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LAST RESORT

Danielle Castelli

Squatting on the edge of the deck, a woman ran her fingertips over the surface of the lake water. A pudgy brown-haired boy, approximately six years old, meticulously dripped water from his cupped hand onto a growing sand mound on the beach below her. She looked down at him, and after a few seconds, he felt her stare, turned, and looked up.

"It's a laligator."

"It looks more like a peacock," the woman said, gesturing toward the lumpy pile of sand, which the boy had been crafting for twenty minutes. "Don't you see the feathers? And there's his eye, and his two feet," she continued, pointing out imaginary places on the lump to him. She knew this boy. His name was Alex, and his family had come to her resort every August for the past four years. She remembered that he had fallen last summer while running down the hill from his family's cabin toward the water, scraping his knee and fracturing his wrist.

"Yeah—yeah it is a peacock," Alex said. "'is name is Laligator."

"Of course. Would you and Laligator like to join me for a swim?"

The boy rolled his eyes and sighed exasperatingly. "Peacocks don't swim. And besides, I can't just leave 'im here, along." As if to emphasize his point, the boy stood, picked up a yellow plastic shovel which he had been sitting on, and thrust it into the sand pile, leaving it sticking up out of what could be determined as the peacock's back.

"Okay, your choice." The woman turned and lowered herself gingerly into the lake. As she raised her eyes, a splash of sunlight landed directly in them, and they began to water. She turned away from the sun, again facing the boy,

who was now twisting the shovel deeper into the peacock's "back," mouth convoluted into a pout, eyes squinting in concentration, legs and arms bent, every muscle at work. The setting sun's rays left just enough light to dot the sand with white, dancing spots. One spot danced across Alex's tan back as he twisted his shovel deeper. The pile of sand began to break a part from the force of the shovel, and, at this point, the boy looked up at the woman.

"Geez, don't cry, lady," he said, his arms now crossed across his chest. His voice was not filled with concern, but annoyance. He waved his hand in the direction of the crumbling sand pile. "The peacock likes it. I'm brushing 'im. This is how you brush peacocks." He then continued assaulting his creation.

The woman laughed without opening her mouth too widely and waded toward the boy in waist-deep water. About six feet from shore, she knelt down and began to blow bubbles on the surface of the water, her eyes still on the boy. He looked up at her, paused, and launched the plastic shovel with as much might as he could muster, calling attention to his throw with a loud, high pitched "HUAAAH!" The shovel landed about a foot to the right of the woman, the splash back hitting her shoulder and upper arm. She smiled. "Coming in?" she asked, holding her arms out to the boy.

The boy looked at her, searching. He took a few cautious steps toward the shore, paused, and then began to back up, toward the now completely mutilated Laligator. His heel caught in the sand, and he plopped down on top of the pile—still staring, but now, with contempt. A particularly large white circle of sunlight danced across the top of his body, and, for a moment, the woman could not make out the boy's face whatsoever. He was simply a sitting set of legs with a hazy yellow blob the place of a head and torso. She grimaced as the white light shimmered, too bright for her eyes to take in. The woman covered her face with their hands, and, after a few seconds, spread her fingers slightly to see if the glare was still too bright. It seemed to be gone, and she uncovered her eyes to reveal the soft, orange light of the early evening. The boy was gone.

The woman was disappointed, but not surprised. She began to move her arms back and forth, propelling herself slowly out, away from the shore. The cool water lapped over her stomach, then her breasts, then her neck as she got further and further out. She closed her eyes and leaned her head back, enjoying the cool water as it ran through her hair. No one would worry about her being gone so long. All of the other families on the resort would be gathering around the campfire on the beach tonight, the last night before they headed home tomorrow and a new bunch would come to stay in her cabins, swim in her lake, enjoy her beach. These people didn't actually need her to be there, she simply wanted them to. The same families came and left every summer. After all of these years, they could take care of themselves. The water lapped over her face and seeped into her mouth and nostrils, sliding down her throat.