***The Jump***

*By Samantha Ramsay*

The world was silent. Far, far below, the waves of the ocean crashed and roared, but up above on the cliff top, there was only silence. The sun was setting in the distance, bathing the whole world in a beautiful wash of gold. The village could be glimpsed in the distance, and it looked supremely peaceful from so far above. Smoke wafted from the rooftops, and a few people could still be seen wandering peacefully through the town, preparing for nightfall. This was the kind of place people went to escape from it all. This was the kind of place people went to escape from themselves.

Eya came here often, and for that exact purpose. After a while, she found it extremely hard to deal with all the people who she was forced to encounter and deal with. As nice as she could be if she wanted to, she found trying to make herself understood extremely frustrating, and sometimes she just needed to get away from it all. She sat down on a rock, near the edge of the cliff, and dangled her feet over the edge.

 Somehow, she was never afraid of looking down at the water below, despite her issues here when she was younger. At the age of five or so, she had wandered up to the cliff’s edge, and fell. All she could remember of the incident was a sense of fear, and the feeling of air rushing by. The memory was frightening, but also strangely thrilling, and sometimes she wondered what would happen if she actually tried to dive off the edge. She didn’t want to die, of course, but she could remember seeing pictures somewhere of high divers – people who regularly dove from such heights and survived. Every time she actually came close to diving, however, something stopped her.

 It was such a beautiful evening, though, and she couldn’t help but daydream about the feeling of soaring out over the water, and smoothly sailing underneath before gliding back up to the surface. She took off her shoes and stood on the edge. The water below looked so calm, clear, and inviting. She took a deep breath, and prepared to dive...

 *Wind rushed by. The world flashed before her eyes in a terrifying blur, and all her five year old brain could think was: I’m going to* die*. She risked a glance down at the water below and squeezed her eyes shut just before she hit the water and the world went dark.*

 Eya sighed and shook her head. She couldn’t do it – the memories of her fall were still too strong. She stepped back and put her shoes on before heading back down into the village. On her way down, she encountered her younger sister, Mira.

 “Oh, hello Eya!” The six year old redhead smiled. “I was just looking for you! Mother sent me up to find you and tell you it’s time to come home and go to bed. I’ve had a wonderful evening. What about you?” Without giving Eya time to answer, she carried on, chattering about her evening. Eya found it ironic that the only person her selective mutism allowed her to talk in front of was the only person who never gave *anyone* time to talk. Eya didn’t mind though, and she actually quite enjoyed Mira’s contented babble.

 When they got to the village, Eya stopped outside the house and interrupted Mira’s explanation of her newest flower. “Mira, will you please tell Mom that I’m going to be home soon, but that I would like to go back up to the cliff for a moment first? I forgot my weaving kit”

 Mira nodded. She was used to sending messages to people from Eya, and rather enjoyed having someone who relied on her to send messages that everyone actually believed in. She insisted that she could talk to ghosts (Eya wasn’t sure exactly when they found an opportunity to speak) and often tried to send messages to people from them, but she wasn’t usually believed. “Of course I’ll tell her! Well, I guess I’d better be going now. Bye Eya! I’ll see you when you get back” Still chattering excitedly, she vanished into the house.

 When Eya reached the clifftop, she found it empty. She quietly sat on the grass, next to her weaving kit. Closing her eyes, she let her mind go still until she heard footsteps coming up from behind. Turning, she saw her two biggest enemies, a pair of girls named Shandin and Kyra.

 “Hello Eya. How are you doing this evening?” The two girls looked at her and smiled, but their happy grins were false.

Eya shook her head and mentally groaned. *Go away!* She wanted to say, but somehow the words wouldn’t come. *I know you just want to torment me.*

 “What, don’t you want to talk to me?” the oldest of the two girls, Shandin, asked.

 “Yeah, don’t you want to talk to us?” the younger one, a brunette, mimicked.

Eya shook her head. She couldn’t understand why people insisted on teasing her because of her selective mutism. The only person she could comfortably talk around was Mira. When she was around anyone else, especially strangers, or people with bad intentions, she couldn’t seem to say anything. She sighed, and glared at the two girls.

 “What?” Shandim mocked her. “Cat got your tongue?”

Eya turned away. *I don’t need to deal with you two*. Standing up, she grabbed her weaving kit. She tried to head to the path and go back down to the village, but she found her way blocked by Shandin and Kyra.

 ”Leaving without saying hello?” Kyra advanced towards her. “That’s not very polite.”

Eya took a step backwards, and scrambled to find a way around the girls.

 This time it was Shandin’s turn to insult her. “Why don’t you say anything, freak? Are you to awestruck by our beauty?” She batted her eyes, and took a step in Eya’s direction.

 Eya stepped back in response of the advancing girls, and found her foot touch air. She had reached the cliff’s edge. Turning away from the girls, she looked over at the water. Did she have any other option? Behind her, Shandin and Kyra came a step closer, and she felt one of them give her a tap from behind.

 “If you want us to stop, just say the word, Eya” Shandin teased her. “we’ll go away if you ask” She giggled, and whispered something to Kyra.

Eya closed her eyes. This was it. She felt Kyra push her again, and, taking another step, she dove off the edge.

 The world spun by her, and she felt the air rush by. Panic surged in her chest, and she instinctively squeezed her eyes shut. After a few moments, she worked up the courage to open them. She twisted into a proper diving position, and saw the water shining below her for about three seconds before she hit the waves and went under. The water was cold and clear, and Eya kicked a couple of times before pushing herself up to the surface. Treading water, she glanced up at the cliff just in time to see Shandin and Kyra turn away and head back down the path. At the moment, though, Eya didn’t care. She had done it! She’d finally broken her fear and done a high dive off the cliff!

 She swam back to the shore and sat there for a moment, reliving the experience. After all those years of fear, of holding back at the edge of the cliff, she had finally done it.
She was free.