

## To Hear the Ocean

That night, only the servant girl heard the waves pounding against the rock; slapping towards the shore. But so it had been for many years- as long as she had been there and more. Many more judging from the age of her charge. Though the maid was still quite young- in her early thirties, as it would appear to most observers- her charge, sitting upstairs now in the ancient rocking chair was, most likely, almost three times that. And yet her lack of hearing was not due to old age, but had been present since she was much younger, in the early '30s.

The now-old woman had first come here when she was three years old. She did not remember that trip, but knew she must have when she was younger, for as soon as she was old enough and could afford the trip to this Carolinian cove she had arrived every summer to spend a week or- a month, on the shore. It had been here that she had first really seen the stars, first really heard the waves; smelled the salty air. There was a certain magic to the place, for along with those things, it had also been the place where she had learned how to wish upon those bright, sparkling jewels that littered the heavens; the only rhyme she could still could still speak.

'Starlight, starbright,'

All of those first impressions of the place had remained true to this day- all, except one. When she was eight she had come down with a terrible fever. Her parents did everything they could to help, but the sickness grew steadily worse. As it was, the depression was in full swing, and there really *wasn't* any money for the doctor, but finally one was called. After prescribing medicine to her already broke parents he left, although he took mercy on them and told them to use what they would have paid him with to cure the girl. Within two days the fever was gone but it took with it her hearing.

'First star I see tonight,'

Memories of a distant childhood can fade to the point where they hang in the balance between real and dreamlike. Perhaps what drew the old woman to this place was simply to prove that it was real. Or perhaps a missing element had called her back year after year. Although she had learned to sign, there was one thing that she had never learned to communicate through the intricate movements of her hands. This, she assumed, was because it was a sound. A constant 'shoosh' and 'hush', like the ebb and flow of breath had become harder to replicate in her mind over the years- she did not remember it clearly anymore, nor it's origin - but she always somehow linked it with this beautiful, solitary cove in the Carolinas.

'Wish I may,'

Now she was rich enough from her creative endeavors to help those like her who couldn't hear. She had a young maid and companion who had been with her for nearly nine years. Yet here she was, her gnarled hands clutching the armrests of her rocking chair as her lips formed the words for the little 'wishing star' song. Every night she was here she could gaze at the stars and wish she could find what she was looking for when she came here.

'Wish I might,'

The young maid walked up the groaning stairs to the airy bedroom at the end of the hall where an elderly woman's eyes were suspended on a star. Every night when the girl told her mistress to go to sleep, the lady would ask what the noise she remembered was before tearing her gaze from the sky to see the signed answer. The younger woman always thought she was asking what the stars sounded like, and each night she tried to explain that no one could really hear the stars. But this night the old woman glanced toward the water as she asked her question.

And her companion finally understood.

'Have this wish I wish tonight.'

After all these years the elderly lady would finally have her answer when the younger one finally breathed the answer as she signed,

"Oh; but you have heard the ocean!"