**The Surf**

First comes the sand, smouldering and getting hotter under the sun. It looks soft and welcoming, until her bare feet leave the wooden walkway for its baking surface. Hopping from one foot to the other, seeking sanctuary in each patch of shade, she skips down to the shore, to bury her burning toes in the ice-blue waters. The first lap of the foam brings relief. The cold pierces her skin and numbs her feet. She shivers. She was desperate to leave the desert-like heat of the sand, but now she lingers at the edge, her toes creating eddies in the foam. The waves come and go, digging her feet deeper into the sand. She knows she has to make a decision.

The sun glints off a wave and she knows what she wants to do. On she plunges, each step surer than the last. She is no longer afraid of the cold, in fact she relishes the spray like shards of ice on her skin, the tug of the current on her legs, the cold creeping from her calves, to her knees, to her thighs. Perhaps she wavers for a moment as the water reaches her waist, but then she sees the wave. It is nearly upon her, rising, growing, raising itself above her head, about to break. “Never show the waves you’re frightened”, her father’s voice echoes in her head. She jumps into the blue wall and out the other side, her ears singing with the cold, a jubilant beat in her heart, water pouring from her hair and face. She is rewarded by the still and calm beyond the breakers, the ebb and flow of the waves as they lift and drop her high above the sunbathers on the beach and back again into the quiet valleys of the sea.

Now she waits. Perhaps time goes by, but it follows a different rhythm, the steady tick, tock of land replaced by the swish of the sea, the wind in her face and the burning sun on her back. Then she can feel it coming. Its pull beneath the surface tugs at her legs before she sees its crest high above the other waves. This is the one. Excitement rises in her throat, but she forces herself to be calm, to focus, to listen to its rhythm as it rushes towards her. “Keep still, wait for the right moment, let the wave take you, guide you…go go go!”

She gives a push and she is up! She is standing, soaring, gliding above the wave, a queen of the seas, her white servants pushing and rushing her down to the shore in a glorious gasp of spray and foam. She jumps off, triumphant, a girl with the power of the ocean in her grasp.

The next wave creeps up without a sound, rising high above her head, the foam jumping with glee at having caught her unawares, the current elatedly slamming her into the ground. Gone is the light. Her world has turned dark, black, the water, the sand, a roaring mess of wetness and force. Gasping for breath she rises, stumbles, winded. The sea retreats once more.

On the sand she sits to catch her breath, as the sun beats down and dries the rivulets of spray on her back. She breathes, she dries, her skin cracked from the salt and the sand. The waves continue to lap.

The sun beats down. The shade beckons. The ocean calls.

She picks up her board and strides into the wave.