The Aquarium

I wanted to own a jellyfish as a pet. Or maybe a shark. Or maybe a manta ray. Makuahine (Mama) and Makuakāne (Papa) say I can't have one because we don't have a place in our house to put a sea creature, but I think they might find those animals to be scary. They're not scary to me.

"Kaui! Come look at these fish! There's so many in here!", my mama shouted excitedly from the other room in the aquarium.

I was standing by the jellyfish tank and didn't want to see the fish. I looked over at my mama.

"No mama, I wanna look at the jellyfish some more," I frowned.

A tall lady walked up next to me. She smelled like flowers, the way grandma smelled when she visited us in Hawaii. She had a flashy badge on her chest that read: Jennifer.

"Hi there honey, admiring the jellyfish?", she said to me. Her voice was friendly. She had long brown hair and kind blue eyes.

My mama told me not to talk to strangers, but I think she worked at the aquarium, so I wasn't worried.

"Yes," I said to the jellyfish in the tank. "I want one as a pet, but my mama and papa won't let me. They say we don't have enough room for one in our house but I think they just find them scary. I think they're cute. And squishy. Maybe if I had one as a pet, I could hold it."

Jennifer laughed.

"It's probably best to admire them from afar. Your parents are right, they wouldn't be great pets, and it would be very hard to hold them," she said, all teeth.

My brows furrowed.
"But, Miss Jennifer, why can't I keep one? There are tons in the ocean, and I would be a great owner. I would feed it everyday and play with it and give it kisses."

"Jellyfish need to be in water constantly. Do you see those things hanging down from its belly?"

She pointed to the spaghetti-looking things hanging down from its colorful, squishy middle. I nodded quickly.

“Those are its tentacles. Each tentacle is covered with cells called cnidocytes. Those cells are venomous, meaning that they will sting you if you touch them, or other animals touch them. So it’s best to keep them far away from you. They’re okay to look at though! Aren’t their colors pretty?”

“Oh.”

I looked at the jellyfish and their tentacles. I didn’t want to be stung. But they were *so* pretty. They were the colors of snow cones I ate with papa and sunsets and the shells at the beach.

I felt a strong hand on my arm and my head snapped over to see who it was.

“Kaui, you need to come to us when we call you, we don’t want to lose you baby,” my mama said to me as she pulled me away from the jellyfish and towards the smaller fish.

I dragged my feet and watched my light up sneakers create a lightshow on the dark aquarium floor.

My mama stopped pulling on me and I looked up to see my papa staring down at me, his dark almond eyes and curly hair a reflection of my own.

“Kaui, I turned around and you were gone. What did we tell you about always holding our hand in crowded places?”

He ruffled my hair and I giggled.

“I’m sorry Makuakāne, I was looking at the jellyfish,” I said as I dug my toe into the ground. The sounds of the aquarium around me faded out, and only the voices of my mother and father played in my ears. I didn’t like it when they got upset at me.

“It’s okay baby, just don’t do it again, okay? We don’t want to lose you in here,” mama said as she grabbed my hand and interlaced her thin fingers with mine.

“Don’t want the octopuses to mistake you for their own and grab you!,” papa yelled as he tickled my belly.

“I’m not an octopus! I’m Kaui!” I said through stifled giggles. The noises of the aquarium flooded back to my ears. Everything was okay again.

I walked through the aquarium with my mama and papa, feeling like I was underwater with the fish. I wish I could breathe underwater, so then I could hangout with jellyfish, but I wouldn’t touch them because Miss Jennifer said they would sting me.

“Do you still want a jellyfish as a pet Kaui?” mama asked me as we stopped to get an ice cream. Vanilla bean, my favorite.

I shook my head. “The lady, Miss Jennifer, said that I can’t have a jellyfish because it might sting me.”

My parents looked at each other in relief.

“So can we get a shark instead?”