

Rescue in a Bottle

By Christina Koufomanolis

The generous sun shone its last evening rays upon the isolated beach. A dilapidated, dingy hut stood between two wind-swept sand dunes. Gritty, coarse sand absorbed the ocean. Waves rolled over the horizon, and the musty odour of rotting timber mingled with the salty smell of the sea. The distant collision of waves against the pier was muffled by the ocean pounding on the shore.

A girl balanced on the serrated rocks, watching the ocean, beholding the power of the sea.

To her right, a ramshackle wooden pier clung to its rusted, worn foundations. It was in a state of utter disrepair. The girl dexterously scaled the collapsing construction. She stood high above her seaside dwelling like the captain of a ship. The corroded metal which encased the pier had no effect on her parched feet, which were as rough and worn as sandpaper. She looked across the endless sea, watching the shades of the late sunset bring life to the sky.

Doubtful thoughts crossed her mind as she stared at the vast ocean. Would she ever escape the remote life that she had always known and find happiness?

The girl could now feel the refreshing trickle of raindrops falling from the infinite sky. As the rain poured down, the ocean waves surged and swelled; alive while they moved and dying once they crashed against the pier.

She began to remember.

She remembered how, all those years ago, she and her family had boarded the *HMS Hope*, a colossal and hostile monster of a ship that resembled anything but its name. She remembered that horrible night, when the vessel crashed headlong into the jagged ice of the frozen Arctic Sea. She remembered how there weren't enough lifeboats to accommodate even half the passengers. She remembered jumping into the icy ocean, almost drowning but somehow washing up on an abandoned island.

Last of all, she remembered how she had been waiting for rescue ever since.

The girl stood her ground, unaffected by her memories and the stormy scene unfolding around her, watching the ocean like a hawk watching its prey. Responding to her gaze, the sea's enormous waves crashed brilliantly with the water beneath them, bringing foam and brine to the shore. Rain bucketed down now, drenching and soaking the world below. The girl observed the fierce ocean, longing for salvation in the form of a ship in the distance.

'Creeeeeeeak...', the pier swayed and rocked with the growing force of the ocean, and it was now that the girl realised it was time to run, to seek refuge in the safety of her hut. Before the ocean devoured both the pier and her in one colossal gulp.

At this moment she glimpsed a small narrow bottle rolling across the waves. Sailing on the ocean like a ship on the sea, the bottle surfaced only to be swallowed once more. It was made from the sand of another shore, seemed to have inherited the salty smell of the sea. This message in a bottle wasn't a feather in a hurricane; it was a chance to break the monotony of her existence.

Looking down at the churning sea below, the girl knew this was her very last chance to climb off the pier, or else be swept away along with it.

The only way to retrieve the bottle now was to entrust herself to the ocean and dive into its boundless waters. Glancing back at her sorry-looking hut and chuckling at her friends the seagulls, the girl took one more look at the beach she had known so well.

Then she dived.

Gasping for breath in the stone-cold ocean, the girl grasped the bottle like her life depended on it. The sea tossed her, and she fought back, each time struggling against the forceful current.

It was a dangerous game between the girl and the ocean, and the ocean was winning!

Clambering onto the pier's derelict platform, the girl held up the bottle in triumph. She had beat the sea at its own game. Draining the icy water from her hair, she freed the bottle from its cork. To her relief, the cryptic message inside was unharmed. It was a telegram, flapping in the wind. Reading with anticipation, the girl laughed. This was what she had been waiting for. Rescue.

'Map coordinates 1200'N, 12200'E. Girl on isolated beach... in need of immediate rescue... help coming... do not fear.

Over and out.'