

# Ocean

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BRRRIIINGG! The bell rang loudly.

Ray dashed as fast as she could towards the school exit. Her friend Quinn was right behind her.

Ray Blake was a 6th grader at Corsa Middle School. She had just started her first year. Quinn Ferguson was also a 6th grader at Corsa Middle. She was Ray's best friend.

As they ran through the halls, Ray and Quinn yelled their delight even as teachers frowned and scolded.

Today was Friday, after their first week of middle school.

All the screaming and yelling and running was expected to be part of Friday afternoon. It was just too hard to resist.

Ray and Quinn dashed out of school and hung out at the basketball court for a while, shooting hoops and dribbling basketballs.

When it started getting dark out, Ray and Quinn started walking to Ray's house. It was their daily routine.

Ray's house was near the beach, and people could often hear loud ocean waves crashing against the shore, or the cawing of seagulls overhead.

But today was different. The waves were calm, and the birds were quiet. Yes, something was definitely different.

Then it happened.

All of a sudden, what looked like squirming black lumps were exploding out from the sand, going everywhere in every direction.

It was a little hard to see, as night was falling fast, but Ray squinted and realized that they were baby turtles.

The hatchlings scrambled and tripped over each other as they raced each other towards the sea. They scampered as fast as they could.

Try as they might, they could not evade the dangers that awaited them on a moonlit beach.

Crabs lurked out of sight, preparing to ambush unsuspecting hatchlings that crossed where they lay. Seagulls started to dart back and forth picking off hatchlings one by one. It was like a moving buffet.

Quinn made to move towards the turtles, but Ray stopped her.

“It’s not good to try to stop them. You’ve got to let nature take its course. Anyways, you know that the seagulls and crabs have their own lives and families to take care of.”

Quinn hesitated, then nodded and stepped back. Ray was relieved to see her friend listen.

Ray had studied and read all about all kinds of marine life, and just as it so happened, her preference was sea turtles.

“We must let nature take its course.” she repeated firmly.

It was hard to watch the hatchlings being eaten up by predators, so Ray and Quinn went inside Ray’s house.

They were greeted by a tabby cat who purred and rubbed against Ray’s and Quinn’s legs. “Citrus!” Ray laughed.

A delicious aroma filled their nostrils. “Spaghetti!” Ray exclaimed. Quinn licked her lips.

Mrs. Blake came out of the kitchen, holding a steaming plate of spaghetti and meatballs. She set it on the table, and laid out forks and knives, and smiled at Ray and Quinn.

She nodded to the spaghetti. “Spaghetti’s on the table.”

Ray nodded and then turned to her spaghetti. Mrs. Blake went out of the kitchen.

Ray and Quinn ate their spaghetti in silence. Finally, when everyone was done, Quinn grabbed her bag.

“I’ve got to go now. My mom will be worried if I don’t show up soon. Bye!”

“Okay. See you on Monday!” Ray replied.

Quinn waved and disappeared through the front door.

Ray sighed, gathered the plates, and put them in the sink. Then she did her homework. Finally, she showered and brushed her teeth, then got into bed. She was fast asleep almost instantly.

A few seconds later, or so it seemed to Ray, she was woken up by her alarm clock, which was ringing loudly.

“Oh, be quiet.” Ray mumbled, shutting the alarm off.

She had forgotten that tomorrow would be Saturday, so she had set her alarm clock as usual so she would wake up early.

Ray was not an early bird.

She yawned and stretched, then changed into her clothes.

She decided to take a walk near the beach before she had breakfast. Because she wasn't hungry yet, she thought that walking could help bring her appetite up.

“MOM! I'm going out!” she yelled as she shut the front door behind her. “Bye, Citrus.” she added as the cat ambled down the stairs.

Ray walked down the steps and started heading across the road to the beach.

Something moving caught her eye.

A hatchling. It was wriggling weakly, trying to head across the road.

“No, no!” Ray scooped up the turtle.

She just narrowly avoided a car coming at full speed, whose driver honked angrily.

The baby turtle was still flailing, though its strength was fading. Ray knew she had to get it in some water.

She dashed back to her house, grabbed a large container, and ran towards the shoreline with the hatchling still in her hand. Scooping up some of the salt water in the container, Ray gently put the turtle inside. She was careful not to spill any of the water as she went back to the house.

Remembering what she had said about letting nature take its course, Ray felt guilty for interfering with the hatchling.

But then she firmly scolded herself. Nature was made up of natural things, not cars and roads. Seagulls and crabs helping themselves to turtles was part of nature, but man-made structures weren't. Ray tried to ease her conscience, trying to persuade herself that she was saving the hatchling from things that humans had made instead of nature.

Stepping inside the house, Ray hollered for her mother.

Soon, Mrs. Blake stepped down the stairs.

“Yes, Ray de-?” She froze as soon as she saw what was in Ray's hands.

“Mom, I found this hatchling on the road. It nearly got run over. We need to find a turtle expert immediately.” Ray said, ignoring her mother’s look of shock.

Eventually, Mrs. Blake recovered. “A-are you sure you made the right decision, taking this hatchling away?”

Ray let out an exasperated sigh.

“If I hadn’t *saved* it, it would be dead! Now we need to move before the hatchling dies! Salt water without anything else like food can only last it so long!”

Her mother still continued to question her. “But how come you couldn’t just put the hatchling in the ocean?”

Ray was using all her determination to stop herself from exploding. She took a deep breath. “If I put it in the ocean during the day, some creature would easily see it, and eat it!”

Mrs. Blake finally gave in. “All right, get in the car. Make sure that turtle doesn’t fall out.”

Ray smirked as her mom left towards the garage. As if she would let the turtle fall!

Anyways, Ray and her mother buckled themselves in the car. They drove to a marine rehabilitation center, only a few miles away from their home.

When they got inside, a blue room greeted them. Ray and her mother went up to the desk.

“How may I help you?” a staff member asked with a smile.

“Erm...” Ray held up the container holding the hatchling.

“May I see it?” the person asked. Ray held out the container.

The woman took it. “A hatchling. There’s always bound to be at least one straggler in every turtle hatching.”

“So you knew about the turtles hatching?” Ray asked.

“Yes,” the woman responded. “Our center keeps tabs on all turtle nests in the area. The turtle who laid the eggs was a leatherback sea turtle.”

Ray nodded. “And it wouldn’t be good to release it in bright daylight, right?” She was hoping the staff member would confirm her actions.

“Never.” the woman said gravely. “It wouldn’t be prudent to release a hatchling in bright sunlight. It increases the chance of the turtle being a meal for a predator. You were right to bring it here.”

Ray nodded again. “What do we do?” she asked.

“I will make sure that the hatchling is all right, and then we will release it at sunset. Shouldn’t take too long.” the woman responded.

“My name is Ashley.” she added.

“You can follow me.” Ashley motioned for Ray and Mrs. Blake to follow her.

Ashley scanned a badge on a sensor, and they followed her down a hallway and into another room.

The room was extremely white, had a medium-sized tank, and other essential equipment. The whiteness of the room was almost blinding, though. Come to think of it, it was irksome and annoying, Ray thought.

Ashley set down the hatchling and the container and took a coconut shell that was lying on the counter, and gently scooped up the hatchling with it.

Ray was curious. “Why do you use a coconut shell instead of your own hands?”

“If you scoop a baby turtle up in your bare hands, it may affect its imprinting process and damage its food sac. So we must use precautions when handling hatchlings.” Ashley replied, not unkindly.

“Now, you guys can go back and do your normal business. We’ll take care of the little one. Then you can come back at 7 o’clock to release the hatchling.”

Ray was worried. “What will you do? How do we know it’s truly okay?”

“Everything will be fine.” Ashley said firmly, yet gently. “If he is in serious trouble, I will alert you. May I have your phone number?” she said, turning to Mrs. Blake.

Ray’s mother jumped. “Oh! Oh, of course. Here.”

She held out her phone to Ashley, who copied the number on a piece of paper.

Ray looked back at the little hatchling. It was swimming around in the tank, checking out pieces of seaweed and little fake corals.

It was so helpless and naive, Ray thought. How could it possibly survive in the real ocean, where there were sharks and other predators?

Her concern must have shown on her face, because Ashley smiled. “Don’t worry. This turtle has much more strength than you think. If every turtle was once like this, how have they grown to become adults and have children of their own? By pure wit, instinct, and determination. This hatchling may one day have its own children.”

Ray nodded once more, unable to speak. Her voice seemed to have become stuck in her throat.

She didn’t know why she was so worried.

“It’s going to be fine. It’ll be fine.” she firmly repeated to herself, as if constantly repeating it would help ease her worries.

Ashley accompanied them to the waiting room and waved them out as they stepped outside.

Ray could not confide any of her worries to her mother. Her voice still remained extinguished; blocked. She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. Mrs. Blake noticed. She turned around when the stop light was red.

“Is everything all right, Ray?” she asked gently.

Ray nodded her head. “Yeah, everything’s fine.” she said tonelessly. She didn’t know why she wasn’t telling her worries to her mother.

“If you’re sure...” Mrs. Blake trailed off, then focused again on the road as the light turned green.

The rest of the car ride was silent. All Ray could think about was the turtle that was still in that annoyingly white room.

As soon as the car was in the garage, Ray jumped out and flung the door open, heading straight for her room. She flopped on the bed, and stared up at the ceiling.

She glanced at the clock. It seemed to be moving more slowly than ever; one second seemed to take one minute.

Ray groaned. If only she could have the turtle with her right now! The hours that passed felt like days. When Mrs. Blake called Ray for lunch, Ray didn’t have the energy to respond. Instead, she lay in her bed, worrying over the hatchling. Eventually, there was a knock on her door and Mrs. Blake came in.

“Ray, dear? Since you didn’t come for lunch, I made a sandwich for you, and a glass of orange juice. Come out of your room when you’re ready.” She set a cup of orange juice and a sandwich on Ray’s desk, then left.

Ray glanced at the small meal, then resumed her staring up at the ceiling. Although she was hungry, she felt like she didn’t have the energy to sit up and eat. She didn’t feel like she had the energy to do anything.

Eventually, her hunger got the better of her, and Ray reluctantly sat up and ate the sandwich and drank the orange juice.

Since she didn’t have anything better to do, she read a book, *Charlotte’s Web*. Then after a few chapters, she practiced violin. Mrs. Blake believed music was a very important part of life. Soon, Citrus came into Ray’s room. He purred and jumped into Ray’s lap.

Ray took out a toy for Citrus to play with, and the two had fun together for a while.

Finally, 7 o’clock came. Ray jumped up, with Citrus hissing as he jumped quickly from her lap.

“Sorry, Citrus.” Ray patted Citrus’ head before leaving with her mom.

Ray and her mom went back to marine center. Ashley was already in the waiting room.

“All ready?” Ashley smiled. Ray nodded.

Ashley held out the hatchling in a small cage so Ray and her mom could see. “Okay, so, it’s a girl. Her health’s good, and she’s ready to be released. We have also tagged her so we can see where she goes. We have one more thing, though.”

Ray started to panic. What was wrong with the hatchling?

“We need you to name her.” were Ashley’s next words.

Ray felt a stab of relief. Then she thought hard. What would be a perfect name for a sea turtle? Then she knew the perfect one. It would be-

“Ocean.” Ray replied to Ashley. “She comes from it, although she was born in sand. It is her natural place to be. The hatchling should be named Ocean.”

Mrs. Blake nodded approvingly, as did Ashley. “Excellent! Now let’s release Ocean.”

They walked onto the beach, close to the shoreline, with the hatchling still in the cage.

They finally stopped as the waves started to rise to high tide. “We will release Ocean now.” Ashley announced.

She lowered the cage onto the cool sand, and slowly opened it. The little turtle was reluctant at first. But then her head poked out, and then her front flippers, then her shell, and her back flippers. Soon she crawling as fast as she could toward the oncoming waves.

Ray, her mom, and Ashley cheered as the hatchling dashed across the beach and entered the water. Soon, all they could see was a little black dot bobbing on the waves, and then it was gone. “Good luck, little one.” Ray whispered.

Ray, although a little sad that the hatchling was now gone, felt a great sense of elation. The hatchling was free. Ocean was free.

## The End

Resources:

<https://www.travelingwellforless.com/releasing-sea-turtles-what-you-should-know/>