

Best Friends  
By  
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Noah and Lily had been close friends ever since first grade. They met at school and abruptly realized they lived on the same street. A country road that bordered a nice semi-deserted expanse of Atlantic beach. Afterword they became constant playmates.

Noah lived in a rather regular seaside two story home that had access to the beach behind it. It sat among a small grouping of mostly vacation houses. While Lily's residence was a short distance away and a bit more isolated. Not that it was much of a walk between the two homes for the kids. Just that her place was a bit more aloof from the others.

While the public beach behind their homes did see vacationing people hanging out on it, especially during the summer, it was not a truly popular beach. Thus there were many times when the kids had it essentially to themselves. Plus being the few children living there full time, the two became almost like siblings.

He was a very welcoming boy and enjoyed Lily's company. Noah treated her just like any other kid. He found he could play all sorts of games, from baseball to touch football, with her. Yet their favorite two outdoor pastimes were volleyball and swimming. Plus both enjoyed console games, especially during the stormy winter months.

He also learned that Lily's family was a bit strange. While she enjoyed hanging out with Noah and his family, he had never seen hers. Though she did on a few occasions gossip about the antics of her older cousins. Along with that, Lily enjoyed spending a lot of time at his home. It had gotten to the point that she was basically a family member. His parent's were continually inviting her over for dinner and family get-togethers.

The few times that Noah had went to Lily's house, he found it devoid of people. Sure the place had lots of furniture and pictures of her family. However he never once met another person there. Plus it seemed as if some of the beds had never been slept in. When asked, Lily mentioned her parents were

underwater archeologists and were always scuba diving ancient sites.

For the first couple years of their friendship Noah wondered about Lily's strange family. However as time passed he grew used to her seemingly lack of family. Noah's parents were happy enough to include her and she gratefully accepted.

On one sunny May weekend day, like many times before, Noah and Lily were on the beach. Both were in their bathing suits playing volleyball. Noah, at age sixteen, was still a bit of a scrawny boy. While he was growing taller, almost a inch a year, he still had a boyish look to him. His light brown hair was just long enough to be blown about by the wind. His bare chest showed he was beginning to show some muscle definition. Plus he wore a simple pair of dark blue trunks and not much else.

Lily, also sixteen, seemed a little bit further along in her development then Noah. She had on her favorite one piece blue and black swim suit. It showed her nice legs, hips, and chest. Her graceful freckled smiling face was framed by her pulled back copper hair.

"Are you ready for this," Lily playfully challenged Noah. She held a volleyball and was ready to serve it to him.

"Go for it!"

"Are you sure, my fireball serve has been clocked at over a hundred miles per hour!"

That caused Noah to break out laughing. "A hundred? I don't think so!"

"Oh, you doubt the goddess of the ball?"

"Bring it lady!"

"Alright!"

Lily took a step back, assumed her stance, threw the white ball up into the air, and then slapped it hard. Her hit was more than enough to cause the ball to swiftly sail towards Noah's side.

Noah adroitly darted back to intercept the ball. Then he underhandedly hit the ball back over the net towards Lily. She rushed in and returned it back to Noah. Her serve was soft enough to lightly flip the ball over the net forcing Noah to dive low. Yet in the end he just missed the thing as it landed on his side scoring a point for Lily.

Seeing the ball hit the ground caused Lily to leap up in the air cheering. "Hell ya, I'm still the queen of the court!"

Noah got up and dusted himself off. "Best two out of three?"

"What you want me to beat you again?"

"Beat me?"

"Yea I'm on a winning streak!"

"That streak will end sooner or later," Noah retorted.

"True," Lily spoke while absentmindedly eyeing the ocean.

"But let's go swimming."

Noah shrugged and threw the ball under his home's deck. After that the pair rushed over and dove into the water. While Noah was a fair swimmer, the water was almost like a second home to Lily. She was so strong a swimmer that it came effortlessly to her. Though she did not forget to occasionally make fun of his weaker skills.

Just off the shore the two played in the water. First they dove under to search for things. Then while Noah floated on his back, Lily swam laps around him. It was only when he began to get tired that they went back to the shore. Each headed to their respective homes to change. Then, like usual, Lily came back for dinner.

During the meal, Lily excused herself and headed up to the bathroom. When she came back, Noah noticed how her arms and legs seemed a bit damp. A short time later he saw through the open bathroom door how she was running water over her arms.

"Are you alright?"

"What do you mean," Lily responded while she washed her arms.

"Well I've noticed how you seemed to keep on wetting your arms?"

"Oh that, well, for some reason I've got some dry skin. Water seems to help a bit." Lily finished, turned off the faucet, and lightly dried her arms.

"Ah ok?" Though Noah seemed to doubt her explanation just a bit. For a short bit longer they played a console game up in his room. After that they broke up for the night and she headed home.

The next morning found Noah awake early to mow the lawn and take out the trash. Pushing himself out of bed, he casually trudged to his window that overlooked the beach. Rubbing his sleepy eyes, the teenager pondered the semi empty beach under the bright morning sun. There were only a few beach goers

walking past for exercise. Then he noticed someone was out in the ocean swimming alone.

Casually intrigued, Noah went over to his desk and grabbed his binoculars. He used them to peer closer at the person. He grasped that the swimmer was Lily! She had been swimming laps back and forth in the water. Her strokes looked almost effortless to Noah. Plus at each turn, she dove deep into the water, stayed down for a long time, then surface only to keep on swimming.

Yet what struck Noah was that he had never seen her swim alone. Like most people, she preferred to swim with someone nearby for safety. However there she was alone. On top of that she seemed a far stronger swimmer than he had ever seen before.

Later on that day the two were hanging out on his deck after another good game of volleyball. Eyeing the surf reminded Noah of what he saw that morning. When he brought it up, Lily didn't respond right away. She simply stated she was just getting some exercise.

Noah suggested they go out and have some fun in the water. In the past all he had to do was mention it and she would easily agree. Yet despite him getting up, Lily seemed reluctant.

"What's wrong? Don't you want to go in the water?"

"No, not really," Lily simply stated. Her eyes suggested she was holding herself back. Like she wanted to swim but couldn't for some reason.

"What you don't want to show me up like you always do?"

"No thank you."

Noah climbed back on the deck and crossed over to where she sat on a deck chair. "Is there something wrong? Did I say or do something bad?"

"No, no you didn't. It's just, well, um, I'm just not in the mood."

"Are you alright? I ask because you've always loved to swim."

"I know alright! I just don't want too!" Abruptly Lily started up nearly knocking over her chair.

"I'm sorry alright. I was just concerned about you."

"Don't be, I, uh, just got to go. We'll hang out later," Lily quickly replied before darting off the deck. He watched as she crossed along the beach back towards her home. The way she walked suggested she was clearly agitated.

Lily never came back that night. Noah tried contacting her through the computer yet she never came online. Then he pondered the darkening dusky skies. As he watched the ocean, he thought he saw someone swimming near Lily's home. Grabbing his binoculars, he saw it was Lily again swimming alone. Though this time she was simply floating on her back in the ocean. Briefly he was afraid she was going to get picked up by the rip tide, yet she occasionally swept her arms to keep herself near the shore.

Throughout the week, as summer descended upon the small neighborhood, things began to change between Lily and Noah. Whereas before they always met each other every day. Yet now he barely saw her. On top of that, when they did meet she never wanted to play or swim together. That was despite the numerous times he had seen her swimming alone in the ocean.

On top of that, while he spent a lot of time in his swim trunks while on the beach, she stopped wearing her swimsuit. The few times they did hang out, she wore shorts and shirt. During those moments they simply sat on his deck. Their conversations centered around the good times they had, the strange things they had seen, and the pranks they pulled.

Beyond her different attire, she also seemed to need to use a wet cloth to wipe her skin. When asked, she again mentioned she had a dry skin condition. Noah offered some medicated skin cream but she declined saying that the cloth seemed to work.

On top of that he noticed Lily seemed to be rubbing the sides of her rib cage. Noah caught her doing that more than once. When he asked, she simply mentioned she had pulled some muscles. Though he had never heard of someone pulling the same muscles on both sides before?

But in the end Noah just shrugged it all off. His mother mentioned that she was a girl and that females her age always went through strange periods. Plus Noah was just glad for those few moments he got to hang out with his best friend.

Then Lily's visits stopped altogether and he never saw her swimming alone anymore. Though he thought he saw her once or twice in her home by the lights in her house's windows. Yet Noah respected her privacy and figured she would contact him when she was ready.

Then in the middle of the following week Noah got a strange phone call from her.

"Hey Lily, long time no speak!"

"I know."

"What's going on. What'cha been busy with?"

"I, uh, just wanted to say I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what?" As Noah spoke on the phone, he thought he heard the ocean close by in the background that sounded like she was on the beach.

"That I've been so busy and that we couldn't hang out."

"Then why not come on over and we can hang out right now?" Noah went into his room and looked out his window. Yet if she was on the beach, Lily was not in view.

"I wish I could," she spoke regretfully.

"Why not?"

"It's just that I can't anymore."

"I don't know what you mean? What's stopping you from coming over?"

Lily didn't respond right away. It seemed as if she was pondering something. "Look Noah, I don't have a lot of time left. But I wanted to say, uh, I had so much fun being your friend." It sounded like she was choking back tears.

Noah was becoming a bit alarmed at her tone. "You sound like you're dying?"

"No, I'm not dying. It's just, just, that I can't see you anymore."

"Huh? Lily, you're not making any sense!"

"Goodbye Noah, You'll always be my closest friend!"

Lily hung up before he could say anything more. Noah hurriedly tried calling her back. However Lily had turned her phone off.

Noah paced around his room trying to figure out that strange call. It sounded like, for whatever reason, that Lily was being forced to leave. To do something she did not want to do.

The next morning, Noah hoped to catch her before she did whatever she had to do. With that in mind, he hurried along the road to her home. Yet it looked like no one was in the house. Checking a few windows confirmed it was quiet.

Noah went back a few days later only to find the house had been emptied of everything. Then within a week it went up for sale. Finally two months later it was sold to a family with a newborn.

Throughout the summer Noah neither saw or heard anything from Lily. Plus all of her online accounts had been deleted. About the only things that remained of her online was associated with his accounts.

Numerous nights he peered at the photos of them. When he played one of his computer games, he was reminded of her. Noah stared at her scores, especially the ones that were higher than his! Each reminded him how much she had been a part of his life. Along with that, in the back of his house was the volleyball net. It reminded him of her so much that he had to take it down.

Lily had been the closest thing Noah had to a sibling. He loved her humor and enjoyed her presence. Yet now with her gone, he felt empty and incomplete.

Months passed since Lily disappeared. Noah had started his senior year and was already planning on going to college. Despite him moving on, he still had an unhealed hole in his heart from Lily's disappearance.

As fall descended upon the area, the few tourists visiting the beach dried up for the season. The ocean was becoming more stormy and choppy while numerous days were grey and overcast. On one such weekend, the beach was empty except for a few intrepid beach walkers. Noah was going about taking care of some of the chores his father assigned him. This including adding a fresh coat of paint to the low wooden fence in the back of his home.

Pleased he had painted the fence to his father's satisfaction, Noah went up on the deck to grab a drink of water. While there, he leaned against the railing and stared out at the ocean. He was pondering a distant cargo ship slowly making its way across the horizon.

Casually Noah let his gaze wander. At first he was not looking at anything particular, just letting his mind roam a bit. Then something caught his eye.

Peering at the object, at first he thought it was just some ocean debris like a plastic jug. Yet Noah swore that it looked like a human head. However what struck him was that the water was cold enough to deter most swimmers.

Then when he pondered what he saw further, a wave rose ahead of the thing and whatever he saw disappeared. Noah asked

himself if that really could have been a person. If so, did their disappearance mean they were in trouble?

With that driving him on, Noah rushed into the house and up to his room. There he hurriedly searched for his binoculars. Finding them, the teenager then went back to the deck.

Using the magnifying glasses, Noah searched the area where he had last seen the head. Then during a lull in the waves, he spotted them. While it was too far for him to make out who it was, Noah could tell it was human.

Before his gaze, the person did something strange. They reached a hand out of the water and started waving. At first Noah wasn't sure what he was seeing until the person made an inviting gesture towards him.

Unsure what to do, Noah decided to go out and see what was up. Leaving the deck, he went and pulled out a small zodiac raft his father kept near the house. Briefly he checked that the craft's motor was gassed up. Then he dragged it to the water's edge.

Pushing off, Noah hopped in and pull started the motor. After a few hard yanks he got the single cylinder engine purring nicely. With a twist of the throttle, he angled the motor and steered out towards where he saw the person.

Soon he had gone far enough away from the shore that the waves lessened a bit. Yet he was still being jostled about by the undulating ocean. Carefully he began searching the surface for the person. He was mindful of his outboard motor so as not to hit them.

Noah then slowed the craft down to a crawl and idled the engine. While the craft moved with the waves, he scanned the water to see if the person might have been caught by the powerful rip tide. However it seemed as if they had disappeared.

"Hello Noah, long time no see," called out Lily's voice from beside his boat.

So startled by her greeting that Noah nearly fell out of the boat. "Lily! Oh my god you scared me!"

"Sorry about that. Though the startled look on your face was priceless!" To Noah, Lily sounded just like her old self. Not when she was becoming distant.

However when he peered at her head bobbing in the water, he quickly noticed she looked different. On the one hand, her face



was still just as graceful and freckled as before. Yet her skin tone had shifted from a nice golden tan to an ashen grey. Her once lustrous copper hair had become dark green. Lily's large blue eyes were now a bright green and even her small ears had grown longer and elfin like.

For a moment Noah was a bit speechless at suddenly meeting his best friend again out in the middle of the ocean.

"I wanted to come back and apologize a bit," Lily broke the silence.

"Um, you left so suddenly?"

"Yea sorry about that, but my change was coming and I couldn't stay any longer. Hold on." She appeared to be running out of breath and dove under the water. When she did that, Noah thought he saw grey shark like dorsal fin come out of the water. It's tip was a dark grey. Then after a moment Lily's head poked out of the water on the other side of his raft. "Sorry, I can't stay above the water that long before running out of breath."

"What's happened to you?"

"Well that's hard to explain. Um, well, how do I say this? I guess the best way to say it is that my people are not human."

"Um..."

"I know it's obvious now, but at the beginning it's not." Before she could continue she ran out of breath and had to dive under the water again. When she came back up she continued. "My people are born like every normal human. Then when we turn sixteen our change comes on."

Again another dive into the water for more breath. Bobbing her head above the surface she continued her story. "Once our change occurs, we cannot go back to the land anymore." When she said that, Lily reached her arms out of the water to hold onto Noah's raft. He got a good look at the alterations that occurred to her arms. Like her face, the skin on her limbs was grey with dark highlights along their backs. On top of that her fingers were now webbed and each finger ended in a long black claw. Plus he noticed small fins jutting out from her elbows.

"So, um, what you're a fish now," Noah dared to ask. He felt the playful repartee he had with her coming back.

That caused Lily to reach an arm into the water and splash him. "Hell no dufus! I'm still me, just now in a more streamlined form!" As Lily laughed, Noah could see that even

her teeth had changed. They looked like smaller versions of a shark's teeth.

Noah waited until she had surfaced again before quickly asking, "so why can't you come on land? I mean, I've still got to try and beat you in volleyball!"

That caused her to laugh and go down for more breath.

"I'll always be the queen of the volleyball court! But I guess the best way to answer your question is to show you," she spoke before diving under the water. Then when she came back she flipped upside down so that she was floating on her back.

Beyond what he saw with her head and arms, her body had gone through a radical transformation. On the one hand she still retained her nice supple breasts and toned stomach. However where her human abdomen should have been merged into what looked like the body of a shark. Where it's head would have been now merged into her human shaped torso. This lower half even included two large fins, smaller lower fins, and a large triangular tail. Lily had ducked her head under the water so she could breathe. When she did that, he saw that every breath of water she took into her mouth exited through long gill slits in the sides of her human chest. Briefly she flipped over to show her dark colored back. Noah could see how she had a small dorsal fin on her human back and a much larger one along her lower shark half.

Gracefully she dove deep into the water. What Noah could see through the dark ocean was that Lily looked perfectly at home under the surface. She swam effortlessly like a shark as she came back up. "I guess you can see now why I can't come ashore. I mean I can't even speak above the surface for more than a few minutes." She seemed regretful of that. "But I wanted to come back and explain. I felt so bad leaving you like I did."

"But..."

"I know you've got so many questions. But I've got to go now." She dove under the water and Noah was afraid she had left. Yet she was just getting another breath. "My family plans on heading south for the winter. But you've been and will always be my best friend."

"Lily, um, I'll miss you!"

"I know and so will I. Good bye," Lily spoke before diving into the water. A moment later she again poked her head out of

the water a few feet away from Noah's craft. "Oh and don't try to beat my score on Mario Cart. You know you can't," she playfully challenged him before diving under the surface.

Noah sat there in his boat stunned at what he had just learned. Lily was now some sort of mermaid like creature and that she could never come back to him. That she was now part of the sea!

Before he could contemplate how she had changed, Noah saw Lily suddenly leap out of the water in the distance only to gracefully dive back under. He thought he heard her giggling or cheering while she did it.

For a while Noah just sat there bobbing along in the middle of the ocean. He was still too stunned at what he had learned and lost. On the one hand he was glad Lily was happy. Yet he was going to miss her. Then he slowly grasped that he had to move on. To live his life and cherish what she had been to him with the knowledge she was happy wherever she was.

With that final realization, Noah restarted the motor which had gone silent during their conversation. He used it to head back ashore. There he pulled the craft close to his home and headed inside. Sitting in his room alone, Noah decided to keep the meeting a secret.

Yet he was contented to know she was out there living her life. He knew he would have to try and fill the hole she left in him. However while he lived his life, Noah always kept an eye on the ocean in hopes of catching a glimpse of his best friend.