the last time I saw you.

The chirps of sparrows rippled through the pine trees. They sang a lovely melody for us until the music of the ocean gradually tuned them out. The sound of waves crashing and seagulls crying consumed my ears. My footsteps muddled as I made my way into the welcoming sand. I sat on the wooden bench made out of a piece of driftwood and gently put you down beside me.

I began to untie my beat-up Converse, sliding my feet out of them with ease. I tugged off my thin grey socks. The sand was plush and mimicked the warmth my socks brought me. Comforting. I picked up your now warm urn and headed off parallel to the horizon.

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Behind me, the cliff rises higher than ever before. Its wet edges send beams so bright that the bare eye can do nothing but look away from its dazzling beauty. Where land and water meet, I begin my walk home empty-handed, accepting life's ocean full of juxtapositions, both rhythmic waves and sneaker waves, joys and sorrows, life and death.

It brings both low and high tides of you.

*The moon's gravitational pull is strong.*