**Ocean Blue**

“Sometimes I think I’m too kind-hearted for this course,” I mutter with a wince as I poke another pin through the specimen of the poor little moth. Other members of the class turn to look at me, the estranged girl who’s talking to herself.

“Rachel, why are you taking so long?” Professor Skane speculates in a tone powerful enough to silence the room’s whispers.

“I-I’m sorry. I’ll get it done, Skane,” I say without revealing that I’m actually just feeling sorry for the meagre moth.

“It’s *Professor* Skane,” he snaps at me.

They say that university is meant to transform you, but I still feel like a tiny caterpillar.

*Professor* Skane has instructed us to capture our own winged insect, identify it, and keep it alive until the next lecture. Most people are somewhat excited. I’m extremely unenthused.

The eyes of other students track me as I make my way through the university campus, armed with a big, dorky insect net. It's been almost an hour. A whole bug-less hour. Not a beetle, not a dragonfly, not even a moth. What did I ever see in this course? This is pointless.

A soft breeze blows carrying the smell of the ocean. Then I see it, a butterfly floating above the crisp green grass of the campus oval, seemingly glowing against the darkening sky.

I run, knowing this is my only chance. My strappy sandals slip off my feet and my floral dress is flying around like loose flowers on the wind. The grass is damp and prickly under my feet and my sun-kissed hair comes loose from its messy bun. With a leap and a swish of my net, I’m standing on the grass of the oval looking at the impaired, iridescent insect in my net. My cheeks flame with embarrassment as I notice even more eyes land on me, yet I can’t help but marvel at the butterfly. It’s no bigger than the palm of my hand and its powdery wings are ocean blue scattered with sandy yellow. ‘Airlie,’ I think, already falling in love with the butterfly, ‘like the beach, that’s your name.’

BEEP, BEEP, BEE- I smash my hand onto the snooze button. I look at my irritating alarm clock displaying the time 7:00 am and groan. I basically just fell asleep. Almost all night I worked on identifying Airlie, but with no luck. This biology course makes me feel like the little butterfly, trapped and unable to find a way into the world, allowed only to observe through a small window. I hate doing this to Airlie.

With my butterfly in its insect box, I’m the last to walk into the classroom. I shut the door, trapping myself in this course for yet another day and turn to face Skane’s glare.

“So what’s the identification of your insect?”

“I don’t know,” I tell Skane softly, looking at the floor.

“Take a seat, Rachel,” he mutters, narrowing his eyes. “And see me after class.”

The lesson whirls by without me, I’m too drained to pay attention. Once the room - and Skane’s influence - has freed the other students, his attention turns to me, as intense as a sniper focusing on its target.

“Why didn’t you identify your insect?”

“I couldn’t identify it,” my voice quivers.

Skane huffs and rolls his eyes. “Show me. I bet I can identify it in 3 seconds.”

“Okay…” I murmur sliding the box to him. I’m starting to get over his pettiness.

Skane’s eyes flash with confusion as soon as he sees Airlie. He storms over to his desk and vigorously dials a number into the phone.

“Hello, this is Professor Brian Skane… new species… yes, I’m sure…” He quietly mumbles with urgency into the phone.

New species?! My mouth goes dry.

Skane hangs up abruptly.

“Rachel, this butterfly is important for my reputation and I request you hand it over at once.”

I look at him with dread, he’s going to kill the little butterfly.

“No, you can’t kill Airlie,” I murmur with disbelief.

I notice an open window only a few steps behind me. Should I free the innocent butterfly? Yes, it doesn’t deserve to die. No, it’s a significant scientific discovery. I take a hesitant step back. Is this the right thing to do? I look down at little Airlie cowering into a corner of the dim, wooden box. *Yes*.

Another step. I look directly up at Skane without hesitation. Without shyness, without fear. Skane’s eyes widen as he realises what I’m about to do and all my fear transfers to him. He steps forward, arms shooting towards the box.

I quickly step and swivel around to the window. My hands find the latch and open the door trapping my butterfly inside. Airlie instantly flutters out into the coastal air, his ocean blue wings waving at me and sprinkles of sandy yellow glinting in the summer sun.

Airlie is free.

I walk towards the door, with newly discovered confidence. I’ve been stuck in this course, and under Skane’s rule, for too long. I open the door.

“Thank you for your time, Skane, but I will not be continuing this course.”

I waltz out the door and swing it shut behind me.

I’m free.

Sara Vella