

THE MOONLIT PAGE

Not the Blue One



Clara had made twenty-four blue bowls that week. She had carried them to the drying shelves, lifted them into the kiln, lifted them out again and inspected every rim beneath the studio lamp.

On Sunday she went to the beach with an empty pocket.

“No blue,” she told her brother.

Ben looked down at his coat.

“I wasn't planning to give you this.”

The tide had left a narrow scatter of small stones and rounded glass above the wet sand. They walked beside it, slowly enough for Clara to notice shapes without bending for every one. The sky was covered in a low sheet of cloud. Beyond the shore, the water looked like an unfinished drawing.

Ben carried a canvas bag containing two apples and a notebook. Clara had asked him to bring the notebook in case she saw a shape she wanted to remember. He had added the apples because she had been known to forget that shapes were not lunch.

“There,” he said.

A small blue fragment lay beside a white pebble.

“Absolutely not.”

"A very good blue."

"That's how they get you."

They left it where it was.

A little farther on, Clara stopped beside a pale piece of glass no bigger than her thumbnail. Its edges were rounded, with a shallow dip along one side. She picked it up and turned it in her palm.

"Another bowl?" Ben asked.

"No. I'm off duty."

He crouched beside her and rested the bag against his knee. Clara put the glass on the notebook's plain back cover. There it looked almost colourless. She traced its outline in the air with one finger, then stopped herself.

"You can borrow the pencil," Ben said.

"I know."

She lifted the glass again. At that moment the cloud thinned. A bright strip travelled across the sand towards them, sharpening the shadows of the little stones.

Held up between her finger and thumb, the glass showed a faint green through its thinner edge. Clara lowered it, raised it again, then turned slightly so the light came through the little curved part.

“Oh, that's nice,” Ben said.

It was. Not a strong colour and not an even one. She moved her hand a little, and the green became easier to see.

Ben opened the bag for the pencil.

“An apple, please,” she said.

He handed her one.

Clara slipped the glass into her empty pocket. They sat on the dry sand for a while, facing the brightening water. The notebook stayed in the bag, and all the other little pieces stayed on the beach.

On the walk back, Ben paused beside the blue fragment.

“Still no?”

Clara took a last bite of her apple.

“Twenty-four is plenty.”

To remember

1. After making twenty-four blue bowls, ceramic artist Clara walks a sandy beach with her brother and refuses another blue reference object.
2. She selects one small rounded, nearly colourless-looking fragment and almost begins studying its outline on the back of her notebook.
3. Thinning cloud brings brighter light; held up and turned, its thin curved edge shows pale green.
4. She asks for an apple rather than the pencil, pockets only the small glass and leaves the notebook unused and other fragments on the beach.