





THE

MARINO MISSION

One Girl. One Mission.
One Thousand Words.



1,000 need-to-know
NEW *SAT vocabulary words

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One Girl, One Mission,
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1,000 Need-to-Know
**SAT Vocabulary Words*



Karen B. Chapman

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About the Author

Karen B. Chapman, Ph.D., grew up in upstate New York and graduated from Cornell University with a B.S. in Biology. She received a Ph.D. in Molecular Biology and Genetics from John Hopkins University School of Medicine and went on to complete postdoctoral fellowships at both the Pasteur Institute in Paris and at Harvard Medical School. Currently, she resides in Northern California with her husband and four young children.

A Futile Request

Alexa waited at the school entryway, anxiously scanning the line of cars jostling for position at the curb. It was five after 3:00 on Friday and the school week was mercifully over. Today Alexa's father was scheduled to pick her up along with Doug and Caroline, the two other kids in her carpool. Alexa was fervently hoping that her dad wouldn't be late. It was so awkward to wait when Doug and Caroline were impatient to leave.

"Is your mom coming?" Doug asked pointedly.

Alexa shifted uncomfortably and adjusted the wayward straps of her backpack. Doug was the star of both the junior varsity soccer team and the lacrosse team. In the social hierarchy¹ of Ithaca High School, Doug reigned with a status and popularity unmatched by his classmates. Alexa was far too shy to pursue a friendship with a boy like Doug, but the proximity of their houses made it natural for them to carpool together. Caroline was the third member of their group, and her picture-perfect

¹ Hierarchy: the classification of a group of people according to ability or to economic, social, or professional standing; pecking order, chain of command

appearance and popularity made her a more natural counterpart for Doug. “My dad’s coming today,” Alexa answered, as she stood on her tiptoes to catch a glimpse of the end of the line. “There he is!” Alexa couldn’t hide the relief in her voice as she spotted her father’s red Chevy Suburban.

Alexa slid into the front seat next to her father while Doug and Caroline hopped into the back. They must have been sharing a private joke—Caroline was giggling incessantly.² Alexa silently speculated³ that the two would probably begin dating this summer and would end up being homecoming king and queen. The two of them just seemed to emulate⁴ the conventional⁵ image of popularity-contest winners, she thought with disdain.

Alexa greeted her father with a quick kiss on the cheek. She was genuinely happy to see him because she hadn’t seen him since last weekend. Her parents had separated recently, and the process of finalizing the divorce was currently underway. It was still a fresh and painful wound for Alexa, exacerbated⁶ by this shuttling back and forth from her childhood house to her father’s apartment.

After dropping off Doug, they continued on in silence to the exclusive⁷ cul-de-sac where Caroline lived in a large, pretentious⁸ Tudor-style mansion. Caroline left with a quick “thanks” and Alexa breathed a sigh of relief. Caroline’s haughty⁹ attitude and disdainful¹⁰ glances were tiring. It wasn’t that she felt jealous of Doug and Caroline, nor did she feel

² Incessantly: non-stop, never ending

³ Speculate: to review something idly or casually and often inconclusively

⁴ Emulate: try to be like, imitate

⁵ Conventional: according with, sanctioned by, or based on convention (a principle or procedure accepted as true or correct); ordinary, conformist, predictable

⁶ Exacerbate: to make more violent, bitter, or severe

⁷ Exclusive: restricted in distribution, use, or appeal because of expense

⁸ Pretentious: making usually unjustified or excessive claims (as of value or standing); showy, ostentatious

⁹ Haughty: blatantly and disdainfully proud; snooty, conceited

¹⁰ Disdainful: full of a feeling of contempt for what is beneath one; scornful

particularly miffed¹¹ that the two of them often didn't include her in their conversations. It just seemed that they perpetuated¹² an aura of superiority that Alexa didn't aspire to.

Alexa pulled the visor down and flipped open the mirror, studying her reflection. She pulled the rubber band out of her ponytail and her shiny, shoulder-length brown hair came tumbling down, covering her green eyes. Growing up, Alexa had always been a bit of a tomboy—she was not inclined¹³ to obsess about her looks the way so many of her contemporaries¹⁴ did. Her attitude had begun to change only recently, when she realized that it was not incongruous¹⁵ to be both athletic and concerned with your appearance. This past year, Alexa's first year of high school, was really the first time that she started feeling good about the way she looked. She had started running on the track team and it was as if she had undergone a transformation¹⁶ from an awkward, shy tomboy to an attractive and confident 16-year-old.

Alexa took her hairbrush out of her backpack and fixed her ponytail as they drove past Alexa's house high on the hill overlooking Cayuga Lake. "It looks like the lawn could use a little work," Alexa's father noted as he glanced at the house the three of them had shared up until two months ago, when he took a modest¹⁷ apartment in downtown Ithaca. Alexa maintained her silence as she wondered what her father was thinking. His demeanor¹⁸ didn't reveal anything, but Alexa wondered if he could really feel that detached¹⁹ from the house they had all shared for so many years.

¹¹ Miff: to put into ill humor; offend

¹² Perpetuate: to make perpetual or to cause to last indefinitely

¹³ Incline: to lean, tend, or become drawn toward an opinion or course of conduct

¹⁴ Contemporaries: one of the same age or nearly the same age as another

¹⁵ Incongruous: lacking congruity, not harmonious, incompatible

¹⁶ Transformation: the act, process, or instance of transforming (to change in composition or structure)

¹⁷ Modest: unassuming, unpretentious; limited in size, amount, or scope

¹⁸ Demeanor: behavior toward others, outward manner; conduct

¹⁹ Detached: exhibiting an aloof objectivity; disconnected, removed

Alexa's father, David McCurry, was a venerated²⁰ professor of molecular biology at Cornell University. He taught the rudiments²¹ of DNA technology to lecture halls filled with aspiring pre-med students. "The Inner Machinations²² of the Cell" was the title of his popular graduate-level seminar, attended by scores of serious-minded scientists in the making. He was highly regarded by his colleagues in the research community for being at the forefront of emergent²³ technologies in the rapidly evolving field of genetics.

Alexa was proud of her father and treasured the time they spent together during her childhood, as brief as these interludes²⁴ were. Alexa's father was also busy running a molecular biology laboratory, where he and his graduate students studied DNA in endless detail. He studied the DNA of a worm called a nematode, which was so tiny you needed a microscope to see it. Alexa would often go to the laboratory with her father on weekends, where he would inevitably become embroiled²⁵ in deep and lengthy discussions with the graduate students who, it seemed to her, appeared to live in the laboratory.

It was Alexa's mom, Helen, who was always there for her with abundant time and an unswerving²⁶ devotion to managing the details of her daughter's life. Helen was also a scientist, but as she liked to characterize it when the subject of vocation²⁷ came up, she was an "unemployed marine biologist, landlocked in the middle of upstate New York." Helen had forgone a scientific career, citing the fact that it was next to impossible to have a career in marine biology so far from the ocean.

²⁰ Venerate: to regard with reverential respect or with admiring deference

²¹ Rudiment: a basic principle, element, or fundamental skill

²² Machination: a scheming or crafty action or artful design intended to accomplish some usually evil end

²³ Emergent: newly formed or prominent

²⁴ Interlude: an intervening or interruptive period, space or event; interval

²⁵ Embroil: to involve in conflict or difficulties

²⁶ Unswerving: not swerving or turning aside; steady

²⁷ Vocation: the work in which a person is regularly employed; career, occupation, profession

Meanwhile, Alexa's father had a burgeoning²⁸ scientific career and he had successfully climbed the academic ladder. Alexa had begun to suspect that the chasm²⁹ between her parents had something to do with the conflicting requirements of their careers. Alexa's mother wanted to move to an academic setting near the ocean, while her father was reluctant to move away from the successful laboratory he had created at Cornell.

Alexa and her dad arrived at the small apartment that he now called home. She followed him inside and settled in at the desk in front of a giant-screen computer. Her father was clearly inept³⁰ at decorating, Alexa thought as she looked at the lurid³¹ green curtains that the previous occupants had left. Or maybe he was just indifferent³² to the aesthetics³³ of his surroundings. Alexa reconsidered and thought that was probably it. To Alexa, her father seemed adept³⁴ at everything he put his mind to. But he abhorred³⁵ spending time thinking about such mundane³⁶ things as decorating. Her father was an archetypal³⁷ professor—his mind was always on his studies.

“Do you want a soda?” her father asked.

“Sure,” Alexa replied, sensing her father was making an effort to make her happy in this awkward new routine.

“What do you say we go to Zeus' for pizza tonight?” her father asked as he set the can of soda down next to the mouse pad.

“OK, but I'm supposed to go to Laurie's tonight to watch a movie with my friends,” Alexa said as she typed in her e-mail password.

“No problem, I'll drop you off there after dinner.”

²⁸ **Burgeoning:** growing and expanding rapidly

²⁹ **Chasm:** a marked division, separation, or difference

³⁰ **Inept:** generally incompetent; bungling

³¹ **Lurid:** causing horror or revulsion; ghastly

³² **Indifferent:** apathetic, unconcerned

³³ **Aesthetics:** a pleasing appearance or effect; beauty

³⁴ **Adept:** thoroughly proficient; skillful

³⁵ **Abhor:** to regard with extreme repugnance; loathe

³⁶ **Mundane:** characterized by the practical, transitory, and ordinary; commonplace

³⁷ **Archetypal:** classic example, model example

“Can I stay there until 11:30?” Alexa asked in her sweetest tone, which she hoped wasn’t too cloying.³⁸ She had gotten her driver’s permit when she turned sixteen last month, but she was still unable to drive unaccompanied by an adult.

Her father made an exaggerated pained expression. He liked to be in bed by 11:00, but Alexa could plainly see by his smile that he would let her.

Alexa saw a message from Laurie in her inbox. This past year they had become best friends, and this had changed Alexa’s life immeasurably for the better. All throughout junior high, Alexa had felt like she didn’t have a close group of friends. It wasn’t like she was totally bereft³⁹ of friends, but she hadn’t formed any friendships that felt particularly meaningful and enduring.⁴⁰

This past year, everything had changed when Alexa entered Ithaca High School and met Laurie. Laurie was editor of the school newspaper. She was bright, funny, and gregarious.⁴¹ Alexa had joined the school newspaper this past year and her easy camaraderie⁴² with Laurie had grown into a deep friendship. It was so easy to talk to her—Alexa confided everything to Laurie. Laurie, in turn, was a solid friend. She always included Alexa in her close circle of friends, a group of girls Alexa really liked. It was as if Laurie’s endorsement⁴³ opened up a whole new existence for Alexa. It felt so good to finally find a group of friends she liked and trusted—friends she cherished⁴⁴ and wanted to keep forever.

Alexa opened the message from Laurie, which read:

³⁸ Cloying: excessively sweet or sentimental

³⁹ Bereft: deprived or robbed of possession of something

⁴⁰ Enduring: lasting

⁴¹ Gregarious: marked by or indicating a liking for companionship; sociable

⁴² Camaraderie: a spirit of friendly good fellowship

⁴³ Endorsement: backing, sanction, approval

⁴⁴ Cherished: to hold dear; feel or show affection for

“Hi Lexxie!

Are you home yet?? Call me ASAP! You’re not going to believe my unbelievable luck! I got an internship with CNN this summer! Can’t wait to tell you all about it. I’m going to be the assistant to the reporter who works right in downtown Ithaca. I’m soooo excited!! Are you coming over tonight? Call me! :-)

 Laurie

Alexa smiled at the thought of Laurie’s elation.⁴⁵ Laurie was such a go-getter. She had an easygoing demeanor, yet she approached challenges with enthusiasm and ardor.⁴⁶ Even when she faced imminent⁴⁷ failure, Laurie persevered⁴⁸ with her positive attitude. After receiving a stack of rejection letters, she had scored the internship of her dreams. Her persistence had paid off spectacularly.

While Alexa was happy for Laurie and her great summer job, she had been brooding⁴⁹ about her own uncertain plans for the summer. She desperately wanted to stay in Ithaca and spend her vacation with Laurie. However, Alexa was cognizant⁵⁰ of her mother’s plans to spend the summer in Nicaragua, and Alexa had the perception⁵¹ that she was expected to go with her. But since the final decision had not yet been made, Alexa hoped that she could cajole⁵² her father into letting her stay in Ithaca with him.

⁴⁵ Elation: marked by high spirits; exultant

⁴⁶ Ardor: extreme vigor or energy; intensity

⁴⁷ Imminent: ready to take place; looming, about to happen

⁴⁸ Persevere: to persist in a state, enterprise, or undertaking in spite of challenges

⁴⁹ Brooding: to dwell gloomily on a subject, worrying

⁵⁰ Cognizant: knowledgeable about something, especially through personal experience; mindful

⁵¹ Perception: the effect or product or perceiving (to come aware of through the senses)

⁵² Cajole: to persuade with flattery or gentle urging, especially in the face of reluctance



Zeus' pizza house was the best of several excellent pizza places in the college town of Ithaca. It was always busy, and this being Friday night, was even more chaotic than usual. The clientele⁵³ was largely made up of students, one of whom waved a greeting to Professor McCurry as he and Alexa entered the restaurant. Another group of students was eyeing the esteemed⁵⁴ professor with reverence.⁵⁵ He was a minor celebrity in town, and Alexa beamed with pride. Her father waited until the pizza arrived at the table, piping hot, thick, and cheesy, to bring up the topic she'd been dreading. Without preamble,⁵⁶ he delved into the dreaded subject.

"You know about the new job offer your mother got for this summer." Alexa took a bite of pizza as her father spoke gingerly.⁵⁷ Helen had been offered a consulting position at a marine biology facility called Puerto Marino, which was located on a Caribbean island off of the coast of Nicaragua in Central America. "This would be a really great opportunity for you," her father continued. "You could work on your Spanish, see a new place, get to..."

"I don't want to go to Nicaragua for the summer!" Alexa cut him off. "I want to stay here in Ithaca! Can't I stay here with you?" Alexa pleaded volubly.⁵⁸ "All my friends are here, we're going to go swimming in the gorge every day, and Laurie's brother has a boat on the lake, and I applied for a job at Hansen's Department Store!" The words were tumbling out of Alexa's mouth, but she could already sense it was a losing battle.

⁵³ Clientele: customers, patrons

⁵⁴ Esteem: to regard highly

⁵⁵ Reverence: honor or respect felt or shown; deference; especially profound or adoring awed respect

⁵⁶ Preamble: an introductory statement

⁵⁷ Gingerly: very cautiously or carefully

⁵⁸ Volubly: marked by a ready flow of speech

“A department store?” Alexa’s father repeated in a disparaging⁵⁹ tone of voice. “Why would you want to sell clothes all summer when you could work in a lab? They have a fully equipped molecular biology lab at Puerto Marino and your mother has already arranged for you to work there. It would be a great opportunity for you to have a project of your own, not to mention the fact that it may very well help you get into a good school. Colleges invariably⁶⁰ look for this type of thing—an interesting and educational summer experience.”

“I don’t think that spending a whole summer locked up in a laboratory sounds very interesting!” Alexa exclaimed. She was in no mood for her dad’s rhetoric⁶¹ about college admissions. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to go to college. It was that her parents unending discourse⁶² about “what you should be doing if you want to go to a good college” was truly tiring and left Alexa feeling ambivalent⁶³ about the whole subject.

Alexa’s father raised his eyebrows in a tacit⁶⁴ response. Her flippancy⁶⁵ had clearly struck a sour note with him. Alexa looked down at her pizza, seeing it was futile⁶⁶ to argue. Her father was resolute.⁶⁷ She was going to Nicaragua for the summer.

⁵⁹ Disparaging: to speak slightly about; decry

⁶⁰ Invariably: not changing or capable of change; constant

⁶¹ Rhetoric: a type or mode of language or speech; also insincere or lofty language

⁶² Discourse: talk, converse

⁶³ Ambivalent: simultaneous and contradictory feelings (as attraction and repulsion) toward an object, person, or action

⁶⁴ Tacit: expressed or carried on without words or speech

⁶⁵ Flippancy: unbecoming levity or pertness, especially in respect to grave or sacred matters

⁶⁶ Futile: serving no useful purpose; completely ineffective

⁶⁷ Resolute: marked by firm determination; resolved

2

Captivating Creatures

Alexa pressed her forehead to the glass window of the airplane to get a better view of the spectacular scenery below. The crystal clear blue water and sandy white beaches looked so inviting, especially after such a long and exhausting journey. The day had started painfully early for Alexa and her mom, with an hour-and-a-half drive to the Syracuse Airport to catch the first flight to New York City. In New York, they boarded a jet for Managua, the capital of Nicaragua. Then they boarded the twin-engine prop plane destined for an island off of the east coast of Nicaragua called the Isla del Maize Grande.

Alexa had barely conversed with her mother at all during the journey. At first, she felt in a bit of a daze from waking up so early. Later in the day, as the journey continued endlessly, she simply didn't feel like making the effort to be genial.¹ To be affable² now would imply that she

¹ Genial: marked by sympathy or friendliness; kindly

² Affable: being pleasant and at ease talking to others

was happy to go along with her parents' plans for her summer vacation. In reality, Alexa still harbored³ a lot of resentment because she didn't get to choose where she would be spending her summer and what she would be doing.

Now they were descending over this spectacular island in this small plane that afforded an amazing view, and despite her lingering resentment, Alexa's curiosity was piqued⁴ with the exotic beauty of her surroundings. Helen held out her hand for Alexa to hold as the plane initiated a steep descent, punctuated⁵ with bumps from air turbulence. Alexa felt too old to be holding her mother's hand like this, but this was an extenuating⁶ circumstance. When she turned to see her mother's face, she could see the nervousness etched into the lines around her eyes and mouth. Alexa squeezed her hand and smiled bravely.

Alexa had sensed that her mother's forsaken career had been an issue between her parents over the years. Although she was devastated by her parents' divorce, she was glad her mother was finally getting out of the house and exploring her options. However, Alexa had never seen her mother so nervous before. She knew it wasn't just the airplane's descent that was evoking⁷ her anxiety, but the new job ahead of her.

Helen was a marine biologist who specialized in mammals that live in the ocean, such as dolphins, whales, and sea lions. In the past, her research had focused on dolphins and their innate⁸ ability to use sonar for underwater navigation. Alexa loved listening to stories of her mother's work with dolphins in San Diego. They had traveled to San Diego several times when Alexa was growing up, and Alexa was always amazed

³ Harbor: to hold a thought or feeling of

⁴ Pique: to excite or arouse by a provocation, challenge, or rebuff

⁵ Punctuate: to break into or interrupt at intervals

⁶ Extenuating: to mitigate; to lessen or try to lessen the seriousness or extent of by making partial excuses

⁷ Evoke: to call forth or up; conjure

⁸ Innate: existing in, belonging to, or determined by factors present in an individual from birth

to see the special rapport⁹ her mother had with the dolphins that she studied.

As the airplane touched down on the tarmac, Helen breathed an audible sigh of relief. They disembarked from the small airplane right onto the landing strip. One of the two pilots assisted the eleven passengers down the stairs while the other pilot procured¹⁰ the luggage from the cargo hold. When Alexa approached the door of the airplane to disembark, the heat and humidity hit her face like a smothering warm blanket. The steamy jungle air was so different from the arid¹¹ heat that Alexa had experienced during a childhood trip to the desert in New Mexico.

“Wow, is it ever hot!” Alexa turned to inform her mother.

“Don’t worry, as soon as you change into your summer clothes you’re going to like it.” Alexa’s mother had a look of satisfaction on her face as she absorbed the warm gentle breeze and the view of the swaying palm trees in the distance. Helen hated the harsh winters of upstate New York, so for her the warm climate of Central America was a tropical utopia.¹²

“This is an impressive airport!” Alexa said sarcastically. “Look at that color!” The terminal consisted of a single shack-like building that was painted a garish¹³ shade of turquoise. A single bright red Coca-Cola machine stood under the sagging awning.

“Well, maybe the color is a little crass,¹⁴ but I think this little terminal is charmingly unpretentious!” Helen replied. The two of them headed to the small building, struggling with their voluminous¹⁵ belongings.

“Where are we going?” Alexa inquired as they entered the building. She realized that she hadn’t even asked her mother anything about her

⁹ Rapport: relation marked by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity

¹⁰ Procure: to get possession of; obtain by particular care and effort

¹¹ Arid: excessively dry

¹² Utopia: a place of ideal perfection

¹³ Garish: offensively or distressingly bright; glaring

¹⁴ Crass: having or indicating such grossness of mind as precludes delicacy and discrimination

¹⁵ Voluminous: having or marked by great volume or bulk

job here in Nicaragua. She'd been so preoccupied trying to think of a way to stay in Ithaca that she was oblivious¹⁶ to her mother's plans. Once her parents decided she was going to Nicaragua, Alexa didn't even ask her mother for any details. She was so embittered¹⁷ at having the decision made for her that for the last two weeks she had stubbornly acted indifferent to the whole subject.

"Someone is supposed to meet us here—an emissary¹⁸ from Puerto Marino. He'll show us to the boat. We'll be taking a boat to another island where Puerto Marino is located." Helen scanned the small room, but no one was waiting for them.

Alexa picked up the Nicaragua guide book in her mother's bag and began scanning. "I don't see any island called Puerto Marino, Mom."

"Puerto Marino isn't the name of the island, it's the name of the marine biology facility. It's owned by an American company called the Marino Enterprise. I have a different map in the yellow folder in my black bag over there." She gestured toward a bag on top of their pile of luggage. "You're welcome to take a look."

"OK," Alexa replied. She pulled out the yellow folder and flipped through the papers. The map was printed on pale blue paper and it had the word "CONFIDENTIAL" stamped in vivid¹⁹ red block letters at the top. On this map it was easy to locate Puerto Marino. There it was, on a small, unnamed island off of the east coast of Nicaragua, about twenty miles from the Isla del Maize Grande, the island that they were on now.

Alexa was surprised that she hadn't been able to locate the island on the map in the guide book. She reached for the original map and put the two side by side. "Mom, the island isn't even on this map—it looks like

¹⁶ **Oblivious:** lacking active conscious knowledge or awareness

¹⁷ **Embittered:** having bitter feelings

¹⁸ **Emissary:** one designated as the agent of another

¹⁹ **Vivid:** producing a strong or clear impression on the senses; sharp, intense

there's nothing around that area at all. It's only on your blue map." Alexa's brow furrowed in thought. Had the cartographer²⁰ purposefully omitted the island from the tourist map?

Alexa rechecked the blue map. It was just then that she noticed the insignia of the U.S. Navy in the bottom right-hand corner.

"Mom, why do you have a map from the U.S. Navy?" Alexa asked with a sense of foreboding.²¹ She racked her memory trying to recall what she'd learned in history class. There had been a civil war in Nicaragua in the 1980s, but Alexa couldn't remember any of the details. That whole affair had happened such a long time ago—right around the time she was born. This map looked new.

"Oh, I think they do some work with Puerto Marino and the dolphins there," Helen replied absentmindedly as she rummaged through her purse for a moist towelette. Her expression turned quizzical as she reconsidered what she had just said. "To be completely honest, I don't know exactly what the relationship is between the Navy and Puerto Marino. I know that the Navy has been interested in dolphins for decades. Maybe they're sponsoring some of the work there. Who knows? But we're about to find out, aren't we?" She smiled with anticipation.

Alexa smiled weakly in response. She simply didn't feel like showing too much enthusiasm for her mother's agenda.

"They have a big project there studying sonar in marine mammals. They're interested in the work I did years ago on echolocation. Puerto Marino is quite big, from what I understand—apparently the compound encompasses²² a significant portion of the island. It's like a small city on

²⁰ Cartographer: one who makes maps

²¹ Foreboding: to have an inward conviction of (as coming ill or misfortune)

²² Encompasses: to form a circle about, enclose

an island that is otherwise fairly undeveloped. I think there's a small town—a local fishing community—but not much else.” Her mother continued, “We’ll be staying at an apartment right on the compound.”

“Really?” Alexa answered. She was a bit perplexed²³ by this turn of events. She hadn’t expected they would stay at a five-star resort, but she had never anticipated they would be on such a remote island for the whole summer.

“Alexa,” her mother began her oration²⁴ softly, “this is a really important opportunity for me. You know how difficult it is to find a job as a marine biologist. I haven’t worked in *so* long, and this is only a temporary position. But if it goes well, it’ll be great for my résumé and hopefully lead to more opportunities down the line.”

“I know, Mom. I want it to go well for you too.” Alexa reached for her mother’s hand and gave it a squeeze. She felt a tinge of remorse at her own unyielding²⁵ selfishness. She didn’t want to undermine²⁶ her mother’s optimism with continual strife.²⁷ Her mother had always been there for her. Alexa silently vowed to improve her attitude and try to be more agreeable for her mother’s sake.

The one-room terminal emptied out quickly as the rest of the eleven passengers from the airplane departed. Alexa and her mother waited on the only bench in the room. The airplane they had arrived on had quickly left again, and now they were the only people in the airport.

A young man burst into the terminal, breathless from exertion. He was holding a sign that read “Dr. Helen McCurry.”

Alexa burst out laughing. It was so funny for him to be holding a sign when they were the only ones in the entire airport!

²³ Perplexed: filled with uncertainty; puzzled

²⁴ Oration: speech; an elaborate discourse delivered in a formal and dignified manner

²⁵ Unyielding: not yielding (to surrender or relinquish to the control of another)

²⁶ Undermine: to weaken or ruin by degrees

²⁷ Strife: an act of contention; fight, struggle

Their guide was eager to converse with them but he spoke only Spanish, and both Alexa and Helen were too rusty in Spanish to be active interlocutors,²⁸ so they continued their journey in silence. Their guide had a car waiting for them that brought them to the island's marina.



Everything about the marina was in a state of disrepair. The old wooden dock was dilapidated and creaked portentously²⁹ as they walked on it. All of the boats moored to the ramshackle dock looked only marginally seaworthy, except for one. A shiny new white yacht looked awkwardly out of place in the modest marina. On its stern, the words "Puerto Marino" were printed in bold block letters. They hopped aboard for the final phase of their interminable³⁰ journey.

The sun was setting as they approached their destination. Alexa felt invigorated by the boat ride and spectacular scenery. Now she was insatiably curious about her surroundings, but it was difficult to make out many details about their new island home, which was now enveloped³¹ in darkness. They docked the boat at an empty pier and climbed aboard a waiting Jeep. Now they were on a remote,³² unpaved road riddled with potholes and flanked by verdant³³ jungle.

"Where are we?" Alexa whispered to her mother, who sat next to her in the back seat.

"We're almost there," her mother answered, with excitement in her voice. They were approaching a gated entryway, guarded by two armed men. As they pulled up to the gate, one of the men approached the Jeep as the other spoke into a walkie-talkie in the small booth flanking the gate.

²⁸ Interlocutor: someone who takes part in a dialogue or conversation

²⁹ Portentously: something that foreshadows a coming event

³⁰ Interminable: having or seeming to have no end

³¹ Enveloped: to enclose or enfold completely with or as if with a covering

³² Remote: isolated, secluded, far from activity

³³ Verdant: green with growing plants

The guard exchanged words with their guide in Spanish and then turned to Helen and spoke in English. “Do you have your security clearance papers?” the guard prompted.³⁴

“Yes, I think they’re right in this folder.” Helen scrambled through the pile of papers, pulled out the appropriate one, and handed it to the guard.

“I’ll also need to see your passports,” the guard added as he perused³⁵ the legitimacy³⁶ of the documents.

The guard looked carefully at the passport photos and at the two women in the backseat, then walked to the guardhouse, where he disappeared with their passports. In a few moments he returned and leaned his head through the open window to talk to Helen.

“Welcome to Puerto Marino, Dr. McCurry,” the guard said with a wide smile. It appeared that with the perfunctory³⁷ security measures taken care of, the guard’s demeanor changed profoundly.³⁸ “I’ll escort you to security headquarters to check in and get your identification badges. After we’ve taken care of these necessities, you’ll be meeting with Dr. Villeponce in the main building. Please follow me.”

“OK,” Helen agreed as their driver put the car in gear. The guard hopped on a motorcycle and waved for them to follow. The road ahead became a cloud of dust as the motorcycle agitated the dry, packed mud road into clouds of billowing dust.

“Well, this looks like a fun place to spend the summer!” Alexa said sarcastically.³⁹ The security was so tight, it appeared to be run like a prison. As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she felt a tinge of

³⁴ Prompt: to move to action; incite

³⁵ Peruse: to examine or consider with attention and in detail; study

³⁶ Legitimacy: the quality or state of being legitimate (being exactly as purposed, neither spurious nor false)

³⁷ Perfunctory: characterized by routine or superficiality

³⁸ Profoundly: characterized by intensity of feeling or quality

³⁹ Sarcastically: having the character of sarcasm (a mode of satirical wit depending for its effect on bitter, caustic, and often ironic language that is usually directed against an individual)

regret in her stomach as she saw the hurt look in her mother's face. Alexa chided herself silently.

"Alexa, we haven't even had a chance to settle in. Don't be so quick to judge."

"I'm sorry, Mom." Alex renewed her vow to improve her attitude. She could clearly see that her mother needed her support.

The guard on the motorcycle pulled up in front of a small gray building. Alexa and her mother climbed out of the Jeep, which immediately took off. The guard ushered them inside, where they had their pictures taken. Minutes later they were handed two photo IDs, each hanging from a circular chain designed to wear as a necklace.

"You must wear your identification badges at all times—security is maintained at a high level," the guard admonished.⁴⁰ "I can take you to meet Dr. Villeponce now, if you'll come with me."

The two women walked with the guard down the dusty road to a large circular cul-de-sac surrounded by several gray, nondescript⁴¹ buildings that were illuminated by powerful floodlights mounted on the walls. The largest, on the right, looked like a colossal⁴² domed warehouse. It was several stories high and nearly windowless, except for several small windows clustered near the door. All of the buildings were made of the same gray material, Alexa noticed. An absence of any kind of landscaping added to the austere⁴³ tone of the compound.

They followed the guard through the entryway of the large domed building. Flashing their newly minted photo IDs to the security desk, they waited in the foyer for Dr. Villeponce, who had been summoned by telephone.

⁴⁰ Admonish: to express warning or disapproval especially in a gentle, earnest, or solicitous manner

⁴¹ Nondescript: lacking distinctive or interesting qualities; dull

⁴² Colossal: of a bulk, extent, power, or effect approaching the stupendous or incredible

⁴³ Austere: stern and cold in appearance or manner

“Welcome to Puerto Marino! You must be Dr. McCurry. I’m Gavin Villeponce.” A sturdy-looking man with a crew cut offered his hand enthusiastically to Helen. He seemed delighted to meet his new collaborator.⁴⁴

“Hi. Yes, I’m Helen McCurry—please just call me Helen. And this is my daughter Alexa.” Alexa dutifully shook the hand that was outstretched to her.

“Well, if you’re not too tired from your trip, I’m anxious to show you around. Would you like to see the dolphins?” He looked expectantly at Helen and Alexa.

Alexa nodded mutely while Helen couldn’t contain her burgeoning enthusiasm. “Oh, yes, let’s go!”

They headed down a long windowless corridor ending in a wide double-door entryway. The doors were shut tight.

“This is a card key for you, Helen. It gives you access to the areas that you’ll be using. Why don’t we make sure it works.” He handed Helen the card and motioned toward the device mounted on the wall. Helen swiped the card and the device responded with a mechanical click. They all looked toward the portal⁴⁵ as the immense double doors opened.

Alexa’s senses were heightened as she crossed the threshold. It was like another world, alive with activity. The room was a vast⁴⁶ open space, like an enormous gymnasium with lofty high ceilings. The far side of the room was open to the outside and Alexa realized that they were situated right on the ocean. Large, deep pools of water nearly covered the floor space and Alexa was delighted to see that there were dozens of dolphins swimming in the water!

⁴⁴ Collaborator: co-worker, colleague; a person working jointly with others, especially in an intellectual endeavor

⁴⁵ Portal: a door or entrance, especially a grand or imposing one

⁴⁶ Vast: very great in size, amount, degree, or intensity, especially in extent or range

Dr. Villeponce led them onto a walkway between two of the pools and it was there that they paused to take in the incredible scene. There were dolphins everywhere, engaged in a multitude of activities. The air was alive with their high-pitched squeaks and the water below was teeming with activity. Several were clustered around a man in a wetsuit who was tossing small fish into their open mouths. A few of the dolphins looked to be doing nothing at all—they appeared torpid⁴⁷ as they floated motionless near the surface.

One dolphin surfaced near them and looked right at them. Alexa was mesmerized by the dolphin's face. It looked like it was smiling at her. She was surprised at the flood of emotions she felt rising up in her. She wanted to touch this charismatic⁴⁸ dolphin, to know it and to talk to it. With a start, she realized why her mother was so passionate about her work. She looked over at her mother, who had a sparkle of excitement in her eyes that Alexa had rarely seen.

"This is Speckle," Dr. Villeponce introduced the dolphin. "She's been with us for the longest amount of time—she's our oldest dolphin and quite a leader. She's the potentate⁴⁹ of the pool!" he chuckled. "All of the other dolphins treat her with respect," he added as he tossed her a fish. Speckle's head rose from the water just in time to catch the fish in midair. It was swallowed instantly. Speckle dove headfirst underwater and her sleek, supple⁵⁰ body disappeared from view.

As they continued along the walkway between the pools, Alexa couldn't help but watch the smooth, streamlined forms of the dolphins swimming underwater. They appeared so well adapted to their underwater

⁴⁷ Torpid: lacking in energy or vigor

⁴⁸ Charismatic: having, exhibiting, or based on charisma (a special magnetic charm or appeal)

⁴⁹ Potentate: one who has the power and position to rule over others; a monarch

⁵⁰ Supple: able to perform bending or twisting movements with ease and grace

habitat. Alexa had to consciously remind herself to watch where she was going—the walkway between the pools was only two feet wide and there was no railing to hold onto. She was captivated⁵¹ with the vision of the dolphins swimming below, but she tried to remain cognizant of her precarious⁵² position.

Dr. Villeponce continued talking as he led them to the outer pool, which was actually outdoors. “We have forty-two dolphins in our program, housed in these four interconnecting pools.” He gestured toward the outer pool. “This one is contiguous⁵³ with the ocean, so that fresh ocean water bathes the facility.” Bright floodlights mounted on the exterior of the building lit the walkway as the group continued around the periphery⁵⁴ of the outer pool. “There’s a retractable gate over here that we can open so that we can release particular animals out into the bay periodically⁵⁵ for open water exercises.” A sturdy ocean vessel was moored next to the gate.

Dr. Villeponce continued his oration in a commanding tone; he obviously enjoyed presiding⁵⁶ over the dolphin facility. As he rambled⁵⁷ on, Alexa barely heard his voice, she was so entranced with the scene unfolding beneath the surface of the water below. A dolphin had found a leaf floating on the surface of the water, deftly picked the leaf up in its mouth, and then dove under the surface. When the dolphin resurfaced, it released the leaf right in front of a very small dolphin, which appeared to be a baby. The larger dolphin goaded the youngster with some loud squeaking noises, clearly enticing the little one to play with its rousing⁵⁸ banter. The baby dolphin grabbed the leaf in its mouth and dove underwater. It swam all of the way down to the end of the pool underwater,

⁵¹ Captivate: to influence and dominate by some special charm, art, or trait and with an irresistible appeal

⁵² Precarious: characterized by a lack of security or stability that threatens with danger

⁵³ Contiguous: touching or connected throughout in an unbroken sequence

⁵⁴ Periphery: the external boundary or surface of a body

⁵⁵ Periodically: occurring or recurring at regular intervals

⁵⁶ Presiding: occupying a place of authority, acting as president, chairman, or moderator

⁵⁷ Rambled: to talk or write in a long-winded, wandering fashion

⁵⁸ Rousing: giving rise to excitement; stirring

then circled back and resurfaced right next to Alexa. It looked like the baby dolphin was trying to hand the leaf to her, as if to say “Your turn now!”

“Oh my gosh, it looks like he wants to play!” Alexa gushed.

“It’s a ‘she.’ This is Coco. She’s our youngest recruit—around one year old.”

“Was she born in captivity?” Helen asked.

“No, she was obtained from the wild about two weeks ago.”

Helen’s face momentarily clouded over, obscuring her earlier enthusiasm. Dr. Villeponce reached down to take the leaf from Coco, putting an end to the game by depositing the soggy leaf in a nearby trash container.

“Let’s go down to the observation level,” Dr. Villeponce directed, as he led them to a stairway descending to a lower level. They followed him down into the darkness.

Alexa couldn’t help but to gasp as she saw the immense windows on either side of her, allowing her to see all of the action underwater in both tanks. It felt like she was in a tunnel underwater. She couldn’t help but marvel at the effortless way the dolphins maneuvered their streamlined bodies through the water. One of the dolphins paused at the window to look at the visitors, who in turn were looking at it. This vantage point made Alexa feel as if she could really be a part of the dolphins’ world. It was intoxicating.

“How about if we stop by our molecular biology lab to show you where you’ll be working on your project, Alexa?” Dr. Villeponce looked at her expectantly.

“OK,” Alexa nodded absently, her reverie preempted⁵⁹ with his question. A laboratory seemed comparatively⁶⁰ dull after the compelling⁶¹ visit with the dolphins.

“Then I’ll show you where the cafeteria is, and of course, the apartment where you’ll be staying.”

“Sounds good,” Helen agreed.

As they returned to the doorway, Dr. Villeponce paused at a desk to pick up a thick yellow folder, which he handed to Helen. “Here’s some background information for you on our sonar project. It would be great if you could familiarize yourself with it before our staff meeting tomorrow morning. We begin at 8 A.M. sharp.” Dr. Villeponce smiled warmly at Helen as he handed her the arduous⁶² assignment. He seemed like a nice person, Alexa thought.

Alexa looked at the formidable⁶³ thick folder her mother now carried. She knew that her mother would tackle her assignment assiduously.⁶⁴ It would probably take her most of the night to get through it all, but her enthusiasm for her new job would give her fortitude.⁶⁵ Alexa noticed that the front of the folder was stamped with another “CONFIDENTIAL” in red block letters. There sure were a lot of secrets around here, she thought.



As Alexa walked to the molecular biology lab with Dr. Villeponce and her mother, she couldn’t stop thinking about the dolphins—she was awestruck⁶⁶ at the sight of so many dolphins in the same place. It was difficult to show any interest in the laboratory, but Alexa tried to be cordial⁶⁷ as she was introduced to Janine, the laboratory technician. Alexa

⁵⁹ Preempted: to take the place of

⁶⁰ Comparatively: considered as if in comparison to something else; relatively

⁶¹ Compelling: demanding attention

⁶² Arduous: hard to accomplish or achieve

⁶³ Formidable: causing fear, dread, or apprehension

⁶⁴ Assiduous: marked by careful unremitting attention or persistent application

⁶⁵ Fortitude: strength of mind that enables a person to encounter danger or adversity with courage

⁶⁶ Awestruck: filled with wonder

⁶⁷ Cordial: warmly and genially affable

dutifully agreed that she would report to the lab at 8:00 in the morning to begin her project.

“Why don’t I take you to your apartment now.” Dr. Villeponce suggested. “You both must be exhausted from your trip.”

Alexa nodded silently, but in reality she didn’t feel the least bit tired. The amazing sight of the dolphins had heightened her senses. While they walked the short distance to the apartment, Alexa formulated her plan. She simply *had* to find a way to spend the coming weeks in the dolphin facility, rather than toiling away in a stuffy laboratory.

As soon as Dr. Villeponce left them alone in their new apartment, Alexa articulated⁶⁸ her yearning⁶⁹ to work with the dolphins.

“Mom, can’t I work with you and the dolphins this summer instead of in the lab?” Alexa pleaded.

“Oh, Alexa,” her mother began compassionately,⁷⁰ “I would love to have you work with me too. But it’s just not possible right now. All of the people working with the dolphins need a special security clearance, a process they refused to conduct for a high school student. I tried, but I couldn’t coerce⁷¹ them into bending the rules.”

“But it just doesn’t seem fair to be here where there are so many dolphins and not be able to see them!” Alexa was exasperated.⁷²

“I know it doesn’t seem fair.” Her mother was empathetic,⁷³ but only to a point. “When I was younger, I had to wait eons before I was allowed to work with dolphins. Not only did I have to finish college, I had to complete two years of graduate coursework as well.”

Alexa looked forlorn⁷⁴ and on the verge of tears. She was bitterly disappointed. It seemed so unfair to be so close to creatures that were so

⁶⁸ Articulate: expressing oneself readily, clearly, or effectively

⁶⁹ Yearning: to long persistently, wistfully, or sadly

⁷⁰ Compassionately: having or showing compassion (sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress, together with a desire to alleviate it)

⁷¹ Coerce: to compel to an act or choice

⁷² Exasperated: irritated or annoyed

⁷³ Empathetic: being understanding of, aware of, and sensitive to the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another

⁷⁴ Forlorn: being in poor condition; miserable

captivating and not be able to spend time with them. In fact, she couldn't even go into the dolphin building without her mother because she didn't have a card key.

"Alexa, I know it seems difficult to accept. I would feel the same way if I were in your shoes. I promise you that I will do everything I can to get you a position in the dolphin facility. But I just need to foster⁷⁵ a more secure relationship with the management before I press for a big favor."

"OK, Mom," Alexa replied in a defeated tone. Her mother gave her a redeeming⁷⁶ hug. At least her mother was understanding of her grievances,⁷⁷ Alexa thought. She was grateful for that.

⁷⁵ Foster: to promote the growth or development of

⁷⁶ Redeeming: to release from blame or debt

⁷⁷ Grievance: a cause of distress (as an unsatisfactory working condition) felt to afford reason for complaint

3

A Serendipitous Find

Alexa awoke to the sound of a multitude of birds singing and chirping loudly outside the window. She slowly regained consciousness and remembered the events of yesterday. It had been such a full day and there was so much to think about. Alexa couldn't get the image of the dolphins out of her mind. In her dreams, she was playing in the water with little Coco, swimming with the ease and grace of these beautiful, animated¹ creatures.

Alexa looked over at her mother, who was still sleeping peacefully in the adjacent bed. They were sharing a small one-bedroom apartment that had a tiny kitchenette and small living room, which consisted of a couch and a small television on a pedestal. The cramped kitchen didn't bother Alexa because she was not particularly domestic,² but the television predicament certainly did. There was no cable TV and the reception, as she'd found out last night, was terrible. They could only get one channel

¹ Animated: full of movement and activity

² Domestic: devoted to home duties and pleasures

clearly, and because everything was in Spanish, it didn't seem worth watching.

Thankfully, they had access to the Internet. Alexa's mother had brought her laptop and it was plugged in on the kitchen counter. Alexa logged on and checked her e-mail. She couldn't wait to see if Laurie had written to her. But her inbox was empty. Alexa sighed. It was hard to keep her attitude upbeat when she felt so isolated on this secluded island, away from her friends. Furthermore, they couldn't even make outgoing calls on their telephone without a phone card to cover the very expensive long-distance fees. With all of these limitations³ on communication with her friends back home, Alexa felt like her coveted⁴ friendships were slipping away.

Alexa deliberated⁵ and decided that she would send an e-mail to Laurie every day. If they could keep in touch by cultivating⁶ an e-mail relationship, Alexa wouldn't feel so desolate.⁷ Truthfully, she admitted to herself, she was wary⁸ of this long absence from Laurie because she didn't want her role as Laurie's best friend to be usurped⁹ by someone else in her absence. Alexa consigned¹⁰ herself to write to Laurie diligently.

Time: 6:54 A.M.

To: "Laurie"

From: "Alexa"

Subject: *Hola!*

Dear Laurie,

Hola! That's Spanish for hi! How are you doing? I miss you! Did you start your job at CNN yet? I am doing OK. We arrived here

³ Limitation: something that limits; restraint

⁴ Covet: to wish for enviously

⁵ Deliberate: characterized by or resulting from careful and thorough consideration

⁶ Cultivating: fostering, furthering, encouraging

⁷ Desolate: deserted, isolated

⁸ Wary: marked by keen caution

⁹ Usurp: to take the place of by or as if by force; supplant

¹⁰ Consign: commit, especially to a final destination or fate

yesterday and got a tour of the place. They have over 40 dolphins here—they are so amazing! The only problem is that my job is in the laboratory. I'm so disappointed about that. I really wanted to work with the dolphins this summer. So far, I've only seen one person my age here. Her name is Charlotte and she is the daughter of Colonel Brandt—a very important Navy colonel who is visiting Puerto Marino. I was introduced to her last night when we ate dinner at the cafeteria. I'm not going to be spending much time with her, though—it's not even debatable.¹¹ She reminds me of Caroline—she is very pretty and very conceited. Just what I need!! Well, I have to go now and get ready for my first day at work—yuk! Write to me soon!!

Your best friend and comrade,¹²
Alexa

Alexa hit Send with a flourish¹³ and almost immediately felt a tinge of regret. Perhaps this e-mail was too negative, Alexa thought. Alexa reread it and realized that she had denounced¹⁴ virtually everything. Next time, she thought, instead of writing from such a disgruntled¹⁵ perspective, she would try to find the positive and make her letters more upbeat.

Alexa realized she forgot to tell Laurie about the best part of their living arrangements—a motorbike! Dr. Villeponce had shown them the small motorbike parked outside of their apartment and told them it was theirs to use to get around the compound if they found walking tiresome. Alexa's mother, who was not a fan of any type of motorcycle, had told Alexa that she could use it as long as she wore the helmet at all times.

¹¹ Debatable: arguable, worthy of debate or consideration

¹² Comrade: an intimate friend or associate; companion

¹³ Flourish: grand gesture, display (also has another meaning, to thrive)

¹⁴ Denounce: to pronounce (especially publicly) to be bad, blameworthy, or evil

¹⁵ Disgruntled: discontent, unhappy

Alexa's mother awoke and they shared tea and toast in the kitchenette. They took turns taking a brief shower, and then it was time to go. They walked outside and Alexa prepared to get on the motorbike.

"I hope you have a good day. You have my pager number if you need me. Be careful in the lab! And be especially careful on that bike!" Alexa's mother added emphatically¹⁶ as she gave her an affirming¹⁷ hug.

"Don't worry, Mom. I'll be fine," Alexa asserted,¹⁸ reassuring her mother. But inside her stomach felt a little queasy from nervousness. It always seemed a challenge to start something new and be the young upstart¹⁹ in an unfamiliar place.

"Let's meet back here at five. We can go to the cafeteria together for dinner." "OK, Mom. See you then." Alexa put on the helmet and started the motorbike. She pulled out onto the road with her mother watching nervously. Alexa waved as she pulled away for the short ride to the molecular biology lab.

It was exhilarating to ride the motorbike, and Alexa was disappointed that the ride was so short. She pulled up in front of the small building that housed the laboratory and reluctantly went inside.

Janine noticed her immediately and greeted her enthusiastically. "Good morning, Alexa! Are you ready to begin?"

Alexa managed a weak smile and an affirmative nod. She appreciated Janine's hospitable²⁰ welcome. She followed Janine over to the lab bench and took a seat next to her on one of the tall stools that laboratory workers use while conducting experiments.

Janine arranged the papers on top of the lab bench to show Alexa. "I know you have some molecular biology experience, is that right?"

¹⁶ Emphatically: with emphasis, forcefully

¹⁷ Affirming: expressing dedication

¹⁸ Asserted: to declare forcefully

¹⁹ Upstart: unknown, insignificant person, low on the totem pole

²⁰ Hospitable: promising or suggesting generous and cordial welcome

“Yes,” Alexa replied. “My father is a molecular biologist and I’ve done a few experiments with DNA in his laboratory at Cornell.” Alexa didn’t elaborate²¹ with any details.

“Terrific. I have a project I think will be very appropriate for your skills. We would like to have DNA from each of the dolphins here at Puerto Marino so that we can carry out some genetic studies. It will also be useful to have their DNA so that we can positively identify individuals in any circumstances that may arise. We already have cells from all 42 animals, so I thought you could work on preparing DNA from each of these samples. Sound good?”

“Yes,” Alexa nodded. “I’ve extracted DNA from worms before, so if this is similar, I already know how to do it.”

“I’m sure the protocol²² is very similar. Here is the protocol we’re using for dolphin cells.” Janine handed her a paper with the instructions printed on it. “I’m hoping you can work independently on this, if possible. I have a daily 9 A.M. meeting and lots of fieldwork to do. Of course, I’ll be available if you have any questions.”

“I don’t mind working independently,” Alexa replied. In fact, she quite liked it. Alexa knew from her previous experience in the lab that it felt empowering²³ to complete an experiment independently.

“Terrific. The first thing you’ll need to do is to make up all of the solutions on this list. Once you’re done with that, come find me and I’ll show you where the dolphin cells are kept in the liquid nitrogen.”

Alexa nodded as Janine started gathering her things to leave. She seemed to be in such a hurry. Alexa looked around the windowless room. There was nobody else there. I wonder if it’s going to be this quiet all

²¹ Elaborate: give details, expand upon a subject

²² Protocol: the plan of a scientific experiment

²³ Empowering: yielding power or authority

summer long, Alexa mused. If only I had gotten a really great summer job in Ithaca, like Laurie, my parents would have let me stay home.

Alexa looked down at the list of solutions: 5M NaCl₂, TE, 70% Ethanol... I'd better get started, Alexa thought reluctantly. She headed over to the scale and the chemical supplies and got down the big bottle of NaCl₂.

The work proceeded quickly and soon she had finished making the five solutions on the list. Alexa looked around for Janine, but the lab was still empty and so was the adjacent office. She looked at her watch. It was only 9:15 A.M. Alexa opened the door and looked outside, but Janine was nowhere in sight. She thought about paging her mother, but thought better of it. It was her mother's first day on the job, and Alexa vowed to handle her own problems, at least for today. The sight of her motorbike beckoned.

"What harm would it do if I just went for a ride to take a look around this island?" Alexa thought impulsively.²⁴ She pulled on her helmet and swung her leg over the bike. She looked over her shoulder one last time to see if Janine was around. Nobody. Alexa started the motorbike and took off.

She rode leisurely past their apartment, then past the cafeteria building, and the big dolphin building where her mother was now working. Alexa continued past the security building and then she could see the main gate with the two omnipresent²⁵ guards looming in the distance.

I wonder if they'd mind if I leave the compound for awhile, she mused. She was steadily approaching the security checkpoint. The guard, posted authoritatively²⁶ at the gate, had clearly seen her. He didn't look

²⁴ Impulsively: spontaneously, on a whim

²⁵ Omnipresent: present in all places at all times

²⁶ Authoritatively: with authority, commandingly, convincingly

alarmed, Alexa thought. Nor was he motioning for her to stop. He nodded, a tacit acknowledgement, and Alexa kept going and rode right out of the compound! She felt a tingle of excitement at her impetuous²⁷ escape.

The bumpy dirt road continued for about a mile and then ended at the intersection of another dirt road, which looked to be in better condition. Alexa didn't remember this part from her journey here; it had been dark when they drove to the compound. She looked right and left, searching for a signal that might indicate which way to go. The answer was not obvious. Both directions looked equally nondescript.

Alexa went left. There appeared to be a void of trees in the distance. Could it be the ocean? After a mile or so there was another intersection and what looked like the rudiments of a small town. She passed by a few small, dilapidated houses and a small general store. A little boy in bare feet was sweeping the doorway of the store. He looked at her curiously with big brown eyes.

A fruit stand was adjacent to the store. Piles of oranges, bananas, pineapples, and some unfamiliar fruits beckoned. Alexa realized she had not brought anything to drink with her and she was already parched.²⁸ Maybe I'll stop on the way back, she thought.

Alexa continued in the same direction. There was little commercial activity in this small town—the ubiquitous²⁹ McDonalds' franchise³⁰ had yet to penetrate this isolated island. The houses lining the street became more numerous and a few people were going about their activities. The ramshackle houses looked like they could barely stand up. It looked more like a threadbare encampment³¹ than a neighborhood of sturdy houses. She felt a wave of emotion for the people who lived in

²⁷ Impetuous: marked by impulsive vehemence or passion

²⁸ Parched: very dry, dehydrated (can also mean very thirsty)

²⁹ Ubiquitous: existing or being everywhere at the same time

³⁰ Franchise: the license granted to an individual or group to market a company's goods or services in a particular territory

³¹ Encampment: the state of being encamped (to place or establish in a camp)

houses like this. From her perspective,³² it appeared so miserable and deprived.³³ An elderly mendicant³⁴ sitting in front of the general store held out his cup to her, beseeching³⁵ her to contribute. Feeling uncomfortable, she avoided eye contact and continued on. But she couldn't help but ponder what it must be like to subsist³⁶ on a handful of coins like that which was in the beggar's cup.

I wonder what it's like to live here, she thought as she watched a woman hang her laundry out to dry on a short rope draped between two houses. The woman returned her gaze with a disapproving look. Apparently she did not enjoy being the subject of Alexa's anthropological musings. The children, however, seemed oblivious to their penurious³⁷ circumstances. They were running around playing and eyeing Alexa on her motorbike with curious, if cautious, brown eyes. The patrons³⁸ sitting outdoors at an open-air café eyed her suspiciously. Alexa felt so conspicuous—not only was she a different ethnicity³⁹ than the townspeople, she was an outsider. She had the distinct sense of feeling ostracized⁴⁰ by their direct gaze.

It looked as if the road ended up ahead in a dense grove of palm trees. As Alexa approached, she could see that there was a wide path leading through the trees. She caught a glimpse of water ahead. She continued on the path, and suddenly the dense canopy of trees opened up onto a spectacular expanse of sandy beach!

“Oh, my gosh!” Alexa exclaimed softly to herself. “This is spectacular!” The sand was so white and pristine. Alexa parked her motorbike by a tree and kicked off her shoes. Her bare feet hit the warm sand and it felt

³² Perspective: point of view

³³ Deprived: marked by deprivation, especially a lack of the necessities of life or of healthful environmental influences

³⁴ Mendicant: beggar

³⁵ Beseech: to beg for urgently or anxiously

³⁶ Subsist: to have or acquire the necessities of life (such as food and clothing)

³⁷ Penurious: marked by a cramping and oppressive lack of resources (as in money)

³⁸ Patrons: customers

³⁹ Ethnicity: ethnic quality or affiliation

⁴⁰ Ostracized: to exclude from a group by common consent

great. Delighted, she scurried⁴¹ toward the translucent⁴² water, which was a beautiful shade of turquoise. It was a spectacularly beautiful cove that she had discovered serendipitously.⁴³ On the right, there was a long pier with several dilapidated fishing vessels tied to the posts. To her left, the cove was bordered by a long, rocky outcrop jutting into the bay.

Alexa felt herself drawn to the water, where a gentle surf was breaking. She stepped gingerly over broken bits of seashells and touched the water with her toes. The sensation was decadent⁴⁴—the water was warm and refreshing. It appeared quite shallow as well. It was so inviting, she wished that she had brought a bathing suit.

Maybe I'll just wade out in the water a bit, she thought. The beach was nearly deserted, except for a couple of grizzled old fishermen on the pier who looked to be unloading the day's catch. Alexa rolled up the bottom of her pants up to her knees and waded out a bit farther. "I'm definitely coming back tomorrow with my bathing suit," she vowed out loud. The sunshine felt so hot on her hair that she contemplated diving right in with her clothes on. She thought this through and decided she could probably take a quick swim, drive back to the apartment, and change her clothes quickly before heading back to the lab.

Just as she was about to take the plunge, she noticed a small, archaic⁴⁵ boat motoring its way toward the pier. It was a dingy⁴⁶ metal rowboat with an outboard engine, operated by a young man seated in the back of the boat. He appeared to be alone but he was talking quite loudly in Spanish over the noise of the motor. Even though she had taken one year of Spanish, his words were unintelligible.⁴⁷ Who was he talking to? Alexa was puzzled.

⁴¹ Scurried: scampered; to move in or as if in a brisk, rapidly alternating step

⁴² Translucent: clear, transparent

⁴³ Serendipitously: obtained by serendipity (the faculty of finding valuable or agreeable things accidentally)

⁴⁴ Decadent: self-indulgent

⁴⁵ Archaic: characteristic of an earlier or more primitive time

⁴⁶ Dingy: dirty, discolored

⁴⁷ Unintelligible: incomprehensible, making no sense

Then she saw it. It was a dolphin leaping out of the water near the bow of the boat! Alexa put her hand above her eyes like a visor to deflect⁴⁸ the blinding sunshine. The boat was heading toward the pier and it looked like the dolphin was coming with it. The dolphin was surfing in the bow's wake, periodically leaping out of the water.

Alexa was so mesmerized by the dolphin that she didn't realize that the boy driving the boat was waving to her. As he pulled in closer to the pier he yelled out to her.

"Hola!" he called, waving his arm in a friendly greeting.

Alexa finally took notice of him. He looked to be about sixteen. His black hair was long, almost to his shoulders, and his body deeply tanned and lithe.⁴⁹ He was smiling at her. All of a sudden she felt exorbitantly⁵⁰ self-conscious—and very glad she hadn't plunged into the water a moment ago. She managed a weak wave.

The boy was concentrating on docking the boat now, so Alexa continued to watch. She couldn't see the dolphin. Maybe it was on the other side of the boat. The boy unloaded several buckets of fish onto the dock and then climbed up the ladder to the pier. The dolphin surfaced right when the boy stood up on the dock. The dolphin was making some squeaking noises. The boy tossed it a fish, which the dolphin appeared to catch and swallow in the same instant. The boy tossed the dolphin two more fish as he talked to the animal in Spanish.

Now it looked as if the conversation was over. The dolphin had disappeared in an instant and the boy was now walking down the pier. He smiled again at Alexa as he headed her way.

⁴⁸ Deflect: to turn from a straight course or fixed direction; bend

⁴⁹ Lithe: characterized by easy flexibility and grace

⁵⁰ Exorbitantly: excessively; exceedingly

What if he was coming over to talk to her? The thought of it made Alexa a little nervous. She decided it was time to extricate⁵¹ herself from this situation. She immediately turned around and headed for her motorbike. If I walk fast, Alexa thought, I can be off the beach before he reaches the end of the pier. She walked swiftly over the hot sand and tossed her shoes into the basket on the back of the bike. She started the bike in her bare feet and took off without looking back.

The ride back to Puerto Marino was quick and Alexa regained her composure as she rode along. It was so foolish to have left the cove in such a hurry, she thought. The boy obviously wanted to talk to her. And I want to talk to him too, she realized. It's just silly to evade⁵² precisely the person you want to get to know, she thought. This is exactly why I've never had a real boyfriend. Alexa knew that whenever she liked a boy, she studiously avoided any interaction with him. But, having the perspicacity⁵³ to realize that her actions were silly, she vowed emphatically that next time, she would be braver.

As she approached the proximity⁵⁴ of the Puerto Marino compound, she again had a nervous feeling in her stomach. What if they don't let me back in? she thought. Or worse, what if they call her mother? Alexa held her breath as the security gate loomed closer.

The guard looked at her and waved her in! That was easy, she thought as she sped back to the lab. She parked her motorbike, slipped her shoes back on, and raced into the lab. It was still empty! Alexa breathed a sigh of relief as she returned to her lab bench. Everything was as it was when she left it. She looked at her watch. She had only been gone 45 minutes.

⁵¹ Extricate: to release from entanglement or difficulty

⁵² Evade: avoid, dodge

⁵³ Perspicacity: having acute mental vision or discernment; clear-sighted; shrewd

⁵⁴ Proximity: nearness, closeness

“Hi, Alexa! How is everything going?” Janine breezed into the lab.

“Fine. I’ve made all five of the solutions and I’m ready to start the DNA extractions,” Alexa replied calmly. It looked as if Janine didn’t even know she’d been gone. Alexa decided that she would not divulge⁵⁵ her indiscretion⁵⁶ to her. There was no reason Janine needed to know that Alexa had gone to the beach when she was supposed to be working. It was discretionary⁵⁷ information.

“Wow! You’re efficient,” Janine complimented.

“Oh, it wasn’t that difficult.” Alexa feigned⁵⁸ a smile.

“Good. I’m glad you’re able to work both independently and efficaciously.⁵⁹ What do you say we do the first DNA extraction together as a practice run, and then you can work on all of the other extractions independently. It’ll essentially be a repetitive task, and it would be great if you could do it all on your own. I am just inundated⁶⁰ with field work.”

“That’s fine with me,” Alexa replied.

“Great. Then let’s get started.”

Janine led Alexa to a big tank of liquid nitrogen, where she donned thick gloves to protect her hands from the ultra-cold solution. Each dolphin at Puerto Marino had several vials of cells frozen away in this tank. Janine lifted a rack of boxes out of the liquid nitrogen and foraged⁶¹ among the boxes with heavily gloved hands. She found what she was looking for—one vial of cells from dolphin 36 (each dolphin had a number assigned to it as well as a nickname that was used by the trainers)—and placed it in a bucket of crushed ice to thaw.

Alexa looked at the orange-capped vial. It was smaller than her little finger, but Janine assured her the vial had over 10 million cells in it!

⁵⁵ Divulge: reveal, tell

⁵⁶ Indiscretion: something (an act or a remark) marked by a lack of discretion (cautious reserve)

⁵⁷ Discretionary: left to discretion, exercised at one’s own discretion (the quality of being discreet; cautious reserve in speech)

⁵⁸ Feigned: fictitious, faked; artificial

⁵⁹ Efficaciously: effective; having the power to achieve the desired effect

⁶⁰ Inundate: to overwhelm with abundance; as if with a flood

Next they added a buffer solution so that the cells were suspended in a milliliter (about a fifth of a teaspoon) of solution. Then they donned protective gloves and glasses to add a mixture of phenol and chloroform, the corrosive⁶² chemicals that are used to break open the cells and release the DNA. The mixture was shaken vigorously and then centrifuged. When Alexa carefully lifted the tube out of the centrifuge, there were two layers of solution, similar to oil on water. Janine explained that the bottom layer was the organic solution containing the debris of the broken cells. The top layer was what they wanted—this was the aqueous solution containing the soluble⁶³ DNA. Alexa carefully lifted the top layer out using a micropipette and placed it in a fresh clear plastic test tube.

“Now for the *dénouement*!”⁶⁴ Janine declared dramatically.

Alexa added an ethanol solution to the tube, snapped the lid on tight, and slowly inverted the tube several times to gently mix the solutions. There was a lull⁶⁵ in the conversation as Alexa held the tube up to the light as both women peered intently through the test tube. A delicate and thin white string had coalesced⁶⁶ in the tube. It looked a bit like the delicate fibers of a spider’s web, except that the white DNA in the tube had a hint of a translucent blue color to it, which only added to its enigmatic⁶⁷ aura.

“There it is! Good job! I think you have some DNA there,” Janine declared triumphantly.

Alexa felt a tingle of excitement at visualizing the DNA. It is such an elusive and mysterious molecule, she thought. It’s in control of virtually everything about us—our eye color, our hair color, even our propensity⁶⁸

61 Foraged: searched; rummaged

62 Corrosive: having the power to break down or eat away at something (can also mean very sarcastic)

63 Soluble: able to dissolve in a liquid

64 *Dénouement*: finale, conclusion

65 Lull: quiet period

66 Coalesce: to arise from the combination of distinct elements; to unite into a whole

67 Enigmatic: something hard to understand or explain; mysterious

68 Propensity: an often intense natural inclination or preference

to succumb to debilitating⁶⁹ diseases. DNA is like a silent and elusive dictator, bequeathing⁷⁰ the characteristics that make us who we are. It was a thrill to see it and hold it in her hands, Alexa thought as she studied the potent molecule in the tube.

“This needs to sit on ice for awhile. What do you say we go get lunch at the cafeteria and we can finish with the DNA prep after?” Janine suggested.

“Sounds good,” Alexa replied, suddenly realizing that she was famished. It had been an invigorating⁷¹ morning of science and adventure.

As they strolled toward the cafeteria, Alexa found herself thinking about her mother and wondering how she was doing on her first day at work. It had to be exciting to work with the dolphins, Alexa thought, as her mind wandered to images of the immense dolphin tanks she had seen the night before. She recalled that feeling of connection when she made eye contact with Speckle and when little Coco brought her a leaf, enticing her to play.

“Which dolphin is number 36? I mean, do you know its nickname?” Alexa asked. It would be so interesting to know which dolphin’s DNA was in the tube, she thought.

“Why, I think that’s Coco,” Janine replied. “She’s just a youngster.”

“Yes, I know,” Alexa replied thoughtfully. “I met her yesterday.”

69 Debilitating: impairing the strength of

70 Bequeathing: handing down, transmitting

71 Invigorating: stimulating, energizing

4

An Old Maxim

“**S**o tell me, how was your day?” Alexa’s mother asked her eagerly as the two of them walked to the cafeteria for dinner.

“It was good. I extracted DNA from Coco!” Alexa replied enthusiastically. She had to admit to herself that her day in the laboratory was far from stifling,¹ as she had feared it would be earlier. In fact, she found her work in the lab to be compelling and uplifting.² “We’re going to make DNA from all of the dolphins.” Alexa thought for a moment about telling her mother about her foray to the beach that morning, but then thought better of it. Alexa had a feeling that her mother, with her protective and maternal sensibilities,³ might not approve of her leaving the Puerto Marino compound, although she hadn’t explicitly⁴ forbade it.

“Wow, that sounds great. Say, I talked to Dr. Villeponce and he said that you can come out on the boat with us when we do our field work with the dolphins next week. Sound good?”

“Sounds great!” Alexa replied with a smile as they each picked up a tray in the cafeteria. It looked like it was going to be burritos for dinner

¹ Stifling: to withhold from circulation or expression; repressing

² Uplifting: improving the spiritual, social, or intellectual condition of; inspiring, enriching

³ Sensibilities: sensitivities; awareness of and responsiveness to something

⁴ Explicitly: clearly, unambiguously

tonight. Alexa was surveying the salad bar when she sensed someone looking at her. It was the boy from the fishing boat that morning! He was standing behind the counter in the kitchen wearing a white kitchen uniform and was absentmindedly wiping the counters as he looked at her with a big smile. Alexa felt herself blush as she looked down.

But she couldn't resist looking back at him again. Running into him twice in the same day seemed like some sort of prophetic⁵ sign that they were destined to meet. Remembering how she had vowed to be braver when it came to interacting with boys, she managed to give him a shy smile. Alexa glanced at her mother, who was busy foraging among the vegetables at the salad bar. It didn't seem that she had noticed anything. But Alexa had a moment of panic. What if the boy came over to say hello right here in the cafeteria? Then she would surely have to explain to her mother how she had met this boy earlier on the beach.

Alexa surreptitiously⁶ put her finger to her lips as if to signal "shhh" as she looked at him. She then ever so discreetly pointed to her mother. Would he understand what she meant? She fervently⁷ hoped so!

The boy nodded and made a motion like he was zipping his lips together. The universal⁸ signal for "don't worry, I'll keep your secret." Alexa breathed a sigh of relief.

He was still looking at Alexa with a big smile as he started walking... right into a wall! Alexa burst out laughing. It almost seemed like he did it on purpose just to make her laugh. He seemed both funny and perceptive, Alexa thought.

"What's so funny?" Helen asked curiously.

⁵ Prophetic: foretelling events; predictive

⁶ Surreptitiously: done, made, or acquired by stealth; secretly, slyly

⁷ Fervently: exhibited or marked by great intensity of feeling; zealously

⁸ Universal: worldwide, general, common

“Oh, nothing, really. It was just someone in the kitchen bumping into a wall,” Alexa replied as they carried their trays into the sitting area. They sat down at a small round table near the window.

“How’s your burrito?” Helen asked.

“Not bad,” Alexa replied in an upbeat manner. Actually, the burrito was surprisingly good, she thought, even though the salad was rather anemic.⁹

Helen, who was a true gourmand,¹⁰ picked fussily at her salad, looking as if she didn’t want to eat at all. For her, cafeteria-style food was an affront¹¹ to the palate. “Oh, look! There’s Charlotte Brandt sitting over there with her younger brother. Why don’t you go over there and say hello? She’s just your age and it would be nice for you to have a friend here!” she prompted.

“Yes, she seems like just the kind of person I want to spend my time with,” Alexa replied with great sarcasm. She had no intention of saying hello to Charlotte. Although Alexa had only briefly met Charlotte last night and hadn’t had a real conversation with her yet, she just envisioned¹² Charlotte as the type of person who would be pretentious. She reminded her of Caroline and her conceited affectations¹³ when she saw Charlotte adjusting her perfect black bow in her perfect long blond hair. She couldn’t help but notice that Charlotte was wearing a stylish—not to mention expensive—Juicy Couture sweat suit with a matching t-shirt. Alexa’s parents were much too frugal¹⁴ to indulge her with such a trendy ensemble.¹⁵ They thought buying her such materialistic things would vitiate¹⁶ her wholesome morals. They were academics and thus it seemed

⁹ Anemic: lackluster, insipid (can also refer to the medical condition caused by the disease anemia)

¹⁰ Gourmand: one who is heartily interested in good food and drink

¹¹ Affront: to insult especially to the face by behavior or language

¹² Envision: to picture to oneself

¹³ Affectation: mannerisms, especially pretentious ones

¹⁴ Frugal: characterized by economy in the expenditure of resources

¹⁵ Ensemble: a complete costume of harmonizing or complementary clothing and accessories

¹⁶ Vitate: to make faulty or defective, often by the addition of something that impairs

unavoidable that they would have a haughty intellectual perspective on bourgeois¹⁷ materialism.

As a result of her parents' parsimony,¹⁸ Alexa's wardrobe was an eclectic¹⁹ mix of styles, but all of the pieces were affordable. Alexa tended to eye those girls who wore expensive clothes with a bit of suspicion, although she had to admit that she fantasized²⁰ about wearing some of the chic outfits herself.

"Oh, Alexa, don't judge a book by its cover," Helen repeated the well-known maxim.²¹ "You don't even know her yet. You shouldn't put people into pigeonholes.²² Everybody has hidden dimensions²³ that you simply don't see when you first meet them. You may find that she's quite nice and has a lot to offer."

Alexa didn't reply, hoping her mother would drop the subject. Instead, she looked around the room as she munched on her burrito. The cafeteria was filling up. Dr. Villeponce and two other men sat at the table next to them. They appeared to be in a heated discussion. Alexa recognized one of the men as Al Janowitz, the CEO of Puerto Marino. The other man was wearing a military uniform.

They were so embroiled in their querulous²⁴ discussion that they didn't seem to notice Alexa or her mother. The words among them were flying rapidly as their voices rose. Alexa couldn't understand what they were talking about, although she knew that it had something to do with the dolphins.

Alexa leaned in toward her mother and asked softly, "What are they arguing about?"

¹⁷ Bourgeois: marked by a concern for material interests and respectability and a tendency toward mediocrity; usually used disparagingly

¹⁸ Parsimony: the quality of being careful with money or resources; thrift

¹⁹ Eclectic: composed of elements drawn from different sources

²⁰ Fantasize: to indulge in fantasy or reverie; daydream

²¹ Maxim: a saying of a proverbial nature; adage

²² Pigeonhole: a neat category that usually fails to reflect actual complexities

²³ Dimension: one of the elements or factors making up a complete personality or entity

²⁴ Querulous: argumentative

Alexa's mother looked concerned and she hesitated, as if she wasn't quite sure how to phrase her answer. "Well...Dr. Villeponce is a scientist and Mr. Janowitz is a businessman. Sometimes peoples' interests clash." Helen paused as she watched the argument heat up. "I think it has something to do with a project that Mr. Janowitz wants to do. And Colonel Brandt—well, he has his own agenda."

"That's Charlotte's father?"

"Yes," her mother nodded.

Alexa was silent as she listened to their confrontation,²⁵ which had escalated dramatically.

"I just don't think that that maneuver has enough mechanisms²⁶ to ensure the safety of the dolphins!" Dr. Villeponce argued logically and coherently,²⁷ but the expression on his face revealed that he was livid.²⁸

"Dr. Villeponce," Al Janowitz replied in an inappropriately loud voice that turned heads throughout the cafeteria, "we have a mission to carry out here at Puerto Marino, and as the CEO, I intend to see that we fulfill that mission. The decision has been made." Apparently oblivious of his indecorous²⁹ vocalizations, Janowitz stood up and left the room without touching his tray. Colonel Brandt politely excused himself, and Dr. Villeponce was left alone. He looked deflated and miserable.

Alexa wondered what Al Janowitz could possibly want to do that might be unsafe for the dolphins. And what was Colonel Brandt's role here at Puerto Marino? Helen looked concerned and immediately rose from her chair to talk with Dr. Villeponce. Alexa wanted to ask her mother so many questions, but it didn't look like she was going to have the

²⁵ Confrontation: the clashing of forces or ideas; conflict

²⁶ Mechanisms: a process or technique for achieving a result

²⁷ Coherently: logically or aesthetically ordered or integrated

²⁸ Livid: very angry; enraged

²⁹ Indecorous: not decorous; conflicting with accepted standards of good conduct or good taste

opportunity now. Dr. Villeponce was probably joining them for dinner, now that his quarrel had dissipated.³⁰ Alexa knew that it would be impolite to bring up his very public argument. She would just have to ask her mother later.

Dr. Villeponce was very cordial over dinner as the conversation turned to the echolocation project that Alexa's mother was helping to design and carry out. The conversation began to get quite technical as the two scientists talked about their favorite topic. Alexa couldn't follow all of the details, but her mother looked so animated and engaged. She appeared to have a lot in common with Dr. Villeponce and he, in turn, had many compliments for Alexa's mother.

"As I'm sure you already know, Alexa," Dr. Villeponce momentarily digressed,³¹ "the dolphin has a sixth sense of sorts. It can locate objects by emitting a series of clicks and then receiving and interpreting the sound waves that bounce back. Essentially, they can 'see' things via echolocation that they can't see with their eyes. Your mother here has designed a study to determine to what extent dolphins can detect objects buried beneath the ocean floor." He smiled at Helen. "I think it's going to be fabulous."

Alexa watched as her mother beamed with the praise that was showered on her. She had always thought that her mother was not the type to like someone who behaved like a toady,³² but here she was enjoying the abundant flattery of Dr. Villeponce. Actually, Alexa admitted to herself, what seemed so untenable³³ about this situation was that her mother was clearly enjoying the company of a man other than her father.

³⁰ Dissipated: to cause to spread thin or scatter and gradually vanish

³¹ Digress: to turn aside, especially from the main subject of attention or course of argument

³² Toady: one who flatters in hope of gaining favors

³³ Untenable: not able to be defended or occupied

She felt a twinge of sadness as she realized it would probably take a long time for her to come to grips with the unalterable³⁴ fact that her parents were now divorced.

³⁴ Unalterable: not capable of being altered or changed

5

A Surprising Revelation

The next morning Alexa returned to the lab at 8:00, where Janine was waiting for her to resume their experiment. Today they were going to analyze the dolphin DNA that they had made yesterday.

“Each individual has a unique pattern of bands when the DNA is cut, and then the pieces are separated on a gel,” Janine explained, as she pointed to a column of bands on the computer screen. “The results of this experiment look sort of like a bar code, and just like a bar code, each one is unique and can be used to unambiguously¹ identify an individual.”

“Kind of like a fingerprint,” Alexa concluded.

“Exactly,” Janine replied.

Janine showed Alexa the instructions for this phase of the experiment and pointed to the first two steps. “Do you think you can handle this part on your own? I have a 9:00 A.M. meeting I need to attend.”

¹ Unambiguously: without ambiguity or uncertainty; clearly, precisely

“No problem,” Alexa replied. “I’ve done this before.”

“Terrific. I’ll be back around eleven and we’ll go on to step three.”

Alexa looked around the empty lab and started to feel a bit lonely. It didn’t help that Laurie hadn’t returned any of her e-mails, and Alexa had already written to her three times. She arbitrarily² concluded that Laurie must be too busy with her new job to check her e-mail. It pained her to think that Laurie might be apathetic³ about writing to her all summer.

Alexa decided that to alleviate⁴ her woes, she would make another trip to the beach. In fact, she had been anticipating⁵ this opportunity eagerly. She had her bathing suit on under her clothes and a towel and sunscreen packed in her backpack. She saw her opportunity after she completed the first step of her experiment—it needed to incubate for an hour. She grabbed her backpack and was out the door.

If anything, the beach was more beautiful than she remembered from yesterday. It looked like a utopian paradise, resplendent⁶ with glistening white sand. Alexa took a walk along the shore and collected a few seashells. It was hard to find a shell intact, but even the broken ones were interesting. The colors, textures, and shapes were so diverse.

Alexa decided to walk out to the end of the rocky outcrop that jutted into the bay. It looked like a good place to take a swim without being in direct view of the fishermen who were unloading their catch on the dock. There was a well-worn path leading out to the end of the point, and Alexa traversed it quickly.

The morning sun was becoming more intense every minute and Alexa surveyed the area for a place to set her backpack and clothes while she took a swim. This area appeared to be well used by the fishermen and

² **Arbitrarily:** based on or determined by individual preference or convenience rather than by necessity or the intrinsic nature of something

³ **Apathetic:** having little or no interest or concern; indifferent

⁴ **Alleviate:** to make (as suffering) more bearable

⁵ **Anticipating:** to look forward to as certain; expect

⁶ **Resplendent:** shining brilliantly; characterized by a glowing splendor

others. There was a flat-topped rock that looked like it was used as a table for cleaning fish and a fire pit for cooking. It also looked like a perfect place to take a swim. The large boulders at the very tip of the peninsula provided a natural staircase of sorts leading down to the clear blue water. The shadows on the water created by the large rocks wavered⁷ hypnotically in the gentle swells. Alexa couldn't wait to get in—it looked so inviting.

The rocks were a bit slippery, but the water was warm and refreshing. Alexa immersed⁸ herself in the transparent⁹ water and resurfaced several yards out. The bottom was sandy and it seemed relatively shallow in the area around the rocks. It was only about four feet deep and perfect for swimming. The water was so amazingly clear that it was easy to see the underwater activity—there were schools of fish swimming by her feet. The colors of the tropical fish were spectacular—vivid blue, orange, and iridescent¹⁰ silver.

This is truly a place of idealistic¹¹ beauty, Alexa thought as she floated on her back languidly.¹² The ocean waves were so mild in the cove that she felt relaxed by their gentle motion. It felt so restorative¹³ to take a refreshing swim after having spent endless hours in the stagnating¹⁴ environment of airplanes two days earlier.

A high-pitched squeak startled her out of her reverie. Alexa let out an involuntary gasp as she turned around toward the source of the noise. It was a dolphin! The dolphin dove underwater with a graceful arch of its back just as she turned around. “Oh, I hope it doesn't disappear!” she said out loud.

Whoosh! Alexa felt the water swirl around her legs as the dolphin swam by underwater. She felt a tingle of excitement go down her spine.

⁷ Wavered: to weave or sway unsteadily to and fro

⁸ Immerse: to plunge into something that surrounds or covers; especially to plunge or dip into a fluid

⁹ Transparent: fine or sheer enough to be seen through

¹⁰ Iridescent: a lustrous rainbowlike play of color caused by differential refraction of light waves (as from an oil slick, soap bubble, or fish scales) that tends to change as the angle of view changes

¹¹ Idealistic: characteristic of idealism (the practice of forming ideals or living under their influence)

¹² Languidly: lacking force or quickness of movement; slow

¹³ Restorative: something that serves to restore to consciousness, vigor, or health

¹⁴ Stagnating: remaining stale (usually from lack of circulation or flow)

She was only a little bit frightened. She knew that dolphins were, for the most part, very friendly.

Finally the dolphin surfaced, making a gurgling noise as it cleared the water from its blowhole. Now the dolphin was looking right at Alexa, and it was only about three feet away! The dolphin appeared to be trying to communicate something to her. It was making noises that sounded like a cacophony¹⁵ of chirps, gurgles, and squeaks. The dolphin seemed to be smiling at her, and Alexa couldn't help but notice the rows of sharp teeth.

"Hi there. What are you saying?" Alexa murmured softly. She felt compelled to talk and further the growing sense of kinship¹⁶ she felt with this animal. "I'm Alexa. What's your name?" Alexa continued a bit louder.

The dolphin replied with a squeak and a big toothy grin, legitimating¹⁷ Alexa's attempt to have a conversation.

"It looks like you have freckles!" Alexa noted. Indeed, the dolphin's bulbous forehead had several dark spots on it. "I think I'll call you Freckles. Would you like that name? Of course, I don't know if you're a girl or a boy, but I think the name Freckles would work for either one."

The dolphin dove underwater and swam in a big circle circumscribing¹⁸ Alexa. Alexa started swimming too, but it was hopeless to try to keep up with this graceful sea creature. The dolphin appeared to enjoy the chase, however mismatched it was. Alexa was thrilled as the lithe dolphin swam by her at a fast pace, almost brushing her as she swam. It was like they were playing a game and nobody had to explain the rules. They didn't need conventional linguistic¹⁹ communication—they understood each

¹⁵ **Cacophony:** harsh or discordant sound; dissonance

¹⁶ **Kinship:** the quality or state of being kin; relationship

¹⁷ **Legitimating:** to show or affirm to be justified

¹⁸ **Circumscribe:** to surround by or as if by a boundary

¹⁹ **Linguistic:** of or relating to language

other without words. Somehow, Alexa felt like she had made a visceral²⁰ connection with this charismatic creature.

Alexa felt a powerful urge to actually touch the dolphin. She held her arm out to touch the beautiful animal as she swam by. Freckles seemed to understand what Alexa was doing and didn't seem to mind at all. In fact, the dolphin swam right by Alexa's outstretched arm and Alexa stroked its back as it swam by. The dolphin's skin felt smooth and slippery.

"*Hola!*" Alexa heard a young man's voice from behind her.

Alexa turned around to see that it was the same boy from yesterday in his fishing boat.

"Hi! I'm José. How are you?" he continued in nearly perfect English with a just a trace of a Spanish accent. He was standing on the seat in his small fishing boat, which was bobbing about in the gentle swells.

"I'm Alexa." Before she had a chance to say another word, an unusually big swell caused José's boat to pitch and he was fighting for his balance, his arms flailing comically.

Splash! He hit the water and resurfaced with a sheepish look on his tanned face. "It's nice to meet you," he added with a grin.

Alexa couldn't help but burst out laughing. "That's quite an introduction!" José was smiling at her, apparently aware of little else. "Should we grab your boat so it doesn't float away?" Alexa inquired.

"No, it's fine. I dropped the anchor." José started swimming toward Freckles.

Alexa wondered if he truly was a lummo^x²¹ or if he had fallen in the water on purpose. She guessed it was the latter, seeing as though he had

²⁰ Visceral: dealing with crude or elemental emotions; instinctive

²¹ Lummo^x: clumsy person

the foresight to anchor the boat before he fell out. Well, at least he's got a sense of humor, she thought with a smile. He seemed to have a penchant²² for breaking the ice and making her laugh with his jovial²³ antics.

The dolphin appeared to recognize José and swam up beside him. José grabbed hold of its dorsal fin (the triangular-shaped fin on the dolphin's back) with his strong, tanned arms and hitched a ride through the water. José had a big smile on his face as he enjoyed being propelled²⁴ through the water by the dolphin. He let go when he was close to Alexa and stroked the dolphin's side as if to bid it farewell. "*Adios, Pecas!*" he said softly as she swam away.

"I didn't know the dolphin already had a name—I was calling it Freckles," Alexa said.

"That's what we call her too! *Pecas* is Spanish for 'Freckles!'"

"I like the name Pecas! I'll call her that too! Do you know that it's a 'she'?"

"Yes, Pecas is definitely a girl. She had a baby last year, and up until last week the calf was always at her side."

"What happened to the baby dolphin?" Alexa asked.

"I don't know—I feel so much sadness for her. She seems so distressed since the baby disappeared." José's face momentarily clouded over with sentiment²⁵ for the lost baby dolphin. They could see Pecas swimming off in the distance. José abruptly changed the subject. "I can tell you are American, but where in America are you from?"

"Ithaca, New York. My dad is a professor at Cornell University."

²² **Penchant:** a strong and continued inclination; liking

²³ **Jovial:** markedly good-humored, especially as evidenced by jollity and conviviality

²⁴ **Propelled:** to drive forward or onward by or as if by means of a force that imparts motion; pushed

²⁵ **Sentiment:** an attitude, thought, or judgment prompted by feeling

“I know of Cornell. It is such a good school. It is my dream to go to University in America. I am trying to save some money so that I can go, but it is very difficult. I need to help my mother and my sisters. But I will go someday,” José added fiercely, his indomitable²⁶ spirit revealing itself. “Do you go to University there?”

“Not yet. I’m still deciding where I will apply for college. I might go to Cornell—my parents really want me to go there—but I might go somewhere else.”

“Wow, you are very lucky,” José said admiringly.

“Yes, I guess so.” Alexa felt a tinge of guilt. She hadn’t really thought of herself as financially or socially privileged before. Not surprisingly, she found that this juxtaposition²⁷ with someone from a different background made her more introspective.²⁸ She had always just thought of her parents as members of the intelligentsia²⁹ rather than the social elite. Although she knew that she would go to college someday, Alexa had never really thought of it as an elusive³⁰ privilege. It seemed more like a predetermined³¹ rite of passage in her family.

José, by contrast, was working very hard to save money for school. Not only was he working in the kitchen at Puerto Marino, he was also supplementing his income by fishing. And it was not at all clear if he would have the opportunity to go to college. It didn’t appear that his parents would be able to subsidize³² his education. The disparity³³ in their backgrounds was immense. Alexa hoped that he didn’t assume that she

²⁶ Indomitable: incapable of being subdued; unconquerable

²⁷ Juxtaposition: the act or an instance of placing two or more things side by side

²⁸ Introspective: a reflective looking inward; an examination of one’s own thoughts and feelings

²⁹ Intelligentsia: intellectuals who form an artistic, social, or political vanguard or elite

³⁰ Elusive: tending to elude, as in tending to evade grasp or pursuit

³¹ Predetermined: to determine beforehand

³² Subsidize: to furnish with a subsidy (a grant or gift of money)

³³ Disparity: containing or made up of fundamentally different and often incongruous elements

was an elitist³⁴—because in reality, she considered herself to be very open-minded and egalitarian.³⁵

“How about you—do you live right around here?” Alexa probed gently.

“Yes I live in the village—you probably passed right by my house on the way here. I live there with my mother and father and my two sisters. Maybe you can come to my house to meet them!” José’s hospitality was undeterred by his modest dwellings.

“Maybe sometime, but I’m supposed to be working right now,” Alexa said with a laugh. “That’s why I didn’t want you to say anything last night at the cafeteria.”

“I understood,” José said, his brown eyes connecting with hers for a moment. “I have two jobs—besides the fishing, I mean. I work at Puerto Marino during the afternoons and evenings, and then I work at the library sometimes on the weekends. They have a computer that I can use at the library. I love computers!”

“Me too,” Alexa added, although she wasn’t sure if she really liked them as much as José did. Distracted by his intense gaze, she wasn’t quite sure what to say and “me too” just came out.

Off in the distance, it looked like Pecas was joined by two other dolphins that Alexa hadn’t noticed earlier. “I think they are going to the Coconut Bay,” José explained. “The dolphins like it there. I can show you if you like.” He motioned toward his boat.

“Oh, thanks, but I need to get back to work.” Alexa was starting to feel a bit like a malinger³⁶—she had skipped out on work now two mornings in a row.

³⁴ Elitist: consciousness of being or belonging to an elite (a socially superior group)

³⁵ Egalitarian: one who believes in human equality, especially with respect to social, economic, and political rights

³⁶ Maligner: to pretend incapacity (as illness) so as to avoid duty or work; shirk

“Are you sure you don’t want to come for just a little while?” José reiterated³⁷ his invitation.

“I really better get back before they know I’m gone.” She smiled at José’s handsome dark face.

“Maybe tomorrow I can show you Coconut Bay?” he asked hopefully.

“Maybe! See you later!”

“Wait! Do you like ping-pong? There is a ping-pong table in the recreation room next to the cafeteria. Sometimes I go there after work. Maybe I will see you there tonight?” José asked.

“Maybe. I’ll try to go there after dinner,” Alexa replied tentatively.³⁸

“Great! See you then!” he replied enthusiastically.

Alexa waved goodbye as she started swimming toward the outcrop and José waved back as he swam in the opposite direction back to his boat. She towed off quickly and pulled her clothes on over her wet bathing suit. Her shoulder-length brown hair was already starting to dry in the hot sun. As she scurried over the rocks to her motorbike, she looked over her shoulder at José. He was busy unloading his catch of fish onto the dock and didn’t see her. Alexa hopped on the bike and sped toward Puerto Marino. She would need to stop at the apartment to change clothes before returning to the lab.

Alexa burst into the lab, ignited³⁹ with the excitement of her morning exploit.⁴⁰ She glanced quickly at the clock on the wall—it was 10:42. She had been gone for well over an hour on her illicit⁴¹ adventure. Fortunately, Janine was not back yet. Alexa breathed a sigh of relief as she rushed to resume her experiment in the tranquility⁴² of the empty lab.

³⁷ Reiterate: to state or do over again or repeatedly, sometimes with wearying effect

³⁸ Tentatively: hesitantly

³⁹ Ignite: to heat up; excite

⁴⁰ Exploit: a deed or an act

⁴¹ Illicit: not permitted; against the rules or law

⁴² Tranquility: the quality or state of being tranquil (free from disturbance or turmoil)

This afternoon, they were going to complete the analysis of the DNA they made yesterday. The first step was to cut the DNA into fragments using a special enzyme that clipped the DNA in specific locations. They had already completed that step this morning. The second step was to separate the pieces of DNA in a gel so that the fragments could form the characteristic bar-code pattern. Preparing the gel for the experiment seemed somewhat akin to making Jell-O, Alexa thought. First the gelatinous material is heated and then it is poured into the rectangular mold. Alexa watched her flask containing the “Jell-O” as it started to boil in the microwave oven, then deftly⁴³ removed the flask and gave it a gentle swirl.

Alexa cooled the boiling liquid by swirling the flask in a warm-water bath, and then she carefully poured the gel into the mold. She reflected silently in the quiet lab as the gel hardened in the apparatus.⁴⁴ I’m actually really interested to see the results of this experiment, she thought. It was a surprisingly fulfilling and exciting process to take cells from an animal, make DNA from the cells, and finally to actually visualize the DNA. Alexa had a surprising revelation⁴⁵—maybe her father was right, about this one thing at least. Perhaps it *was* better to spend the summer doing something meaningful in a laboratory rather than frittering⁴⁶ away the time at the shopping mall back home.

It seemed that despite the inauspicious⁴⁷ beginning, the summer was turning out to be rather interesting after all. Alexa couldn’t wait to e-mail Laurie with a surfeit⁴⁸ of details about the dolphins, the lab, the beach—and, of course, José.

⁴³ Deftly: characterized by facility and skill

⁴⁴ Apparatus: an instrument or appliance designed for a specific operation

⁴⁵ Revelation: the act of revealing an enlightening or divine truth

⁴⁶ Fritter: to spend or waste bit by bit on trifles, or without commensurate return

⁴⁷ Inauspicious: not auspicious or favorable; ominous

⁴⁸ Surfeit: an overabundant supply; excess

6

Pecas' Plea

The recreation room at Puerto Marino was exceedingly simple, almost ascetic¹ in its décor. It was as if aesthetic concerns had been set aside, and in their place, a utilitarian² theme prevailed. The walls were unadorned and the floor was bare cement. On one side of the room there was a reading corner, with several plain gray chairs clustered around a low table and a rack of magazines and newspapers. On the other side, two computer terminals faced the wall. In the middle, there was the ping-pong table, which looked new and virtually unused.

Alexa barely noticed anything about the sparsely³ adorned room—she quickly scanned the area to see if José was there. The room was empty except for one person sitting in the reading corner. To her dismay, that person was not José—it was Charlotte! She was sitting there quietly reading a fashion magazine and didn't notice Alexa's entrance.

Alexa decided to avoid Charlotte and instead to sit down at one of the computers and wait for José. She logged on to check her e-mail yet again. There was still no reply from Laurie! But there was a very sweet

¹ Ascetic: plain, stark, simple; austere in appearance, manner, or attitude [not to be confused with aesthetic, which means pleasing in appearance or effect; beauty]

² Utilitarian: no-frills, practical and functional as opposed to decorative

³ Sparsely: of few and scattered elements; especially not thickly grown or settled

note from her father, who was eager to hear about her project in the lab. He also said that he missed her very much, which gave Alexa a nice warm glow inside.

Alexa started to compose a reply when someone sat down beside her.

“*Hola!*” José smiled brightly. “I hope you weren’t waiting long—I just got out of work.” José spoke very quietly, almost in a whisper.

“No, I just got here,” Alexa replied in a conspiratorial whisper.

“So, are you any good at ping-pong?” José asked.

“Hardly!”

“Oh, I’ll bet you are a virtuoso⁴ ping-pong player!”

“You’ll see!” Alexa replied, laughing at José’s pronouncement.⁵ In reality, she had only played the game three times before, and that was several years ago.

As they picked out their paddles, José continued talking in a hushed voice. “Why are we whispering?” Alexa finally asked.

“Well, I am not really supposed to be using this recreation room. Usually it’s not a problem. I am friends with most of the people who work here and they don’t mind at all. There’s just one guard who found me in here before, and he was very strict—he threatened to get me fired. So, hopefully, he’s not working tonight!”

“Yikes! Maybe we shouldn’t play,” Alexa said with concern.

“It will be fine, don’t worry.” José picked up the ping-pong ball and beckoned to Alexa, who relented and took her position at the end of the table opposite José. They started hitting the ball back and forth. Neither one of them was very skillful at the game, but this only seemed to fuel their laughter and fun.

⁴ Virtuoso: expert, incredibly skillful and masterful

⁵ Pronouncement: a usually formal declaration of opinion

Alexa could see Charlotte in the background, pretending to be preoccupied⁶ with her magazine. But instead she was watching Alexa and José have a good time, laughing and being silly. It looked like she wanted to join them. Alexa felt a bit discourteous⁷ ignoring Charlotte this way, but truthfully, she didn't want Charlotte encroaching⁸ on her special friendship with José.

But she couldn't ignore her indefinitely. When Alexa inadvertently hit the ball a little too hard, it went flying over José's head and landed right at Charlotte's feet! Alexa cringed as José went over to retrieve the ball.

"I'm sorry!" José apologized to Charlotte as he picked up the ball.

"Don't worry about it. It looks like fun," Charlotte said demurely.

"Did you want to play with us?" José was unfailingly polite.

Charlotte looked over at Alexa expectantly. It looked like Charlotte wanted to join them, but she didn't want to intrude if Alexa didn't want her to. Alexa, however, didn't really want Charlotte to join them. She knew it would be polite to reiterate José's invitation and make Charlotte feel welcome, but instead she remained silent.

"Oh, no thanks—I was just leaving anyway," Charlotte replied politely as she got up and started to leave.

Just as Alexa was breathing a sigh of relief, a uniformed security guard walked into the room, his gaze focused on José. Alexa could tell by the look on José's face that this was the guard he would rather avoid.

"What are you doing in here?" the guard asked José sternly. "I thought I told you this room is only for the resident staff and their children—not for the locals who work in the kitchen!"

⁶ Preoccupied: engrossed, busy or occupied with thought

⁷ Discourteous: lacking courtesy; rude, impolite

⁸ Encroaching: to enter by gradual steps or by stealth into the possessions or rights of another

Alexa felt her stomach sink. She would feel so terrible if José lost his job. There was an awkward silence as José faced the wrath⁹ of the guard without a response. He was indefensible¹⁰ in the face of the guard's charges, and he instinctively knew that combativeness¹¹ would only worsen his situation.

"It's quite all right, Mr. Jamison," Charlotte said sweetly but authoritatively. "He's my guest—I invited him." Charlotte smiled coyly at the guard, placating¹² his anger. It was clear who was in control of the situation. Charlotte, being the daughter of the Colonel Brandt, was used to getting her way around Puerto Marino. Alexa wasn't sure exactly what sort of role Colonel Brandt played at Puerto Marino, but it was clearly an important one because he and his family were treated like VIPs by the staff.

"I do apologize, Miss Brandt." Mr. Jamison immediately tried to rectify¹³ the situation. "Sorry to have interrupted," he added, hastily departing.

"Thank you so much!" José said gratefully.

"That was really nice of you," Alexa added.

"Don't mention it—it was nothing, really," Charlotte replied, brushing off their praise. "Enjoy your game," Charlotte added politely as she too departed.

"Whew!" José said in relief after Charlotte departed. Alexa was also immensely relieved. The two continued playing ping-pong, but Alexa couldn't help but think about Charlotte's surprising actions. She never expected Charlotte to be her advocate¹⁴—in fact, Alexa had viewed her as more of an adversary.¹⁵ Even after Alexa neglected to invite her to join

⁹ Wrath: strong vengeful anger or indignation

¹⁰ Indefensible: incapable of being justified or excused; inexcusable

¹¹ Combativeness: marked by eagerness to fight or contend

¹² Placating: to soothe or mollify especially by concessions; appease

¹³ Rectify: to set right; remedy, correct

¹⁴ Advocate: one who pleads the cause of another; specifically one who pleads the cause of another before a tribunal or judicial court

¹⁵ Adversary: one who contends with, opposes, or resists; opponent, rival

their game, Charlotte was not at all vindictive.¹⁶ Quite the contrary, she had generously wielded her influence to exculpate¹⁷ José. Alexa realized that perhaps her preconceptions¹⁸ about Charlotte were wrong. Maybe she *was* worth getting to know a little bit better.



Alexa's first experiment at Puerto Marino was an unmitigated¹⁹ failure. Janine looked over her shoulder at the computer screen the next morning and said some encouraging words. Janine was being very graceful with her solicitous²⁰ attention, but Alexa could plainly see that the experiment was botched.²¹ The image should have been showing crisp bands forming a characteristic bar code, but instead there was an amorphous²² smear.

"I'm not quite sure what went wrong here," Janine analyzed. "It looks like something might have gone wrong with the gel."

"I followed the instructions," Alexa replied, looking a bit forlorn.

"Yes, but sometimes mistakes just happen. Don't fret about it. Just try it again today." Janine started to leave for her daily 9:00 A.M. meeting, but the expression on Alexa's face revealed that she needed further assurance.²³

"Anything worthwhile requires a lot of perseverance. Wasn't it Thomas Edison who said genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration?" Janine smiled warmly at Alexa and continued her speech. "All successful scientists have a large number of botched experiments under their belts. The thing that makes them successful is that they use their minds to figure out what they need to fix and they keep trying. It's analogous²⁴

¹⁶ Vindictive: disposed to seek revenge; spiteful

¹⁷ Exculpate: to clear from alleged fault or guilt

¹⁸ Preconceptions: opinions that are formed prior to actual knowledge or experience

¹⁹ Unmitigated: not lessened; unrelieved

²⁰ Solicitous: manifesting or expressing solicitude (attentive care and protectiveness)

²¹ Botched: to foul up hopelessly; failed, spoiled

²² Amorphous: without shape or form

²³ Assurance: something that inspires or tends to inspire confidence

²⁴ Analogous: showing an analogy or a likeness that permits one to draw an analogy

to learning how to ride a bike. When you fall off, you need to get back on and try again.”

“Yes, but doesn’t the saying go that once you learn how to ride a bike you never forget? Does that mean that my experiments will always work now?” Alexa asked, her eyebrows raised to emphasize the cynicism²⁵ of her retort.

Janine laughed heartily. “You are too smart for your own good! This is just what I need to brighten my morning—satire²⁶ and spunk from my summer student!”

The two of them shared a good laugh. Janine looked at her watch and then hurriedly gathered her things to leave for her meeting. As she breezed out the door, she cheerfully yelled goodbye and good luck to Alexa.

Once again, the lab was quiet and Alexa set her mind to the task before her, resolving to make it work. This time she would follow the instructions meticulously.²⁷ She carefully and methodically²⁸ poured the gel again.

While the molten gel was setting in its mold, Alexa couldn’t resist taking another trip to the beach. She was anxious to see the dolphins again and admittedly, to see José as well.

It was another beautiful, sunny day and the wind rushing by her felt great as she drove to the beach on her motorbike. She hurried to the end of the rocky outcrop to see if Pecas was there, but there was no sign of the dolphin.

Off in the distance she could see a boat. It looked like José! He was waving to her and it looked like he had altered his course to come her way.

²⁵ Cynicism: having or showing the attitude or temper of a cynic (a faultfinding captious critic)

²⁶ Satire: wit, irony, or sarcasm used to expose and discredit vice or folly

²⁷ Meticulously: extremely carefully, painstakingly

²⁸ Methodically: habitually proceeding according to method; systematically

“*Hola!*” José yelled over the noise of the motor. His boat was almost to the large rock where Alexa was standing when he cut the motor. He scurried to the front of the boat, where he nimbly seated himself on the bow with his legs dangling off the front end of the boat. He deftly stepped onto the rock and quickly turned and caught the boat to prevent it from hitting the outcrop.

“How are you?” José asked as he stood next to her on the large boulder.

“I’m fine,” Alexa managed to say. She couldn’t think of what to say next. Even though they had talked quite a bit last night playing ping-pong, Alexa felt shy all over again. She hadn’t noticed how tall José was until he was standing right next to her like this. And really, really cute, she couldn’t help thinking. An awkward silence ensued.

“I saw Pecas and the other dolphins over at Coconut Bay. Do you want to come with me to see?” José looked down at her and saw her hesitation. “It’s only a few minutes from here,” he added persuasively.

“OK,” she gave in with a smile. “But I have to be back in a half an hour to get back to work.”

“No problem,” José replied confidently as he held the boat with one hand and reached the other hand out for her to hold as she stepped into the boat.

Alexa sat in the middle of the old rowboat as José ran the outboard motor from the back seat. She looked at the ripped cushions and well-worn fishing equipment. While the boat seemed marginally seaworthy, it certainly could use some refurbishing.²⁹ Nevertheless, she couldn’t help

²⁹ Refurbish: to brighten or freshen up; renovate

but think that it felt really great to be out on the clear blue water with the fresh salty air rushing by.

“There’s Puerto Marino,” José pointed out, raising his voice over the loud motor.

“Wow! I didn’t realize that it was so close!” Alexa replied, surprised to see that Puerto Marino was actually adjacent to the bay where she was swimming. She could see the exterior of the enormous dolphin facility with the sturdy white boat moored to the dock. The road must have wound around the town in a circuitous³⁰ fashion, only to end up at the beach right next to the compound, she realized.

“And the next bay is Coconut Bay,” José added as they went around the peninsula that delineated³¹ the border between Puerto Marino and Coconut Bay. “This is the best fishing area around. That’s why the dolphins like it here, too.” José smiled and pointed to the middle of the bay where a group of four dolphins were jumping out of the water.

The bay was deserted except for two fishing boats. From a distance they could see a scuba diver climb up onto the boat. The diver was bringing something out of the water, but Alexa couldn’t make out what it was. She watched curiously.

“They are diving for lobsters,” José explained.

“Diving for lobsters?” Alexa repeated with disbelief. “Don’t they catch the lobsters in traps?”

“Not around here. It is so much more efficient to dive down and get them by hand. And it pays well. It’s one of the few ways that anyone can make any money around here. But it is extremely dangerous.”

³⁰ Circuitous: having a circular or winding course; roundabout, indirect

³¹ Delineated: to mark the outline of; demarcated

“Why is it dangerous? I didn’t think that scuba diving was that dangerous,” Alexa asked curiously.

“It is very dangerous if you don’t have the proper training and equipment. My father got the bends diving for lobsters. Now he is in a wheelchair—he probably won’t be able to walk again. He made me promise that I would never do it!”

“I hope you don’t go diving for lobsters either!”

“Well, unfortunately, conventional fishing isn’t nearly as profitable. I was lucky to find the job at Puerto Marino. I need to help my family and hopefully, save some money to go to college someday.”

“I’m really amazed at all you do. I feel like I’ve had it so easy by comparison.”

“Did you want to go swimming?” José inquired, shrugging off her compliments. The beautiful sandy beach rimmed with coconut palms beckoned invitingly. He pulled the boat up to shore and again held his hand out to Alexa to help her out of the boat.

“Yes! I can’t wait. I wonder if Pecas will recognize me?” Alexa was thankful she had worn her bathing suit under her clothes again today. She started wading into the water and José was quick to follow. Alexa could hardly contain her excitement as she walked on the sandy ocean bottom toward deeper water.

One of the dolphins approached, and Alexa stood still as José caught up to her. He stood by her side as they both waited quietly for the dolphin to come closer. In this minute of silence between them—a moment that didn’t feel the least bit awkward—Alexa couldn’t help but feel that she and José had begun a special friendship.

“Pecas!” Alexa exclaimed. “It’s you! How are you?” Alexa talked to the dolphin as it surfaced in front of them. “I’m so happy to see you.”

Pecas appeared to be attempting a squeaky reply.

“How come Pecas is so friendly and the other dolphins are keeping their distance?” Alexa asked José curiously. In the distance, three other feral³² dolphins hovered, reticent³³ to join Pecas in her folly³⁴ with the humans.

“Several dolphins are friendly with the fishermen around here. Some don’t seem to like to interact with people and some do.” José shrugged as he gestured toward the dolphins in the distance. “The ones that like people—we give them fish when we have some extra. It’s been going on for generations. My grandfather fished in these waters, and he has many stories to tell about the dolphins.”

“My mom told me you’re not supposed to feed dolphins in the wild. It’s not ethical.”³⁵

“Why not?” José asked, puzzled. He hardly saw feeding a dolphin as a heinous³⁶ act. As far as he could tell, it appeared to be inconsequential.³⁷

“Well, I think that it interferes with their normal routine of hunting for their food. They might forget how to catch fish if people keep giving fish to them,” Alexa said, trying not to sound too confrontational.

“That’s absurd!” José replied, indignant³⁸ at the suggestion that his actions would cause the dolphins harm. “They still catch fish—I see them do it!” José pointed out why, from his perspective, Alexa’s argument was illogical.³⁹

“Well, they look fine to me, too. Look at Pecas jump!” Alexa changed the subject, backing off her earlier assertion. She hadn’t meant to incriminate

³² Feral: not domesticated or cultivated; wild

³³ Reticent: restrained in expression, presentation, or appearance

³⁴ Folly: lack of good sense or normal prudence and foresight; foolishness

³⁵ Ethical: involving or expressing moral approval or disapproval

³⁶ Heinous: hatefully or shockingly evil

³⁷ Inconsequential: of no significance or importance

³⁸ Indignant: filled with or marked by indignation (anger aroused by something unjust, unworthy, or mean)

³⁹ Illogical: not observing the principles of logic; not reasonable or sound

José or to be antagonistic;⁴⁰ she had only been trying to make conversation. She decided that in order to avoid getting entangled⁴¹ in an argument with José she would try to find a topic that didn't generate so much friction.⁴² He was a very passionate person, she realized, as she began to analyze his actions in her mind. On the one hand, his impassioned⁴³ love for life was incredibly attractive. He was so full of positive energy that he simply radiated enthusiasm. On the other hand, he tended to see things as black or white. If he were to have a fault, this would be it, she thought. But on the whole, Alexa concluded, he was simply wonderful.

José also seemed eager to get past the awkward moment and showed her how to hold her arms out so that Pecas could swim next to their outstretched hands. Alexa was thrilled when Pecas swam right in between her and José. They both stroked the dolphin's side. Even though she had already touched Pecas yesterday, it still felt unimaginably exciting to swim with this wild dolphin and especially to touch it. Alexa tried to figure out why she felt so intensely emotional about these encounters with Pecas. It must be that the dolphins seem so similar to us, and yet so different, she thought. Communicating with them seemed somehow profound in a way that was hard to put her finger on.

It appeared that Pecas also had communication on her mind. Although her face appeared fixed in a permanent smile, her tone of voice suggested otherwise. It looked like Pecas was trying to tell her human friends something upsetting in her series of high-pitched squeaks. She swam out a ways and then turned back to face Alexa and José, only to "speak" again.

⁴⁰ Antagonistic: marked by or resulting from antagonism (actively expressed opposition or hostility)

⁴¹ Entangled: to involve in a perplexing or troublesome situation

⁴² Friction: the clashing between two persons or parties of opposed views

⁴³ Impassion: to arouse the feelings or passions of

“I wonder what she’s trying to tell us?” Alexa asked José, puzzled at the dolphin’s erratic⁴⁴ behavior.

“I don’t know. She’s been acting this way ever since her baby disappeared last week,” José replied in a voice filled with concern.

Pecas swam out farther and repeated her urgent cry, goading⁴⁵ them to do something.

“I wonder if she wants us to follow her?” Alexa asked.

“Yes! Let’s go!” José replied, without wasting a second. He took her hand as they raced through the water with great alacrity⁴⁶ back to the boat. Alexa grabbed her backpack off the beach and tossed it into the boat. José had already pulled the boat off of the beach and was standing next to it in shallow water holding his hand out for Alexa. He helped Alexa into the boat, pushed the boat into deeper water, and quickly hopped in himself, anxious to begin their urgent quest.⁴⁷

“Do you think she’ll be afraid of the motor?” Alexa inquired over the noise of the outboard engine.

“I don’t think so. The dolphins here are used to the fishing boats. In fact, they like to ride in the bow waves. You’ll see,” José answered confidently.

Sure enough, Pecas joined them by leading the way in front of the boat. She swam right in the wake of the bow, periodically jumping clear out of the water. Alexa was impressed by how effortlessly Pecas swam at a fast clip.

It wasn’t long, however, before Pecas broke away and turned to “talk” to them once again. She seemed to be leading them to go in a new direction.

⁴⁴ Erratic: characterized by lack of consistency, regularity, or uniformity; deviating from what is ordinary or standard

⁴⁵ Goading: to incite or rouse as if with a goad; provoking, prodding

⁴⁶ Alacrity: promptness in response; cheerful readiness

⁴⁷ Quest: an act or instance of seeking; pursuit, search

Alexa turned to José. They were silent for a moment. They knew they couldn't possibly follow Pecas where she wanted to go. She was headed straight for Puerto Marino!

"We can't go there!" Alexa voiced the obvious.

"It looks like she's headed straight for the dolphin facility. I wonder why she would want to go near there?" José asked, puzzled. He prided himself in his uncanny⁴⁸ ability to understand these animals.

"Maybe she wants to see one of the dolphins that's living in there," Alexa offered.

"But she has lots of dolphin friends out here in the bay. If her cries are symptomatic⁴⁹ of her loneliness, why wouldn't she be heading out into the bay to play with the other dolphins?"

"Didn't you say her baby is missing? What if her baby is in there?" Alexa theorized.⁵⁰ It was a horrifying thought—the specter⁵¹ of such a tragedy made her sick to her stomach.

"Do they have such young dolphins in there?" José asked incredulously. Although he worked at Puerto Marino, he had never been inside the dolphin facility.

"I know they have at least one dolphin that's only around twelve months old," Alexa replied, thinking of little Coco.

"How could they possibly take a baby dolphin from its mother! *That* is really unethical!" José quickly condemned⁵² the reprehensible⁵³ act. He could barely contain his anger. "It's also illegal! The government hasn't given out any permits to catch the dolphins here. In fact, they promulgated⁵⁴ a law two years ago that made it illegal for anyone to catch a wild dolphin in these waters. There's a statute⁵⁵ that specifically protects

⁴⁸ Uncanny: being beyond what is normal or expected, suggesting superhuman or supernatural powers

⁴⁹ Symptomatic: characteristic, indicative

⁵⁰ Theorized: to form a theory about; speculate

⁵¹ Specter: a haunting or disturbing image or prospect (can also refer to a ghost or apparition)

⁵² Condemn: to declare to be bad, wrong, or evil

⁵³ Reprehensible: deserving criticism

⁵⁴ Promulgate: to put (a law) into action or force

⁵⁵ Statute: a law enacted by the legislative branch of a government

these dolphins! That dolphin facility should be razed⁵⁶ to the ground and all of the dolphins set free!”

“We don’t know for sure that Pecas’ baby is in there,” Alexa said, hoping to calm José. But inside, she felt a sense of dread. Obviously, Puerto Marino had to get its dolphins from somewhere, and what better source than the waters right outside the facility? If no one saw them actually catching the dolphin, who would ever know? How could anyone ever figure out where the dolphins came from?

“We have to do something about this!” José was adamant. In his mind, it was incumbent⁵⁷ upon them to find a solution to this dilemma.

“First we need to figure out if Pecas’ baby is in Puerto Marino,” Alexa said, her mind churning and beginning to formulate⁵⁸ an idea. She knew they needed to be calm and rational⁵⁹ about this.

“How are we going to do that?” José asked, his voice laden with emotion. “We can’t even get into the dolphin facility, the security is so tight!”

“I think I have an idea,” Alexa replied thoughtfully.

⁵⁶ Razed: demolished, destroyed to the ground

⁵⁷ Incumbent: obligatory, imposed as a duty (is also commonly used to refer to a politician who is currently in office)

⁵⁸ Formulate: to reduce to or express in a formula

⁵⁹ Rational: relating to, based on, or agreeable to reason; lucid

7

The Clandestine Mission

Alexa looked at her watch—it was 9:15 A.M. She waited impatiently at the water's edge at the end of the rocky outcrop for José to pick her up in his boat. They had settled into a routine during the past week of meeting each other every day between 9:15 and 10:15. They had a mission to carry out and they were determined to see it through to the end.

Like clockwork, José's boat approached from the distance, right on time. Alexa was much more agile¹ hopping into the boat now, having practiced this maneuver every day for the past week. But José still held his hand out for her to hold when she jumped aboard and Alexa always took it, even though at this point, she really didn't need to. The past week had strengthened the bond between them. Not only were they friends, they were now collaborators on a clandestine² mission.

¹ Agile: marked by a ready ability to move with a quick, easy grace

² Clandestine: marked by, held in, or conducted with secrecy

"I think Pecas is out in the open water near Coconut Bay," José said, pointing off in the distance. He always had some idea where the dolphins were from his early morning fishing expedition.

"Let's go!" Alexa replied with enthusiasm. "We don't have much time!" She began unpacking her backpack. She got out her sterile swab, still covered in its plastic wrapping, and her sterile, capped test tube and got them ready for their endeavor.³

Last week, Alexa had gone back to the molecular biology lab with a newfound sense of purpose when she realized she had figured out a way to determine if Coco or one of the other captive dolphins at Puerto Marino was actually Pecas' baby. She had burst back into the laboratory that fateful day to excitedly ask Janine a question: "Can the DNA analysis that we're doing be used to figure out if two dolphins are related?"

"Of course," Janine replied. "That's how paternity tests are done."

At that moment, a plan crystallized⁴ in her mind. If DNA analysis could be used to determine paternity, it seemed reasonable to assume it could be used to test maternity as well. Alexa was thrilled to have figured out such a cunning⁵ way to determine if Pecas' baby was one of the dolphins at Puerto Marino.

Alexa's father had been even more helpful. When Alexa told him she wanted to determine the relationship between two dolphins by analyzing their DNA, he was ecstatic⁶ that she had taken an interest in molecular biology. To help feed her curiosity, he faxed several papers to her that described how to compare two DNA samples and determine if they are related. Then he lectured her on how to formulate and test a hypothesis.⁷

³ Endeavor: to attempt (as the fulfillment of an obligation) by exertion of effort

⁴ Crystallize: to cause to take a definite form

⁵ Cunning: displaying keen insight

⁶ Ecstatic: of, relating to, or marked by ecstasy (a state of overwhelming emotion, especially rapturous delight)

⁷ Hypothesis: a tentative assumption made in order to draw out and test its logical or empirical consequences; theory

Alexa assured him she harbored no preconceived⁸ notions⁹ of the outcome of the experiment—she intended to be scrupulous¹⁰ and unbiased in her interpretation of the data.

But in order to get started, they needed to get some DNA from Pecas. This was proving to be a real challenge. They needed to swab some cells from the inside of Pecas' mouth in a manner similar to the way a doctor would take a throat culture.

It was José's idea that they could probably do this while feeding Pecas fish. He had been feeding Pecas on occasion for years, so the dolphin trusted him. The only problem was that Pecas ate the fish so quickly—it looked like she was swallowing them whole—that they could never even get near her mouth with the swab. This time José was planning on holding the fish very close to the boat to see if Pecas would come up to him and take it right out of his hand. Today he had three buckets full of fish. Yesterday, they had gone through all of the fish that he had caught in the morning without successfully getting the cells from Pecas.

Alexa was pleasantly surprised to see how dedicated José was to their undertaking. Initially, Alexa had been concerned that José was going to do something radical¹¹ out of vengeance¹²—he was so emotional about this issue. Alexa's scheme,¹³ however, was a persuasive one. She convinced him that by using DNA from the dolphins, their conjecture¹⁴ was easily verifiable.¹⁵ Now they shared a bond of solidarity¹⁶ in their passion for the dolphins and the search for Pecas' baby. José also seemed fascinated with Alexa's work in the laboratory. Not only did he share her reverence for the power of DNA, he was anxious to help with the experiment she

⁸ Preconceived: to form (as an opinion) prior to actual knowledge or experience

⁹ Notions: a theory or belief held by a person or group

¹⁰ Scrupulous: punctiliously exact; painstaking

¹¹ Radical: tending or disposed to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions

¹² Vengeance: punishment inflicted in retaliation for an injury or offense

¹³ Scheme: a plan or program of action, especially a crafty or secret one

¹⁴ Conjecture: a conclusion deduced by surmise or guesswork

¹⁵ Verifiable: capable of being verified (to establish the truth, accuracy, or reality of)

¹⁶ Solidarity: unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on community of interests, objectives, and standards

had designed. Alexa thought José might be able to join her in the lab on the weekend, but today was already Friday and they still hadn't successfully obtained the cells from Pecas' mouth.

José had a look of determination on his face as they approached the area where the dolphins were swimming. He looked intently at the frolicking animals, trying to identify Pecas. In the distance, they could see the dolphin facility of Puerto Marino looming ominously¹⁷ on the shore like a huge monstrosity.¹⁸

"I think I see her!" Alexa exclaimed, pointing the way.

José nodded, slowing the boat and then turning the motor off completely. He threw several fish into the water to get the dolphins' attention. It worked! Pecas came right over, clearly looking for more fish. José lavished¹⁹ praise on the approaching dolphin. The other dolphins stayed behind and eyed the proceedings warily. It was as if they didn't espouse²⁰ close contact with humans, but nevertheless, they were interested to watch Pecas interact with her human friends.

Alexa made her way back to the end of the boat where José was talking softly to Pecas. He was trying to coax her to take the fish right from his hand instead of tossing the fish to her, which was her customary way of accepting handouts from humans. Alexa tried to keep her balance in the wobbly boat as she walked toward the back, swab and test tube in hand. She steadied herself with a hand on his shoulder and squatted down beside him, trying to get within reach of Pecas.

José talked continually to Pecas in Spanish as he held a fish in his outstretched hand. Alexa wondered what he was saying. Without taking his eyes off of Pecas or relenting in his hypnotic Spanish rhapsody,²¹ he

¹⁷ Ominously: being or exhibiting an omen, especially foreboding or foreshadowing evil

¹⁸ Monstrosity: an object of great and often frightening size, force, or complexity

¹⁹ Lavish: expending or bestowing profusely

²⁰ Espouse: to take up and support as a cause; become attached to

²¹ Rhapsody: a highly emotional utterance (can also refer to a highly emotional literary work, etc.)

motioned with his free hand for the swab. Alexa knew that he didn't want her to get too close to the dolphin's sharp teeth. She handed the swab over. Pecas took the fish from José's hand and swallowed it rapidly. José quickly readied another fish. As Pecas approached to take the second fish, he quickly swabbed the inside of her cheek with the swab in one hand and then deftly gave her the fish with the other hand.

"I think we've got it!" José exclaimed as he sealed the swab in the sterile test tube.

"It looked good! But we'll see," Alexa replied cautiously. Two days ago they thought they had a sample, but when she returned to the lab, there were no cells on the swab. It probably never even touched the inside of the dolphin's mouth.

José, however, was in no mood for understated²² optimism. He was assuming that their tenacity²³ had paid off. He stood up on the seat of the boat and held his arms up in victory. "We did it!" he yelled. True to form, he started to lose his balance and soon was flailing comically trying to regain his footing. Down he fell into the water with a resounding splash!

Alexa started laughing at the sight of his exuberance and soon couldn't stop. He had probably fallen on purpose. Nevertheless, his jollity²⁴ was infectious. Pecas also seemed amused—she squawked animatedly.

"Come swimming with us!" José beckoned.

"OK," Alexa laughed. How could she possibly refrain from indulging?

Pecas, who seemed unfazed by the swabbing, had invented a whimsical²⁵ new game of fetch that kept them all playing together. The dolphin dove about ten feet down to the bottom and returned with a sponge on her rostrum (the protruding mouth of the dolphin, analogous to the beak

²² Understate: to state or present with restraint, especially for effect

²³ Tenacity: the quality or state of being tenacious (persistent in maintaining or adhering to something)

²⁴ Jollity: the quality or state of being jolly (full of high spirits)

²⁵ Whimsical: resulting from or characterized by whim or caprice; lightly fanciful

of a bird) and swam by José, who grabbed it curiously. When he threw the sponge back in the water, Pecas quickly retrieved it and swam by Alexa, as if asking her to do the same. Alexa was delighted to comply.

Inevitably, however, Pecas began her strange behavior of plaintive²⁶ cries. Swimming again toward Puerto Marino, she would turn back to face her two human friends and desperately beseech them to join her. Alexa and José had begun to notice a pattern with Pecas' actions. She would play with them for a short while, and then, when she had their full attention, she would begin this compulsive²⁷ behavior.

"It looks like our fun and games are over," José said sadly.

"Yes, I think so too. I really want to get back to the lab anyway," Alexa replied, as she pulled herself into the boat. As the words came out of her mouth, Alexa realized that for the first time, she really meant it—she couldn't wait to get back in the lab.

"I wish I could come with you! I can't wait for tomorrow," José said passionately. José planned to sneak into the lab to join Alexa after he worked his breakfast shift at the Puerto Marino cafeteria. But his enthusiasm for science and his special friendship with Pecas made it hard for him to wait so long. "I want to help you with the experiment! Will you tell me all about it? I want to know *everything!*" he added vehemently.²⁸

"Of course," Alexa replied. "But don't worry, you'll be there for the most interesting part—the results, when we find out if Pecas' baby is in there." The two of them climbed into the boat and José took his seat near the outboard engine. He rummaged through his backpack instead of starting the motor, like usual.

²⁶ **Plaintive:** expressive of suffering or woe; mournful

²⁷ **Compulsive:** obsessive, habitual, or irrational behavior

²⁸ **Vehemently:** marked by forceful energy

“I have something for you,” José said shyly. He handed her a necklace with a large tooth in the center, surrounded by beautiful and delicate pink shells. “It’s a shark’s tooth, to ward off evil spirits. It’s to bring you good luck.”

Alexa was stunned into silence. She had never received a gift from a boy before. She was so surprised that she barely could respond. “It’s beautiful! Thank you,” Alexa managed to say as she accepted the gift and fastened the talisman²⁹ around her neck.

“I caught the shark myself,” José added shyly. He didn’t need to embellish³⁰ this fact with any narratives³¹ about his heroic bravery. Alexa was already impressed with his valor and touched by his gesture.

“I love it.” Alexa was amazed with José—he could be so courageous as to catch a shark and yet so tender and sweet to make a necklace. And she was filled with unutterable³² happiness that he had made the necklace for her.

“Alexa,” José began in a serious and thoughtful tone of voice, “do you think that you could come to the library tomorrow morning—very early—around six? I want to show you something before I go to work in the morning and before we begin this experiment.” José climbed into the boat and looked right into her eyes to underscore³³ the importance of his request.

“Sure,” Alexa replied. How could she possibly refuse when she looked into his soft brown eyes? “I think I know where it is—is it right on the main road in town?”

“Yes, with a sign out front saying *biblioteca*.”

“But will it be open so early in the morning?” Alexa asked.

“Don’t worry, I have a key. Just come. It’s important.”

“I’ll be there,” Alexa replied with certainty.

²⁹ Talisman: an object held as a charm to avert evil and bring good fortune

³⁰ Embellish: to heighten the attractiveness of by adding ornamental details

³¹ Narratives: something that is narrated; a story

³² Unutterable: being beyond the powers of description

³³ Underscore: give emphasis to, highlight

8

Not a Nemesis

Alexa and Janine waited in line at the cafeteria for lunch. Alexa was nervous and excited at the prospect of seeing José again, even though she had just left his company a mere hour and a half ago.

Alexa had returned to the lab, adorned¹ with her new necklace and glowing with joy. She was still in shock, never having received such a tangible form of adulation² from a boy. She kept reaching up to touch the sharp tooth, just to check that it was still there. Alexa loved the necklace—she loved the way the rough shark's tooth was couched³ in the soft pink shells. The combination of the masculine sharp tooth with the feminine pink shells might appear mismatched to some people, but to Alexa, it was strangely harmonious.⁴ It was such an original, unique gift—not some hackneyed⁵ old heart on a chain or class ring like you might expect from a high school boy.

When Janine first saw Alexa wearing the necklace, she eyed it curiously. It was hardly inconspicuous. But Janine, being ever so discreet, didn't harangue⁶ or tease Alexa in the slightest. Janine didn't even mention the

¹ Adorned: to enliven or decorate as if with ornaments

² Adulation: to flatter or admire excessively or slavishly

³ Couched: to lay (oneself) down for rest or sleep

⁴ Harmonious: having the parts agreeably related; congruous

⁵ Hackneyed: lacking in freshness or originality; trite

⁶ Harangue: a ranting speech or writing

correlation⁷ between the new necklace and Alexa's wet hair. Although Alexa had liked Janine from the beginning, now she really liked her and respected her as a mentor. Janine managed to interweave⁸ teaching and her inherent⁹ love of science with a great level of caring for Alexa's feelings.

Alexa didn't see José in the kitchen as she and Janine passed through on route to the seating area. Alexa's butterflies calmed as the moment for a brief encounter with José passed by inconsequentially. When they scouted the room for a place to sit, Alexa noticed Charlotte sitting by herself at a corner table like a pariah.¹⁰ It didn't take more than a modicum¹¹ of perceptiveness¹² to see that Charlotte was lonely.

"Janine, do you mind if I go join my friend for lunch?" Alexa asked.

"Not at all—enjoy yourself. I'll meet you back at the lab at one o'clock."

Charlotte brightened up immediately when she saw Alexa approaching—her morose¹³ demeanor was suspended by Alexa's munificence.¹⁴ She gestured at an empty chair for Alexa to sit.

"Hi, why don't you have a seat," Charlotte offered decorously¹⁵ with a trace of Southern drawl.

"Thanks. I also wanted to thank you again for the other night—that was so nice of you to rescue José like that."

⁷ Correlation: a relationship between two or more things which tend to vary, or occur together in a way not expected on the basis of chance alone

⁸ Interweave: to mix or blend together

⁹ Inherent: involved in the constitution or essential character of something, belonging by nature or habit

¹⁰ Pariah: outcast

¹¹ Modicum: a small amount

¹² Perceptiveness: ability to notice and see; discernment, sharpness

¹³ Morose: having a sullen or gloomy disposition

¹⁴ Munificence: characterized by great liberality or generosity

¹⁵ Decorous: marked by propriety and good taste

“Oh, it was nothing,” Charlotte replied with nonchalance.¹⁶ “It looked like you all were having fun!” Charlotte raised her eyebrows and smiled conspiratorially. “So tell me, is he your boyfriend?”

“Oh, I don’t know...” Alexa blushed self-consciously.

“Did he give you that necklace?”

“Yes...” Alexa started to giggle nervously. “He just gave it to me this morning. It’s a shark’s tooth for good luck. He caught the shark himself!”

“Oh my gosh! He is *definitely* your boyfriend then. No doubt about it.”

Alexa laughed. It was fun to have a girlfriend to talk to about these things. And it was especially nice to have a friend who was also a compatriot¹⁷ when they were all so far from home.

“I have a boyfriend back home in Virginia,” Charlotte offered. “He didn’t refer to me as his girlfriend until we had been dating for four months! They keep us guessing!” Charlotte’s hearty laugh permeated¹⁸ the atmosphere.

“Did he give you that bracelet?” Alexa asked with a teasing innuendo¹⁹ in her voice.

“No, actually, my father gave me this—my real father, that is. Colonel Brandt is my stepfather. My real father was also in the Navy...he died when I was ten years old. It was an accident...during training exercises.” Charlotte was fingering the silver charm bracelet on her wrist.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” Alexa felt terrible. She had wanted to tease Charlotte about *her* boyfriend, but had mistakenly stumbled onto a very sad and awkward topic of conversation.

¹⁶ Nonchalance: having an air of easy unconcern or indifference

¹⁷ Compatriot: fellow countryman

¹⁸ Permeate: to spread or diffuse through

¹⁹ Innuendo: an oblique allusion; hint, insinuation

“It was a long time ago, but it’s still difficult to talk about,” Charlotte replied, looking down at the table. “Let’s talk about something else. I want to hear more about this necklace that you’re wearing! My boyfriend never gave me anything like that!”

“Is it hard to be away from him all summer?” Alexa asked.

“Yes! It’s killing me! The worst part is that he doesn’t return my e-mails very often and I can only talk to him once a week.”

“That must be so hard!” Alexa said sympathetically. “I can kind of understand what that must be like—I’m not receiving very many e-mails from my friends at home either. I feel so isolated.”

“You *were* feeling isolated, but now you have a *boyfriend!*” Charlotte laughed melodiously.²⁰

Alexa couldn’t help but laugh as well. All of her earlier misconceptions²¹ about Charlotte had been negated.²² Alexa had thought that Charlotte was narcissistic,²³ pretentious, and narrow-minded. But she wasn’t any of these things. Quite the contrary, Charlotte was friendly, fun-loving, and sweet. Alexa realized that it was she, herself, who had been insular²⁴ in her judgments. She had perceived Charlotte as her nemesis,²⁵ when in reality, Charlotte wanted to be her friend.

“Do you do any activities or sports back home?” Alexa asked, eager to steer the conversation away from her love life.

“Yes, I play field hockey and I run on the track team, and I also play the piano.”

“I run track too! I just started this past year,” Alexa replied enthusiastically.

²⁰ Melodiously: having a pleasing sound or melody

²¹ Misconception: a mistaken idea or concept

²² Negate: to cause to be ineffective or invalid

²³ Narcissistic: excessive concern or love of oneself

²⁴ Insular: characteristic of an isolated people, especially having a narrow or provincial viewpoint

²⁵ Nemesis: a formidable and usually victorious rival or opponent

“You do? Do you want to go running with me? I’m going running every morning at six. Say you’ll go with me! It’ll be fun!” Charlotte mandated.²⁶

“Well, I don’t think I can go tomorrow morning…” Alexa hesitated as she thought about her early-morning rendezvous with José at the library. “But I could join you the day after tomorrow.”

“Great! Let’s meet in front of this building at 6:00 A.M. the day after tomorrow!”

“I’ll be here,” Alexa promised.

²⁶ Mandated: to make mandatory, obligatory

9

A Contemptuous Claim

Time: 5:30 A.M.

To: "Laurie"

From: "Alexa"

Subject: early morning rendezvous!

Dear Laurie,

Guess what? It looks like José and I were able to get some cells from Pecas the dolphin! Yesterday we had so much fun swimming together—José and I played in the water with Pecas for a while until it looked like she was trying to tell us something again. When I took the swab back to the lab, there were cells there! We finally did it :-)! He gave me the most amazing necklace with a shark's tooth. Then he asked me if I would meet him at the library at 6 A.M. Can you believe that I'm up at 5:30? He said he wants to show me something. He looked sooo cute when he asked me! He works part-time at the library in addition to everything else that he does – I'm so impressed. Can't wait to find out what he wants to show me. Gotta run now!

Best friends always,
Alexa

P.S. It turns out that Charlotte is really nice—I think we are going to be friends!

Alexa hit Send and wondered if Laurie would ever respond. It was getting tiring to write all of these things and not receive a reply. But realistically, life is full of inequities,¹ she thought, feeling a bit jaded.²

The town was eerily quiet at this early hour as Alexa sped to the library on her motorbike. She parked her bike and took a protracted³ look at the *biblioteca*, which occupied a prominent⁴ position on the main street. Though stylistically⁵ grand, the building looked as if it was sorely in need of a major renovation.⁶ It had an ornate⁷ stucco façade and well-worn wooden steps leading up to a large iron door. The building looked at least 100 years old, Alexa thought as she nervously pulled the ring-shaped door handle. Locked! It didn't look like the door was going to budge.

Alexa peered through the window and knocked gently. José came bounding toward the door, a sheepish grin on his face. He opened the massive door and beckoned to Alexa.

"Come in!" He gestured toward the interior. "I hope you weren't out there too long."

"No, I just got here," Alexa replied, suddenly shy again in the wake of his welcome.

"I want to show you something on the computer." José started walking purposefully⁸ toward the desk in the back of the room.

"I was so curious when you told me you wanted to show me something at the library—I thought it would be some sort of book."

"No, it's on the computer, the thing I need to show you. There are some amazing books here—but we don't have time for that now. What I have to show you is very important," he added seriously.

¹ Inequities: unequal things or situations

² Jaded: world-weary, cynical

³ Protract: to prolong in time or space

⁴ Prominent: widely and popularly known

⁵ Stylistic: of or relating especially to literary or artistic style

⁶ Renovation: to restore to a former better state (as by cleaning, repairing, or rebuilding)

⁷ Ornate: elaborately or excessively decorated

⁸ Purposefully: with intent; having a purpose

“Oh my gosh, what kind of computer is that?” Alexa asked with a note of disdain. She had never seen such a worn, antiquated⁹ machine. “That looks like a vestige¹⁰ from the 80s!”

“It’s the only computer I have access to,” José replied defensively. “And it works...at least sometimes it works.” After fumbling with the circuitry¹¹ under the desk, he began madly tapping away on the keyboard, trying to get the screen to respond from its dark repose.¹²

“It looks like you’re really good with computers,” Alexa complimented. She searched for something soothing and eloquent¹³ to say after her earlier faux pas. In truth, Alexa really was impressed with José’s abilities. By now he had gotten some bright green words to appear on the black screen and appeared to be programming the computer. Alexa struggled to fathom¹⁴ just what he was coercing the computer to do. He typed quickly, she noticed. His fingers moved knowingly over the well-worn keyboard, the keys’ beige veneer¹⁵ effaced¹⁶ by years of use.

“I have to be, to get this thing to work!” José smiled good-naturedly, putting Alexa at ease. He didn’t appear to be insulted by her earlier comment. Finally, a familiar sight appeared on the screen as José clicked on the Internet Explorer icon. The familiar sounds of a dial tone followed by electronic dialing filled the silence. “Sometimes it takes awhile to get online. But it should be easy at this hour.” They heard the telltale sound of the computer connecting. José quickly typed in an address, and the computer paused for a lengthy moment while it strained to pull up the image.

Finally, the image finished loading and José hopped out of his chair in front of the terminal to let Alexa take his seat.

⁹ Antiquated: old-fashioned, old or obsolete

¹⁰ Vestige: a trace, mark, or visible sign left by something (as an ancient city or a condition or practice) vanished or lost; relic

¹¹ Circuitry: the components of an electric circuit

¹² Repose: to lie at rest

¹³ Eloquent: vividly or movingly expressive or revealing

¹⁴ Fathom: comprehend

¹⁵ Veneer: a thin sheet of a material; finish, or coating

¹⁶ Efface: to eliminate or make indistinct by or as if by wearing away a surface

“There are lots of things I want to show you, but maybe you can start by reading this,” José said solemnly.

Alexa sat in the chair and eagerly looked at the screen. It was an article called “The Dolphins of War” on the Conservation Forum website. Alexa read rapidly. The article described how the military purportedly¹⁷ uses dolphins as guards for naval installments, to locate underwater mines and enemy divers, and to carry out “kamikaze” missions to blow up enemy submarines, among other duties.

“I didn’t know dolphins are used in the military. Do you think any of this is true?” Alexa asked incredulously.

“Of course,” José answered with emotion coloring his voice. “And I think that the reason you see some military people at Puerto Marino, is that they are here to buy the dolphins. Why else would they be here? Puerto Marino is a business. They capture and train dolphins, and then they sell them. I’ll bet some of these dolphins are destined for dolphin shows. But the rest are going to the military.”

Alexa felt a growing sense of dread in the face of his logical deduction.¹⁸ She had seen the military personnel, including Colonel Brandt, at Puerto Marino. But she didn’t have a clear idea of why they were there. “I thought they were interested in the dolphins’ sonar because submarines use sonar...” As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she realized how silly they sounded. Alexa couldn’t believe her own oversight. She hadn’t even seriously thought about what Puerto Marino was doing with the dolphins. But now it all made sense. José’s theory had a ring of truth to it. And her mother was collaborating with these people! It was hard to

¹⁷ Purportedly: ostensibly, allegedly

¹⁸ Deduction: a conclusion reached by logic or reasoning

imagine her mother doing anything that could possibly harm the dolphins. But nevertheless, Alexa felt conflicted—her eyes returned to the article searching for a redeeming factor.

“Well, maybe they’re studying the dolphins some of the time, but realistically, why would the Navy be interested in dolphins if they weren’t going to use them to fight the enemy?” José prodded.

Alexa was silent as she read the words on the screen. “You know, this article is mostly about the old Russian military dolphin unit. It doesn’t even exist anymore. It says that the program was abandoned a long time ago,” Alexa said hopefully. She didn’t want to believe that the dolphins at Puerto Marino were destined to be used for dangerous missions.

“Yes, but the Americans are probably doing similar things,” José said contemptuously.¹⁹

“I don’t know that...aren’t some of these articles written by animal rights groups? They make such ostentatious²⁰ claims. I’ve seen them protesting medical research at the University back home. And in that case, I know some of the things they said were outlandish²¹ because my father works in those laboratories. I don’t think we can just interpret everything they say literally.”²² Alexa searched for something else to say that would modulate²³ José’s growing malice²⁴ toward Puerto Marino and the American military.

“There are so many articles on the Web—you can read them and decide for yourself. But I have to run to work now. Did you want to stay here?” José asked.

¹⁹ Contemptuously: with contempt, disdain

²⁰ Ostentatious: marked by or fond of conspicuous or vainglorious and sometimes pretentious display

²¹ Outlandish: exceeding proper or reasonable limits or standards

²² Literally: actually, in a literal sense or manner

²³ Modulate: to adjust to or keep in proper measure or proportion; temper

²⁴ Malice: intent to commit an unlawful act or cause harm without legal justification or excuse

“No, I’m heading to the lab.” Alexa’s mood had deflated from the height of nervous anticipation to the depths of sober reflection. Her thoughts were a tangled morass²⁵ of conflicting emotions and alliances.

They decided to ride together on the motorbike, at least until they were in view of the security gate. But not even the thrill of riding the speeding bike with José could lift Alexa’s mood and her growing disillusionment²⁶ with the dolphin facility at Puerto Marino, which had once seemed so captivating.

Time: 10:30 A.M.

To: “Laurie”

From: “Alexa”

Subject: dolphins at war

Dear Laurie,

Well, I found out what José wanted to show me and now I’m really upset. He thinks that the dolphins at Puerto Marino are going to be sold to the Navy. Did you know that dolphins are used in the military? José showed me an article on the Internet. I feel so naive. I thought the military was studying the dolphins, not using them! Apparently they are used to locate underwater mines and enemy divers. I suppose that would be OK, if it were safe for the dolphins. But the article José showed me on the Internet—it didn’t look so safe. I wish I could talk to you about this! Please write back soon!

Best friends always,

Alexa

²⁵ Morass: something that traps, confuses, or impedes

²⁶ Disillusionment: to leave without illusion or naive faith and trust

Alexa clicked Send on the computer in the lab and sighed. It would be so great to talk to Laurie right now, she thought. José seemed so inordinately²⁷ passionate and rather intemperate²⁸ whenever the subject of the dolphins came up. Her mother was obviously caught in the middle, as was Charlotte. Alexa longed for an impartial and sympathetic ear to help her work through her complex feelings.

She realized she couldn't even concentrate on the experiment that she and José planned to work on today. Finding out if Pecas' baby was in captivity, a goal that had seemed so compelling before, now paled in comparison to the plight of all of the dolphins.

The first time she saw the dolphin facility, Alexa simply thought that it was amazing. The dolphins *looked* happy and well-cared for...and Alexa didn't have any negative feelings about the dolphins living their life in confinement. It hadn't even occurred to her. But now...now that she had developed such a unique friendship with Pecas, her perspective had changed dramatically. She had to agree with José—dolphins deserved a certain level of respect. It didn't feel right to confine them against their will and to sell them to the highest bidder. It seemed particularly egregious²⁹ to sell them into a life of military service.

Alexa was thirsty for more information. She sat down at the computer and double-clicked on the Internet Explorer icon. The powerful, modern computer in the lab responded quickly to her commands. Opening up the Google search engine, she typed in “dolphins—military” and clicked Search. The results of the search were displayed in an instant.

²⁷ Inordinately: exceeding reasonable limits; excessively

²⁸ Intemperate: not temperate (moderate); extreme, immoderate

²⁹ Egregious: conspicuously bad; flagrant

There were so many links to explore! Alexa scanned the long list, not knowing where to begin. There was one entitled “U.S. Navy Marine Mammal Program.” Alexa double-clicked on the link. Jackpot! This brought up the Navy’s own website, which included information about the dolphin and sea lion programs. Alexa chuckled at the cartoon of a dolphin and a sea lion in a Navy uniforms.

Alexa clicked on “Frequently Asked Questions” and read eagerly. Here were the answers to all of her questions. She scanned the list. *“Why does the Navy use marine mammals?” “What species of marine mammals are used by the Navy?” “Does the Navy train its dolphins for offensive warfare, including attacks on human swimmers or divers?”* Alexa eagerly read the answer: *“No. The Navy does not now train, nor has it ever trained, its marine mammals to injure humans in any fashion or carry weapons to destroy ships.”*

“Does the Navy ask the dolphins and sea lions to do dangerous things? The dolphins locate and mark the location of sea mines that are designed to be set off by large ships, not aquatic animals. Once the marking has been completed, the animals are removed from the area before the mines are disarmed....” In the swimmer detection program, dolphins move so quickly and with such accuracy that human swimmers in dark or murky waters are located and marked before they know what has happened.

Alexa grew more relaxed as she continued reading. It was very reassuring. It looked like the Navy made every effort to keep the dolphins safe and healthy. Alexa couldn’t wait to show this to José.

Ding! The computer emitted the telltale bell alerting Alexa to an incoming e-mail. Alexa clicked on her e-mail window. It was from Laurie!

Time: 11:30 A.M.

To: "Alexa"

From: "Laurie"

Subject: Re: dolphins at war

Dear Alexa,

I can't stop thinking about your e-mail. I had no idea dolphins were used in the military either! What a fascinating story. I am going to tell Jeff on Monday—he is my boss at CNN—maybe we can do a story on it! I am his protégé³⁰—and I know he would be really impressed if I could bring in a really hot idea for a story. Now I am doing some research on the Web. Did you know that the U.S. military flew dolphins to Iraq to help clear the harbor in the Iraq war? Check out the link to the article below. Don't worry so much about the article that José showed you. If there is one thing I have learned working in the media, it's that you can't believe everything you read. Particularly from lobbyist³¹ groups or egotistical political pundits³² who like to see their name in print at any cost! You have to be really critical about the source. We always have to check our facts over and over again. It's such an onerous³³ task and it's usually the intern who gets the grunt work! Well, anyway, I have to run now! I have so much work to do before Monday!

Love,

Laurie

Finally, a response from Laurie! Alexa breathed a sigh of relief. Laurie hadn't forgotten her! As Alexa reread the e-mail, she couldn't help

³⁰ Protégé: one who is protected or trained or whose career is furthered by a person of experience, prominence, or influence

³¹ Lobbyist: a person or group that attempts to influence or sway (as a public official) toward a desired action; activist, campaigner

³² Pundits: one who gives opinions in an authoritative manner; critic

³³ Onerous: involving, imposing, or constituting a burden

but smile at Laurie's vivacity.³⁴ She had such a spirited way of jumping into things with both feet. Now she wanted to do a story on dolphins!

Alex clicked on the link in the e-mail to look at the article that Laurie had unearthed³⁵ on the Internet. It was entitled "Crack sea mammals in training." Alexa scanned the article. It was all about the training of dolphins and sea lions for deployment in Iraq. The article quoted Tom LaPuzza, the man who had run the Navy's Marine Mammal Program since its inception³⁶ in 1960. Most of the article covered familiar territory, but then Alexa's eyes locked on one quote from Mr. LaPuzza:

"We get them when they're newborns," he said, adding that the mammals lived for around 25 years and never left the service. "They are in the Navy for life."

Alexa paused, her feeling of turmoil and dread returning. The article also mentioned that the Navy obtained its dolphin recruits by purchasing them from other marine mammal facilities. But where were these facilities getting their dolphins? Maybe some of them were born in captivity but ultimately, some of them had to have been captured from the wild. Alexa's emotions were bubbling up inside her. Was this really an ethical thing to do? It was hard to be objective³⁷ when she couldn't stop thinking about Pecas' baby. Was her baby now destined to be in the Navy for life? Alexa felt that it was now of paramount³⁸ importance to find out. Where was José? They needed to begin this experiment!

José arrived at 10:45, full of apologies. This morning they had been short-handed in the kitchen at Puerto Marino. Not only did he have to stay late after the breakfast service, he needed to return within a half hour to help with lunch.

³⁴ Vivacity: the quality or state of being vivacious (lively in temper, conduct, or spirit); enthusiasm

³⁵ Unearthed: brought to light, discovered

³⁶ Inception: an act, process, or instance of beginning

³⁷ Objective: expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations; without bias

³⁸ Paramount: superior to all others; supreme

“Let’s take a look at the cells from Pecos. I put them in some media yesterday.” Alexa headed toward the tall incubator. A warm draft of air hit her face as she opened the incubator and pulled out a flat, square-shaped bottle that was resting on its side. “This is the dish where I’m growing Pecos’ cells.”

José could barely contain his excitement as he looked at the dish with amazement. “What is that pink stuff?” he asked incredulously as he pointed to the dish in Alexa’s hand. The bottom of the dish was covered with a bright magenta liquid.

“That’s media—it’s like food and water for the cells that are growing in here—sort of like an organic³⁹ soup.” She carefully brought the dish over to the microscope without disturbing the magenta liquid. She set the dish on the microscope platform and switched on the scope.

“What do you see?” José asked anxiously. “Can I take a look too?” José was very excited at the novelty⁴⁰ of being in a sophisticated laboratory. He loved science and its environs.

“Just a second, I’m trying to locate the cells.” Alexa concentrated on focusing the microscope.

“Do you see them?”

“Yes! Here they are.” Alexa hopped off the chair in front of the microscope and gestured to José. He eagerly took her seat and gazed through the scope.

“Wow! This is *so* awesome!” José reacted as if he was viewing the most opulent⁴¹ jewels in the world.

“Do you see the cells?” Alexa inquired.

³⁹ Organic: of, relating to, or containing carbon compounds

⁴⁰ Novelty: something new and fresh

⁴¹ Opulent: exhibiting or characterized by opulence (wealth, affluence); magnificent, lavish

“I think so,” José replied as he started to fiddle with the knobs on the side of the scope. “There are so many of them!”

“It’s funny you should say that because paradoxically,⁴² there aren’t enough cells. I don’t think we have enough to extract DNA today. I think we need to let these cells grow and divide. I’ve never extracted DNA from such a small number of cells before. It’s just safer if we wait.” Alexa spoke carefully, knowing José would be disappointed.

“How long do you think we need to wait?”

“Probably until next weekend,” she said tentatively. Alexa was also disappointed to have to wait so long, but she knew from experience that it was prudent⁴³ to follow the experimental protocol precisely. She knew that if they attempted the experiment too soon, it might not work and then they would have to start all over again. Alexa, being a pragmatist⁴⁴ at heart, knew that in all practicality,⁴⁵ it was better to wait.

“Oh. That seems like such a long time to wait.” José got up from his chair and looked at Alexa.

“I agree.” Alexa took the dish out from under the microscope and placed it back in the incubator. “But the cells have already started to proliferate⁴⁶ since yesterday, so at least the culture is doing well.”

“I’m so impressed that you are such a smart scientist,” José said admiringly.

Alexa laughed at the notion that her lowly summer intern status was suddenly exalted⁴⁷ to brilliant scientist. Modestly, she refrained from responding to his compliment.

“Do you have time to look at some things on the computer with me? I found some other things about dolphins in the military that I want

⁴² Paradox: a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true

⁴³ Prudent: shrewd in the management of practical affairs; sensible

⁴⁴ Pragmatist: a person who takes a practical approach to problems and affairs

⁴⁵ Practical: of, relating to, or manifested in practice or action; not theoretical or ideal

⁴⁶ Proliferate: to grow by rapid production of new parts, cells, buds, or offspring; reproduce, multiply

⁴⁷ Exalted: to raise in status (can also mean to praise, glorify, or honor)

you to see.” Alexa was eager to show him the information she had found and to talk about the various conflicting stories on the Internet. Some of these articles had to be fallacious,⁴⁸ and they needed to talk and resolve⁴⁹ their differing perspectives on this issue.

“I would love to, but I have to get back to work.” José came over to Alexa and took both of her hands in his. He was gazing admiringly at her. “But maybe I will see you on Monday morning at the shore?” he added softly as his eyes looked directly into hers.

“Yes...sure. I...I’ll be there,” Alexa managed to reply, even though her heart was racing. She didn’t have much experience being kissed by a boy, but intuitively,⁵⁰ she felt that this moment was leading up to it.

“Great, see you then. I’ve got to go now.” José gave her hands a squeeze and smiled down at her face. And then he left! The moment felt so anticlimactic.⁵¹

Alexa tried to catch her breath; her heart was pounding. It seemed like a long time until Monday.

⁴⁸ Fallacious: untrue; tending to deceive or mislead

⁴⁹ Resolve: to deal with successfully, to clear up

⁵⁰ Intuitively: known or perceived by intuition (quick and ready insight); instinctively

⁵¹ Anticlimactic: of, relating to, or marked by anticlimax; an event (as at the end of a series) that is strikingly less important than what has preceded it

10

A Conflagration Ignites

Time: 3:30 P.M.
To: "Laurie"
From: "Alexa"
Subject: I think...

Dear Laurie,

I think José might like me too! He held my hands today—just now—for a whole minute! I thought I was going to faint! I thought he was going to kiss me, but it didn't happen! I can't wait for Monday. He didn't ask me to meet him on Sunday—what do you think he's doing?

Did you pitch your story idea to your boss Jeff? I thought I would try to do more investigating about the dolphins here. Maybe my mother will take me to see them. I'm also going running with Charlotte. She's really great—we are eating all our meals together now. I think you would really like her.

Your friend always,
Alexa

Alexa decided to wait in the lab a while longer to see if Laurie replied. If only José wasn't perpetually¹ working, they could have done something fun together today, Alexa pined. Ding! The computer signaled incoming e-mail—it was from Laurie! Alexa perked up, bolstered² by Laurie's quick response.

Time: 3:47 P.M.

To: "Alexa"

From: "Laurie"

Subject: I know!

Dear Lexxie,

I know what you should do—you should kiss him!! Of course he likes you! He's only been meeting you at the beach every day! Don't be so ridiculous. I know he likes you. I told Jeff my idea about doing a story on dolphins in the military. He tabled³ it! He said there are already lots of stories out there so it's not worth doing unless I'm able to find a unique angle. Oh well. Don't forget to write to me tomorrow and tell me about The Big Kiss. Ha ha.

Laurie

Kiss him? Was she crazy? Alexa laughed at the thought of it and immediately discredited⁴ the idea. She knew that she would never have the temerity⁵ to pull off such a bold action. Well, at least Laurie was writing to her and was making some effort to maintain the rapport they had at home, Alexa thought. That was a huge relief. It was Alexa's greatest fear that in her absence, someone else would supplant⁶ her role as Laurie's

¹ Perpetually: continuing forever

² Bolster: to give a boost to

³ Tabled: removed from consideration indefinitely

⁴ Discredit: to refuse to accept as true or accurate

⁵ Temerity: nerve, boldness

⁶ Supplant: to supersede (another), especially by force or treachery

best friend. Alexa banished the pessimistic⁷ thoughts from her mind. While Laurie had been remiss⁸ in her lack of response earlier, her latest e-mails redeemed her in Alexa's eyes. Deep down, she really didn't believe Laurie would be that fickle.⁹



Puerto Marino was quiet early Sunday morning as Alexa jogged slowly to the cafeteria where Charlotte was waiting for her. The only noise came from the birds, who chirped and sang vociferously¹⁰ as they greeting the sunrise. The words of her track coach resonated¹¹ in her mind as she approached the building. He had admonished the team on their last day of practice to “Keep in shape and run regularly or you’ll be sorry!” and added “Consistent training augurs¹² well for success!” True to his prediction, Alexa regretted procrastinating¹³ her training. What if Charlotte is really in shape and has an audacious¹⁴ workout planned? Alexa worried. “I hope I can keep up!” she said aloud as she approached Charlotte, who was stretching on the front steps of the building.

“Good morning!” Charlotte greeted her cheerfully.

“Hi. I have a confession to make...I haven't been running in several months—I may not be able to keep up with you,” Alexa said with chagrin.¹⁵

“Don't worry. We'll take it easy. I'm just happy to have the company. If you need to stop, just say so. I'll promise not to chide¹⁶ you for being out of shape!” Charlotte laughed as they started jogging.

“Where are we going?”

⁷ Pessimistic: negative, gloomy

⁸ Remiss: showing neglect or inattention

⁹ Fickle: marked by lack of steadfastness, constancy, or stability; given to erratic changeableness

¹⁰ Vociferous: marked by or given to vehement insistent outcry

¹¹ Resonate: to produce or exhibit resonance (a quality of evoking response)

¹² Augurs: to foretell

¹³ Procrastinating: putting off until later

¹⁴ Audacious: intrepidly daring

¹⁵ Chagrin: disquietude or distress of mind caused by humiliation, disappointment, or failure

¹⁶ Chide: reproach in a usually mild and constructive manner; scold

“Oh, I have this route that I usually do—it’s about two miles to this beautiful beach down the road. We have to go through this destitute¹⁷ little village—hardly a cosmopolitan¹⁸ town,” Charlotte added derisively.¹⁹

“Yes, I know exactly what you’re referring to—José lives in that town!” Alexa replied defensively.

“Oh, I’m sorry! I must have sounded so pompous!²⁰ I didn’t mean to insinuate²¹ anything derogatory!²² What I meant was it’s a quaint little village, not a large, crowded cosmopolitan city.” Charlotte artfully restated.²³

Her penitence²⁴ sounded genuine, although Alexa was certain her initial comment about the village *was* irreverent.²⁵ Alexa was in no mood to argue about Charlotte’s sweeping generalizations²⁶ about the local village. Nor was she in any condition to argue—she needed every breath to keep up with Charlotte. “It’s OK. I know you didn’t mean to insult José. Let’s just forget about it.”

Charlotte was only too happy to comply. Skillfully, she changed the subject as they ran out onto the main road toward the town.

“Last summer, I was with my stepfather in San Diego for six weeks. He travels so much for his work in the military. He’s always going somewhere for a new assignment. I’ve been to seven schools already and I haven’t even graduated yet!”

“Wow, seven schools? I’ve only been to one!”

“It’s so difficult. I hate always being the new person when everybody already has their group of friends. Girls can be so cruel.”

“That sounds difficult,” Alexa said sympathetically.

¹⁷ Destitute: lacking possessions and resources; especially suffering extreme poverty

¹⁸ Cosmopolitan: having wide international sophistication

¹⁹ Derisively: expressing ridicule, scorn, or contempt

²⁰ Pompous: having or exhibiting self-importance; arrogant

²¹ Insinuate: to impart or communicate with artful or oblique reference

²² Derogatory: expressive of a low opinion; disparaging

²³ Restate: to state again or in another way

²⁴ Penitence: sorrow for sins or faults

²⁵ Irreverent: lacking proper respect or seriousness

²⁶ Generalizations: to make vague or indefinite statements

“It’s kind of fun to travel in the summer, though—when school is out. I loved San Diego. And it’s really great when I meet a new friend like you!”

“I was really happy to meet you too!” Alexa replied breathlessly. She wanted to tell Charlotte about her parents’ divorce, but the rigor²⁷ of their pace was making it hard for Alexa to converse. She could feel a cramp in her side beginning to get worse, but she was determined to quell²⁸ her desire to stop and catch her breath.

“Why don’t we take a break at the beach up here. We can dangle our feet in the water and catch our breath,” Charlotte suggested when she saw that Alexa was struggling.

“Sounds good! I can’t believe how out of shape I am!” Alexa was immensely relieved to arrest²⁹ the strenuous activity. She looked over at Charlotte. It was surprising how her pristine, carefully coiffed appearance belied³⁰ her adeptness³¹ in athletics. On the contrary,³² Alexa was relieved they had decided to curtail³³ their workout.

“Don’t worry, it’ll come back to you. Just run with me every day!” Charlotte said cheerfully as they approached the sand.

The beach was serene³⁴ so early on a Sunday morning. If anything, the peacefulness made the scene even more spectacular. Alexa took a deep breath of the fresh, salty air. She was happy they had deviated³⁵ from their run to spend a few peaceful moments in this beautiful spot.

“Oh, look! Someone left a bunch of old soda cans over there by the water!” Charlotte was indignant at this impropriety.³⁶

²⁷ Rigor: a condition that makes life difficult, challenging, or uncomfortable; severity

²⁸ Quell: quiet, pacify

²⁹ Arrest: to bring to a stop

³⁰ Belie: to give a false impression of

³¹ Adeptness: thoroughly proficient; expert

³² Contrary: a fact or condition incompatible with another; opposite

³³ Curtail: to make less by or as if by cutting off or away some part; shorten

³⁴ Serene: marked by or suggestive of utter calm and unruffled repose or quietude; peaceful

³⁵ Deviate: to depart from an established course or norm; stray

³⁶ Impropriety: an improper or indecorous act or remark; especially an unacceptable use of a word or of language

“That makes me so mad! It is absolutely an insidious³⁷ offense to desecrate³⁸ such a beautiful place!”

“Let’s pick them up!”

“I agree.” The two girls marched over to the litter with the conviction³⁹ of the righteous.⁴⁰

“It looks like the remains of a boxed lunch from Puerto Marino. Someone from the compound must have come here for lunch and left their trash on the beach,” Alexa said.

“I was afraid of that,” Charlotte replied with remorse. “There’s really no excuse for people to behave like that,” she decried.⁴¹ Chatting continuously as they picked up the litter, they realized they had similar outlooks about pollution. Both of them were idealists⁴² when it came to issues about the environment. They shared the view that pollution in all forms simply had to stop if the world was going to remain habitable.⁴³

“Why don’t we stop here at the beach every day on our run and pick up the litter?” Charlotte suggested. “Then at least we can do something to try to counteract⁴⁴ this degradation!”⁴⁵

“I agree! That’s a great idea.” Alexa didn’t need any further inducement.⁴⁶ This was exactly the type of thing that she liked to do—something

³⁷ **Insidious:** having a gradual and cumulative effect

³⁸ **Desecrate:** to treat disrespectfully, irreverently, or outrageously

³⁹ **Conviction:** a strong persuasion or belief

⁴⁰ **Righteous:** arising from an outraged sense of justice or morality

⁴¹ **Decry:** to express strong disapproval of; condemn

⁴² **Idealist:** one guided by ideals, especially one who places ideals before practical considerations

⁴³ **Habitable:** capable of being lived in; suitable for habitation

⁴⁴ **Counteract:** to make ineffective or restrain or neutralize the usually ill effects of by an opposite force

⁴⁵ **Degradation:** the act or process of degrading (to impair in respect to some physical property)

⁴⁶ **Inducement:** a motive or consideration that leads one to action

constructive,⁴⁷ yet idealistic. “I’m so glad we became friends, Charlotte. It’s great to have a friend like you to do things with. I thought I was going to be so lonely here all summer—but instead...”

“Instead you have me *and* a boyfriend!” Charlotte teased.

Alexa laughed. At least Charlotte was good-natured in her teasing.

“Hey, is that a mirage,⁴⁸ or do I see your man on the horizon right now?” Charlotte pointed to a boat in the distance.

“Oh my gosh—it *is* José! Let’s go out on the rocks and say hello,” Alexa said, her voice filled with excitement.

“Are you sure you want me to come? Did you want to go see him by yourself?” Charlotte inquired, her refined⁴⁹ manners always at hand.

“Of course I want you to come! You’re my friend and he’s my friend! Just come with me, please?”

“OK,” Charlotte agreed, making an effort to be pliable,⁵⁰ even though she appeared reluctant to go. Alexa started racing down the rocky peninsula, waving madly at José, while Charlotte followed slowly, restrained⁵¹ in her demeanor.

“José!” Alexa yelled as she ran to the end of the rocky outcrop, narrowly avoiding a fall on the abundant detritus.⁵²

José waved back and turned the boat in their direction. When he was about 50 yards away, he dropped the anchor and dove into the water, disappearing from sight. Alexa waited anxiously, immobilized⁵³ with concern. Where did he go? Finally, after what felt like an interminable pause, he surfaced right in front of Alexa.

“Hi!” He grinned infectiously.

⁴⁷ Constructive: promoting improvement or development

⁴⁸ Mirage: an optical effect that is sometimes seen at sea, in the desert, or over a hot pavement, that may have the appearance of a pool of water

⁴⁹ Refined: free from what is coarse, vulgar, or uncouth

⁵⁰ Pliable: yielding readily to others

⁵¹ Restrained: reserved, controlled; to limit, restrict, or keep under control

⁵² Detritus: loose material (such as rock fragments or organic particles) that results directly from disintegration

⁵³ Immobilized: incapable of moving

“You always find a special way of saying hello!” Alexa laughed. “José, you remember Charlotte...” Alexa introduced.

“Sure. Thanks again for saving me the other night.”

“Oh, it was nothing,” Charlotte replied.

“Why don’t you guys come on in! The water is so nice!” José beckoned.

“I didn’t bring my bathing suit—although I guess I could swim like this anyway...” Alexa replied. The water looked so inviting, and she was so hot and sticky from jogging.

“If you don’t come in you’re going to get wet anyway!” José teased Alexa as he began to splash her playfully.

“I’m getting in, I’m getting in!” Alexa laughed as she climbed down the rocks and jumped into the refreshing, clear blue water. She surfaced near José and turned back to look at Charlotte, who was still on the shore. “Why don’t you come in, Charlotte? The water’s so nice!”

“I can’t. I just got my hair highlighted and the combination of the salt water and the sun would ruin it.” Charlotte replied. Her perfect blond hair was tucked neatly under her cap.

Alexa could see José roll his eyes. Knowing him as she did now, she had the insight⁵⁴ to know that this was exactly the kind of thing he scorned.⁵⁵ Alexa could tell he preferred her naturalness and absence of vanity.⁵⁶ He liked the fact that she was unfettered⁵⁷ by such superficial⁵⁸ beauty concerns and that she didn’t color her hair like Charlotte. He also

⁵⁴ Insight: the power or act of seeing into a situation

⁵⁵ Scorn: open dislike and disrespect or derision often mixed with indignation

⁵⁶ Vanity: inflated pride in oneself or one’s appearance

⁵⁷ Unfetter: emancipate, liberate

⁵⁸ Superficial: presenting only an appearance without substance or significance

liked her sense of adventure and the way that she just jumped in the water, not minding if her hair got wet or her clothes got sullied.⁵⁹ On the one hand, Alexa was admittedly a bit relieved that José hadn't taken a liking to pretty Charlotte. But on the other hand, Charlotte was her friend, and Alexa wanted them to be able to have fun altogether. Thankfully, Charlotte didn't see José's adverse⁶⁰ reaction.

"Your hair won't get wet! The water is really shallow here. Why don't you come in?" Alexa pleaded. "There are so many beautiful fish you can see out here and the water feels so good."

"OK," Charlotte agreed unenthusiastically. She made her way down to the water and gingerly stepped in.

"What did you do in San Diego when you were there last summer?" Alexa asked Charlotte, eager to draw her into conversation. José was busy diving to the bottom, retrieving shells and interesting bits of coral.

"I spent most of my time at the beach. My dad was visiting the naval marine mammal facility there," Charlotte replied.

"Charlotte, where does the Navy get the dolphins it uses? And do you know what they use them for?" Alexa seized the opportunity to get more information.

"The marine mammals are an integral⁶¹ part of America's homeland security program and a vital⁶² part of our military operations overseas," Charlotte replied assuredly.⁶³ Evidently, she was a proponent⁶⁴ of dolphins

⁵⁹ Sully: to make soiled or tarnished

⁶⁰ Adverse: acting against or in a contrary direction; hostile

⁶¹ Integral: essential to completeness

⁶² Vital: concerned with or necessary to the maintenance of life

⁶³ Assuredly: without a doubt; certainly

⁶⁴ Proponent: one who argues in favor of something; advocate

in the military. “The dolphins in particular have great diving abilities and can locate underwater mines and other things that present grave dangers for people. Dolphins have a...”

“Well, then, isn’t it dangerous for the dolphins too?” José interjected. He had resurfaced just in time to hear her speech. Alexa cringed when she heard the hostility⁶⁵ in José’s voice as he impugned⁶⁶ her friend. It was like Charlotte had just pushed a hot button and a raging⁶⁷ inferno had ignited.

“All military operations have some element of danger to them. That much is obvious. The point is that the civilians of the world, like you and me, are lucky to have a military that protects them! The military deals with the dangerous situations for us. And yes, the dolphins are part of that, and you should be grateful there are people who are willing to risk their lives to protect you!” Charlotte said defiantly, fueling the conflagration.⁶⁸

“Grateful?” José said cynically.⁶⁹ He was flabbergasted.⁷⁰ “For this?” he added belligerently⁷¹ as he gestured toward the Puerto Marino compound, looming in the distance. “You have to be kidding me! You people come in here like you own our country!” he berated,⁷² the hostility in his voice obvious. He was now on the offensive,⁷³ and his voice wavered with

⁶⁵ Hostility: deep-seated, usually mutual, ill will

⁶⁶ Impugn: to assail by words or arguments; oppose or attack as false or lacking integrity

⁶⁷ Raging: violent, wild

⁶⁸ Conflagration: fire, especially a large disastrous fire

⁶⁹ Cynically: having a sneering disbelief in sincerity or integrity

⁷⁰ Flabbergast: to overwhelm with shock, surprise, or wonder

⁷¹ Belligerent: inclined to or exhibiting assertiveness, hostility, or combativeness

⁷² Berate: to scold or condemn vehemently and at length

⁷³ Offensive: making attack

emotion. Alexa could see that he harbored a lot of resentment.⁷⁴ In his mind, Puerto Marino and the American military were one and the same. One entity was supplying trained dolphins and the other was buying them and using them for military operations. And Charlotte, who openly condoned⁷⁵ the use of dolphins in the military, was a lightning rod for his pent-up anger. And José was not finished yet. “You just move in here, pollute our beaches, steal the dolphins from our waters, and build these monstrous buildings! That cove used to be the most beautiful place in the world, an amazing place where you could catch so many fish just by touching your net to the water. And now look at it!” he said with derision.⁷⁶

“If you think it’s so despicable, why do you work there?” Charlotte replied rancorously,⁷⁷ close to tears. Alexa knew Charlotte felt passionately about the environment. But touching even deeper, Charlotte felt the loss of her father every day and was profoundly aware of the sacrifices the men and women of the military make. José had hit a nerve. Charlotte was deeply hurt by his comments, but instead of defending herself, she lashed out at him, and the bickering⁷⁸ continued.

“Because I have to,” José said, his voice breaking. He, too, was close to tears. Charlotte’s recrimination⁷⁹ touched on an inflammatory⁸⁰ subject. José was working for Puerto Marino even though he loathed⁸¹ their presence in his country. He needed the money that his job with Puerto Marino provided, but he obviously didn’t condone what they were doing.

⁷⁴ **Resentment:** a feeling of indignant displeasure or persistent ill will at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury

⁷⁵ **Condone:** to pardon or overlook voluntarily; especially to treat as if trivial, harmless, or of no importance

⁷⁶ **Derision:** the use of ridicule or scorn to show contempt

⁷⁷ **Rancorously:** characterized by bitter, deep-seated ill will

⁷⁸ **Bickering:** to engage in a petulant or petty quarrel

⁷⁹ **Recrimination:** to make a retaliating charge against an accuser

⁸⁰ **Inflammatory:** tending to excite anger, disorder, or tumult

⁸¹ **Loathed:** to dislike greatly and often with disgust or intolerance

Alexa wanted to burrow⁸² into a hole to hide from this calamity.⁸³ Her allegiances⁸⁴ were divided between Charlotte and José. Alexa had the sagacity⁸⁵ and empathy⁸⁶ to see both sides of their argument. In her eyes, neither one was right nor wrong, they just came from very different perspectives. Both Charlotte and José were so obstinate⁸⁷ in their positions that they didn't try to see the issue from the other person's point of view. Alexa searched her mind for something she could do or say to salvage⁸⁸ the relationship between her two new friends.

"I'm leaving now!" Charlotte announced as she started swimming toward the shore.

"Wait, Charlotte! I'll go with you!" Alexa called out. Alexa turned to José. "I'll see you later, OK? I'm sorry this turned into such a mess," Alexa whispered to him.

"No, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt her feelings. I took out all of my anger for Puerto Marino and the military on her. It was wrong of me. I will have to find a way to tell her I'm sorry," José said, expressing his repentance.⁸⁹

"That would be good—because you don't even know some things about Charlotte that will make you regret what you've said even more. But right now, I'm going to try to catch up to her."

"OK. See you tomorrow?" José asked hopefully.

"OK. We'll talk then." Alexa swam toward the shore. It would be a good idea for them to talk, Alexa thought. José really needed to talk about

⁸² Burrow: a hole or excavation in the ground made by an animal (such as a rabbit) for shelter and habitation

⁸³ Calamity: an extraordinarily grave event marked by great loss and lasting distress

⁸⁴ Allegiance: devotion or loyalty to a person, group, or cause

⁸⁵ Sagacity: keen in sense of perception and judgment, discerning

⁸⁶ Empathy: the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner

⁸⁷ Obstinate: perversely adhering to an opinion, purpose, or course in spite of reason, arguments, or persuasion; stubborn, inflexible

⁸⁸ Salvage: to rescue or save especially from wreckage or ruin

⁸⁹ Repentance: to feel regret or contrition

some of these issues with someone who could mollify⁹⁰ rather than inflame his obstreperous⁹¹ tendencies.

Alexa hopped out of the water and hurriedly put her sneakers on, even though she was soaking wet. Charlotte was already out of sight. Alexa raced to catch up with her. It wasn't difficult; Charlotte had slowed down to a walk. She was sobbing uncontrollably.

"Oh, Charlotte, I'm so sorry that you guys had a fight—I know he didn't mean to be insolent.⁹² He doesn't know about what happened to your father—he never would have said anything so flagrantly⁹³ upsetting if he knew. He's just so emotional when it comes to anything having to do with the dolphins."

"It's not that. Well, maybe it's that too, but I'm really upset because I lost my bracelet!" Charlotte rubbed her bare wrist as the tears streamed down her face.

"The one your father gave you?" Alexa asked with horror.

"Yes!" Charlotte sobbed.

"Let's go look for it!" Alexa said urgently. "It's probably in the water."

"It could be anywhere. It's gone now. I really don't see the point in trying," she replied, shunning⁹⁴ Alexa's suggestion.

"But it probably slipped off in the water—and the water is so clear. Maybe we could find it!"

"It's gone. We'll never find it." Charlotte was obdurate⁹⁵ in her position.

⁹⁰ Mollify: to soothe in temper or disposition; placate, calm

⁹¹ Obstreperous: marked by unruly or aggressive noisiness

⁹² Insolent: insultingly contemptuous in speech or conduct; overbearing

⁹³ Flagrant: conspicuously offensive

⁹⁴ Shun: to avoid deliberately and especially habitually

⁹⁵ Obdurate: resistant to persuasion or softening influences; stubborn

“Well then, I’ll go back and look for you. Will you meet me for lunch at the cafeteria at noon?” Alexa was eager to talk things over with Charlotte.

“OK,” Charlotte agreed tearfully.



Alexa turned around and headed back to the beach, careful to keep her eyes on the ground, ever vigilant⁹⁶ for any sign of the bracelet. The beach was quiet and she was grateful for the tranquility. This was a good opportunity to ruminate⁹⁷ about the shocking argument that seemed to come out of nowhere. The vivid memory of her two friends yelling at each other reverberated⁹⁸ through her mind. The surfacing of José’s latent⁹⁹ anger toward Puerto Marino was surprising, but the sentiment was understandable, given the circumstances.

As she waded through the clear blue water, Alexa thought about the things Charlotte had said. She had to acknowledge that some of Charlotte’s points about the military were reasonable and valid. The fact that the men and women of the military put their lives at risk so that others could live in safety was irrefutable.¹⁰⁰ As simple as it sounded, this was actually a new perspective for Alexa to consider. Growing up on a university campus, the pervasive ideology was consistently liberal.¹⁰¹ There always seemed to be some sort of anti-war protest going on at the university. In this academic microcosm,¹⁰² Alexa rarely encountered conservative political views, and she had never met anyone who could be considered reactionary.¹⁰³ But truthfully, Alexa acknowledged to herself,

⁹⁶ Vigilant: watchful, alert, and attentive

⁹⁷ Ruminare: to go over in the mind repeatedly and often casually or slowly

⁹⁸ Reverberate: to continue in or as if in a series of echoes; resound

⁹⁹ Latent: present and capable of becoming, though not now visible, obvious, or active

¹⁰⁰ Irrefutable: impossible to refute or deny

¹⁰¹ Liberal: of or constituting a political party advocating or associated with the principles of political liberalism

¹⁰² Microcosm: a little world; especially the human race or human nature seen as an epitome of the world or the universe

¹⁰³ Reactionary: ultraconservative in politics

she found it hard to agree with José's complete renunciation¹⁰⁴ of the military. Particularly in light of the cataclysmic¹⁰⁵ and tragic events of 9/11, which underscored the fact that there are some dangerous people out there who want to compromise the safety of Americans. Also, Charlotte's father had died in service to the military, and she must be acutely aware of the risks that he had taken. It wasn't hard for Alexa to see Charlotte's perspective.

But she could also empathize with José's point of view. José wasn't nefarious,¹⁰⁶ he simply resented the entire concept of Puerto Marino. José adamantly repudiated¹⁰⁷ the concept of capturing wild dolphins and selling them into a life of service. It was easy to see why he would have misgivings¹⁰⁸ about such a distasteful business taking root in his own backyard. Alexa knew with all her heart that José was a good person, and that if he knew about Charlotte's father, he never would have been so callous¹⁰⁹ as to malign¹¹⁰ the military and hurt her feelings. His malediction¹¹¹ derived more from his narrow perspective than from a mean spirit on his part.

Alexa could see so clearly both sides of the argument and why it had escalated into a raucous¹¹² confrontation. If only she had had the

¹⁰⁴ Renunciation: the act of refusing to follow, obey, or recognize any further

¹⁰⁵ Cataclysmic: a momentous and violent event marked by overwhelming upheaval and demolition

¹⁰⁶ Nefarious: flagrantly wicked or impious; evil, malicious

¹⁰⁷ Repudiate: to reject or renounce; to refuse to have anything to do with

¹⁰⁸ Misgiving: to suggest doubt or fear to

¹⁰⁹ Callous: feeling no sympathy for others

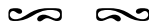
¹¹⁰ Malign: to utter injuriously misleading reports about; to speak evil of

¹¹¹ Malediction: to speak evil of

¹¹² Raucous: boisterously, disorderly

clairvoyance¹¹³ to predict and prevent this melodrama¹¹⁴ from happening in the first place. Now, she thought, it was up to her to mediate¹¹⁵ the reconciliation¹¹⁶ of her two friends.

Looking down at the ocean floor through the crystal-clear water, Alexa felt discouraged. Maybe Charlotte was right and the bracelet was lost forever. The refractive¹¹⁷ property of the water distorted the view of the objects below, although she could clearly see a school of variegated¹¹⁸ tropical fish swim right by her legs. This was not going to be an easy task, she realized. But she knew that if the antagonism between her friends was ever going to be absolved,¹¹⁹ the bracelet needed to be found. Alexa decided that she would keep looking tenaciously¹²⁰ until she met Charlotte for lunch. And if the bracelet hadn't turned up by then, she would continue looking after lunch and all summer if she had to.



Walking into the cafeteria to meet Charlotte, Alexa was barely able to suppress¹²¹ her sorrow. As Alexa approached her table, she could see that Charlotte's face was pallid¹²² and her eyes were red from a long crying session. Charlotte looked up at her expectantly with a bit of hopefulness in her eyes. But when she saw the look of despair and sympathy on

¹¹³ Clairvoyance: the ability to perceive matters beyond the range of ordinary perception

¹¹⁴ Melodrama: a drama characterized by extravagant theatricality

¹¹⁵ Mediate: to bring accord out of by action as an intermediary

¹¹⁶ Reconciliation: a restoration of friendship or harmony

¹¹⁷ Refractive: distortion of an image by viewing through a medium

¹¹⁸ Variegated: having discreet markings of different colors

¹¹⁹ Absolve: to set free from an obligation or the consequences of guilt

¹²⁰ Tenacious: persistent in maintaining or adhering to something valued or habitual

¹²¹ Suppress: to keep secret or to stop or prohibit the publication or revelation of

¹²² Pallid: abnormally pale or wan

Alexa's face, her optimism was immediately squelched.¹²³ They didn't need any words to communicate the fact that Alexa had not been able to find the bracelet.

"Charlotte, I'm not giving up! I'm going back to look after lunch."

"I don't think it'll do any good—it's gone," Charlotte replied with a stoic¹²⁴ expression.

"Well, I'm not giving up! I know how much it meant to you."

"That's really nice of you," Charlotte replied.

"José feels really bad he said those things to you—I know he's very sorry," Alexa began with a conciliatory¹²⁵ gesture in her attempt to restore accord.¹²⁶

"Alexa, I really like having you as a friend. But that doesn't mean I have to like him! The things he said were really appalling!"¹²⁷

Alexa paused. Arbitrating¹²⁸ an understanding between José and Charlotte would not be easy. It looked as though their acrimonious¹²⁹ dispute had left Charlotte with an aversion¹³⁰ for José that would be difficult to overcome. Even more difficult was the thought that Alexa would need to convince Charlotte to see the situation from José's perspective as well. After all, the confrontation had two disputants¹³¹—it wasn't just José who had berated Charlotte with harsh words; Charlotte had

¹²³ Squelch: to completely suppress

¹²⁴ Stoic: not showing passion or feeling

¹²⁵ Conciliatory: to make compatible; reconcile

¹²⁶ Accord: to bring into agreement

¹²⁷ Appalling: inspiring horror, dismay, or disgust

¹²⁸ Arbitrating: acting as an arbitrator (one who decides in the case of a dispute)

¹²⁹ Acrimonious: caustic, biting, or rancorous, especially in feeling language or manner

¹³⁰ Aversion: a feeling of repugnance toward something with a desire to avoid or turn from it

¹³¹ Disputant: one who is engaged in a dispute

drubbed¹³² José as well. But for the moment, Alexa had the discretion¹³³ not to push the divisive¹³⁴ issue any further.

“Do you still want to go running with me tomorrow morning and pick up litter at the beach? We could look for your bracelet at the same time,” Alexa suggested.

“OK. Maybe we should look on the beach near where we picked up the trash. Maybe it fell off before I even went in the water,” Charlotte replied.

“Yes! But let’s not defer¹³⁵ the search until tomorrow,” Alexa pleaded, seizing the opportunity to shake Charlotte out of her impassive¹³⁶ state of inactivity. “Let’s go now before the tide comes in!”

¹³² **Drub:** to abuse with words; berate

¹³³ **Discretion:** the quality of being discreet, especially cautious reserve in speech

¹³⁴ **Divisive:** creating disunity or dissension

¹³⁵ **Defer:** postpone, put off

¹³⁶ **Impassive:** giving no sign of feeling or expression

11

A Stealthy Scheme

A contrite¹ and apologetic José steered his boat toward Alexa, who was waiting inanimately² on the shore. As he maneuvered the boat closer, she could see that the enmity³ he displayed so openly in his fight with Charlotte had dissolved. At least José was sorry about the argument, Alexa thought, unlike Charlotte, who was impenitent.⁴

“Alexa, I am so sorry I blew up yesterday with Charlotte,” José said sincerely. He plopped the anchor in the water and waded ashore with a sheepish expression on his face. “Is she really angry with me?”

“Well, I don’t know if anger is really the right word to characterize it. She is really upset. I know you probably didn’t know this, but her real father died in a training exercise for the military when Charlotte was ten. Colonel Brandt is her stepfather. She has every reason in the world to be sensitive about the things you said,” Alexa explained. As he absorbed her words, José looked even more discomfited.⁵ Alexa felt a rush of sympathy

¹ Contrite: grieving and penitent for sin or shortcoming

² Inanimate: not endowed with life or spirit

³ Enmity: deep-seated and typically mutual hatred or ill will

⁴ Impenitent: not penitent (feeling or expressing humble or regretful pain or sorrow for sins or offenses)

⁵ Discomfited: to put in a state of perplexity and embarrassment

for him. The look of concern on his face was so endearing,⁶ José displayed his emotions on his sleeve, Alexa thought. When he was angry, there was no hiding it, and when he was sorry, he was replete with contrition.

“Oh, no!” José was horrified. “The things I said—I still believe they are true...but I never should have said those words to her.”

At least he didn’t disavow⁷ his role in the altercation,⁸ Alexa thought. He was definitely intransigent⁹ in his views, but at least he was apologetic about the hurt feelings his words precipitated.¹⁰ “Unfortunately, the situation is even worse—yesterday morning Charlotte lost the bracelet her father gave her. I think the real reason she’s still upset is probably attributable¹¹ to the fact we weren’t able to find it anywhere.”

“No wonder she is upset. But don’t worry, Alexa. We will find it,” José asserted.

“But how?” Alexa voiced her dissent.¹² “We’ve already looked everywhere. We looked on the beach, on the road, on the rocks, in the water...Alexa enumerated¹³ her list with her fingers.

“It’s probably in the water, and if it’s there we will find it,” José said confidently. The water is shallow and clear, there is not much current, and we’ve never lost anything in this bay. We’ve always found whatever we’ve dropped in these waters. I’m going to come back here with my mask and snorkel at first morning light tomorrow. I’d do it right now, but I have to get to work soon.”

“That would be great,” Alexa replied, feeling relieved that José was going to emend¹⁴ the situation. “Look over there! Is that Pecas?” Alexa pointed to a group of three dolphins hovering in the distance.

⁶ Endear: to cause to become beloved or admired

⁷ Disavow: deny responsibility for

⁸ Altercation: a noisy, heated, angry dispute; also a noisy controversy

⁹ Intransigent: refusing to compromise or abandon an extreme position or attitude; uncompromising

¹⁰ Precipitate: to bring about, especially abruptly

¹¹ Attribute: to explain by indicating a cause

¹² Dissent: to differ in opinion

¹³ Enumerated: counted, tallied

¹⁴ Emend: to correct

“It looks like her! Let’s hop in the water!” José cried.

They both wasted no time jumping into the shallow water. Pecas swam in closer while the two other dolphins waited in the distance. Pecas swam slowly, encircling Alexa and José as they stood in chest-deep water.

“What’s wrong with her?” Alexa asked. They both noticed immediately that something had changed with their dolphin friend. It was as if a light had been extinguished. Whereas Pecas usually seemed animated and full of zealous¹⁵ vigor, she now appeared phlegmatic.¹⁶ The vitality she usually displayed in abundance had diminished¹⁷ significantly. It was as if depression had enervated¹⁸ her. When she finally surfaced to communicate with them, she wasted no time in beginning her plaintive cries and leading them toward Puerto Marino.

“I think we already know what’s wrong with her,” José said as he looked scornfully in the direction of Puerto Marino.

“I just wish we could do something about it,” Alexa said wistfully as she watched Pecas swim away.

“I’ve been thinking about this for a while. It’s time we do something about it!” In José’s black-and-white view of the world, this dire¹⁹ situation warranted²⁰ immediate action.

“What are you talking about? We can’t begin our experiment to see if Pecas’ baby is captive in there until this weekend,” Alexa pointed out logically. “We don’t have enough cells to extract the DNA!” she added, substantiating²¹ her argument even further.

“We could free all of the baby dolphins at Puerto Marino! Or maybe even all of the dolphins!” José said defiantly.²²

¹⁵ Zealous: filled with or characterized by zeal (eagerness and ardent interest in pursuit of something)

¹⁶ Phlegmatic: having or showing a slow and stolid temperament; apathetic

¹⁷ Diminished: reduced in scope or size

¹⁸ Enervated: lacking physical, mental, or moral vigor; to lessen the vitality or strength of

¹⁹ Dire: arousing terror or causing extreme distress; calling for quick action, urgent

²⁰ Warranted: sanctioned, authorized

²¹ Substantiate: to establish by proof or competent evidence; verify

²² Defiantly: full of defiance (disposition to resist, willingness to contend or fight)

“What? That’s crazy!” Alexa scoffed.²³ Had his idolatry²⁴ of the dolphins made him lose his senses? At the very least, his perspective was subjective²⁵ when it came to Puerto Marino, she thought.

“Why is it so crazy? I’ve been thinking about this for a long time. They took the dolphins from the ocean illegally, and we would just be returning them there. It’s not stealing or despoiling.”²⁶ He looked expectantly at Alexa, waiting for her corroboration.²⁷ “They didn’t have a permit to take any dolphins from these waters. It’s illegal!” he repeated.

“But we don’t even know that Pecas’ baby is in there!”

“What if we do the DNA experiment and it turns out her baby is in there? Then we would know for sure that they captured the dolphin illegally. Wouldn’t you agree that we should do something about it?”

“Yes,” Alexa agreed, complying²⁸ with his logic. “In that case, if we knew for sure that her baby was confined in Puerto Marino, then I agree—we would need to free her from captivity. But we don’t even know that yet!”

“Wouldn’t you want to free all of the dolphins anyway? They’re all in the same situation. We need to set all of the dolphins free!” José said firmly, as if this notion was the obvious corollary²⁹ of their decision to free Pecas’ baby. In his mind, the emancipation³⁰ of all of the dolphins at Puerto Marino was not an eccentric³¹ wish on his part; it was the dolphins’ inviolable³² right.

²³ **Scoffed:** to treat or address with derision; mocked, ridiculed

²⁴ **Idolatry:** immoderate attachment or devotion to something

²⁵ **Subjective:** modified or affected by personal views, experience, or background

²⁶ **Despoiling:** to strip of belongings and value; pillage

²⁷ **Corroboration:** to support with evidence or authority

²⁸ **Complying:** to conform or adapt one’s actions to another’s wishes

²⁹ **Corollary:** a deduction or inference

³⁰ **Emancipation:** to free from restraint, control, or the power of another

³¹ **Eccentric:** deviating from conventional or accepted usage or conduct, especially in odd or whimsical ways

³² **Inviolable:** secure from violation or profanation; unbreakable

“No,” Alexa replied firmly. “If we find out for sure that Pecas’ baby is in there, I agree we should free her.” In Alexa’s mind, that piece of irrefutable DNA evidence would consecrate³³ their entitlement³⁴ to free Pecas’ baby. “But I just don’t feel right about freeing the dolphins we really don’t know anything about. We don’t even know what kind of situation we’d be exposing them to out in the open ocean! The baby dolphins might not have a mother waiting for them, and some of the adult dolphins might not even be from this area. They might not even know how to live on their own in the ocean—it can be a treacherous³⁵ place!”

“I see your point. Maybe we should just start with freeing one dolphin,” José compromised.³⁶ “After we right one wrong in the world we can think carefully about what we can do to help the other dolphins.”

“Then I think we have a consensus,”³⁷ Alexa agreed. But unlike José, Alexa didn’t think this would be a facile³⁸ undertaking. It didn’t seem quite real to her—the idea that they would actually carry out this stealthy³⁹ scheme. Theoretically,⁴⁰ reuniting a young dolphin with its mother sounded like the right thing to do. However, Alexa could not trivialize⁴¹ the logistical hurdles the way José could. At times, he resembled a

³³ Consecrate: to make inviolable or venerable (can also mean to declare sacred)

³⁴ Entitlement: the state or condition of being entitled; right

³⁵ Treacherous: marked by hidden dangers

³⁶ Compromise: to adjust or settle by mutual concessions

³⁷ Consensus: general agreement; unanimity

³⁸ Facile: easily accomplished or attained

³⁹ Stealthy: intended to escape observation; secret

⁴⁰ Theoretically: according to an ideal or assumed set of facts or principles, in theory

⁴¹ Trivialize: to make trivial (of little worth or importance)

doctrinaire⁴² idealist. He tended to aspire to lofty principles without thinking too much about the practical difficulties that may be encountered in their implementation.⁴³ Still, Alexa had to admit she really admired José's idealism. He had high-minded principles and an illimitable⁴⁴ sense of purpose. When she was around him, everything they talked about or did together took on a heightened⁴⁵ sense of importance. Alexa felt intoxicated, excited, and simply happy to be alive whenever she was around him. So what if José wasn't good at thinking through the practical details—she could help with that. “So how are we possibly going to manage to break into a high-security facility and free this baby dolphin?” she asked.

“Don't worry. We'll figure it out. We are two innovative⁴⁶ people—we will find a way,” José replied, taking her hand in his as they waded through the water toward the shore.

“José, if we can prove that they captured one of the dolphins in the bay, and it's illegal to do that, why don't we just report it to the police?”

José groaned audibly. “You don't understand what it's like here! Things don't work like that! Puerto Marino has the support of all of the politicians around here. They think that they're doing us a favor by bringing in an industry to stimulate the economy here. I just don't think they would help us if it involved antagonizing Puerto Marino. It would never work. We have to take care of this ourselves!” he pleaded.

“OK. But let's just wait to see the results of the experiment,” Alexa replied.

⁴² *Doctrinaire*: one who attempts to put into effect an abstract doctrine or theory with little or no regard for practical difficulties

⁴³ *Implementation*: to put into practical effect; carry out

⁴⁴ *Illimitable*: incapable of being limited or bounded

⁴⁵ *Heightened*: to increase the amount or degree of

⁴⁶ *Innovative*: characterized by, tending to, or introducing innovations (a new idea, method, or device)

“Sounds like a plan.” José took a deep breath as he tried to calm down. When they reached the shallows, he turned to her, looking sincere. “I want to show you something special tomorrow. Have you ever ridden on a kayak?”

“Yes, several times.”

“I want to take you kayaking through the estuaries! Will you come?”

“What are the estuaries...and where are they?” Alexa asked.

“You’ll see! It is so beautiful—so full of life—you have to see it!” he said with his indefatigable⁴⁷ passion.

That sounds like fun,” Alexa replied, her heart fluttering. José was standing so close to her and holding her hand. Her head was spinning and it was hard to concentrate when she felt this ineffable⁴⁸ excitement, but Alexa knew there was no way that she was saying no. She wanted to go kayaking with José.

“Great!” he said, smiling down at her. “I’ll look for Charlotte’s bracelet in the early morning and then let’s meet at the library at the usual time later tomorrow morning. I’ll borrow my uncle’s pickup truck and we can carry the kayaks in the back. It’s just a short drive from here—the place where we launch the kayaks. You’re going to love it!” José predicted with his boundless⁴⁹ enthusiasm. It was as if the thought of going kayaking had filled him with renewed vigor, and he dropped Alexa’s hand and raced though the shallow water to the rocky outcrop. Nimbly, he hopped up ashore, and then turned to Alexa and held his hand out to help her up.

Alexa could barely keep up. She had thought this special moment was destined to culminate⁵⁰ in a kiss. But the kiss she had thought was

⁴⁷ **Indefatigable:** incapable of being fatigued; untiring

⁴⁸ **Ineffable:** incapable of being expressed in words; indescribable

⁴⁹ **Boundless:** having no boundaries; vast

⁵⁰ **Culminate:** to reach the highest or a climactic or decisive point

inevitable didn't happen. Riding her motorbike back to the lab to check on Pecas' cell culture, she couldn't help but dwell on this shortcoming. Obviously, she couldn't talk about this with Charlotte, given the way Charlotte felt about José. It would have to be Laurie, she thought. She raced back to the lab, filled with a sense of purpose. Not only did she have an important experiment to conduct, she also needed to send a critical e-mail to her friend back home.

Hurrying into the lab, Alexa stowed her backpack and immediately headed over to the incubator to check on Pecas' cells. She always felt intense anticipation when she took her dish of cells out of the incubator and brought it to the microscope. It was particularly exciting to check on the cells first thing in the morning, as the cell culture always changed significantly overnight. Alexa was growing to love the routine of coming to the lab in the morning and checking the status of her various experiments, the most exciting of which concerned Pecas.

Flipping on the microscope light, Alexa placed the dish containing Pecas' cell culture on the stage of the microscope. Eagerly, she peered through the lenses and focused. If there had been any change since she last checked the culture an hour and a half earlier, it was imperceptible.⁵¹ The cells looked like miniature spindles with rounded centers and pinched, pointed ends. They looked healthy and plump, forming a smooth layer that clung to the bottom of the dish. In Alexa's discerning⁵²

⁵¹ Imperceptible: not perceptible by a sense or by the mind, extremely slight, gradual, or subtle

⁵² Discern: to recognize or identify as separate and distinct; discriminate

judgment, the cells were not too crowded. It looked like they had enough room to grow. Probably tomorrow would be the best time to split this culture into two dishes, she surmised.⁵³ Their experiment seemed to be on schedule. Alexa inferred⁵⁴ that they should have 10 million cells by Saturday, and, after an industrious⁵⁵ weekend in the laboratory, they should have the factual⁵⁶ evidence by Monday.



“Look at that! I think there’s an iguana on the road!” José stopped the pickup truck and he and Alexa hopped out to take a closer look.

Alexa looked curiously at the bizarre lizard that somehow appeared ancient. It seemed curiously out of place in the contemporary⁵⁷ world—like an anachronistic⁵⁸ miniature dinosaur. They watched it amble slowly across the road.

Alexa could hardly contain her excitement as she helped José launch the kayaks into the estuary. Not even the news that José had been unsuccessful in the inexorable⁵⁹ search for Charlotte’s bracelet could dispel⁶⁰ her good mood. They had driven for several miles on an unpaved road through the tropical forest.” This is an estuary,” José explained, “where the rivers flowing to the sea are bathed by the incoming tides from the ocean. So, the water is a mixture of fresh and salt water.”

It’s so calm,” Alexa noted, “if there’s a current at all, it’s indiscernible.”⁶¹ Paddling through the water was both easy and relaxing. The

⁵³ **Surmise:** a thought or idea based on scanty evidence

⁵⁴ **Inferred:** derived as a conclusion from facts or premises

⁵⁵ **Industrious:** persistently active; zealous

⁵⁶ **Factual:** restricted to or based on fact

⁵⁷ **Contemporary:** marked by characteristics of the present period; modern

⁵⁸ **Anachronistic:** a person or a thing that is chronologically out of place, especially one from a former age that is incongruously in the present

⁵⁹ **Inexorable:** not to be persuaded or moved by entreaty (pleas); relentless

⁶⁰ **Dispel:** to drive away by or as if by scattering; dissipate

⁶¹ **Indiscernible:** incapable of being discerned; not recognizable as distinct

abundant foliage⁶² formed a canopy over their heads, shading them completely from the unrelenting⁶³ sun.

“Do you see these trees here? These are mangroves. Look at the roots,” José said, pointing to the tangled web of woody roots under the surface of the water. “This is a haven for many small fish—it is where they hide from predatory⁶⁴ animals.”

“What kinds of animals are in here?” Alexa asked with a bit of trepidation.⁶⁵

“Oh, crocodiles, snakes, deadly parasites⁶⁶...you name it, it’s in here!” José laughed, teasing her. “This jungle has a plethora⁶⁷ of wildlife. You can see so many species of birds in these trees—you just have to proceed very quietly. Why don’t you go first, so I don’t scare the birds away before you see them,” José urged. He maneuvered his kayak to the side to facilitate⁶⁸ her passing in the narrow waterway.

“OK,” Alexa agreed, feeling very special to get this private tour of the jungle. She paddled by José, who put his finger to his lips, warning her to avoid startling the wildlife. She could tell by the amused look in his eyes that he was also reminding her of the first time she saw him in the cafeteria, when she had signaled to him to be quiet. She made a motion like she was zipping her lips, just as he had done on that day. They both burst out laughing as they reminisced about that fateful meeting.

Alexa paddled ahead and then let her kayak glide in the calm waters as she absorbed the amazing scene. Now that they had halted their conversation, the sounds of the jungle were readily audible. A delicate and mesmerizing birdsong filled the air, and she looked intently in the trees

⁶² Foliage: the leaves of one or more plants

⁶³ Unrelenting: not softening or yielding in determination

⁶⁴ Predatory: living by predation (a mode of life in which food is primarily obtained by the killing and consuming of animals)

⁶⁵ Trepidation: apprehension, fear

⁶⁶ Parasite: an organism living in, with, or on another organism

⁶⁷ Plethora: excess, profusion

⁶⁸ Facilitate: to make easier, help bring about

for the source of this magical incantation.⁶⁹ She looked back at José for guidance, and he pointed silently to the source. Alexa quickly turned her head to catch a glimpse of this melodious creature. But her quick movement must have startled the bird, and her attempt to catch a glimpse of it was foiled.⁷⁰

The waters were easily navigable,⁷¹ and Alexa paddled on. There was so much to see in this amazing place. In the distance, she saw a crocodile slink into the water from its perch on a floating log. She looked back at José with wide eyes. He looked amused and quite satisfied that they had been able to see one of these elusive animals on their foray⁷² into the jungle. As Alexa turned back around, she saw a spectacular crimson-colored bird alight⁷³ by the side of the water.

Up ahead it looked like they had some choices to make. Another estuary joined theirs at an oblique⁷⁴ angle, and then the combined waters emptied into a much wider river that was perpendicular to the channel they were on. José pointed to the right, and they paddled out to the large waterway, where José assumed the lead. The current was quite strong here, and they both paddled hard against its force. José pointed to a sandy beach up ahead, which was their apparent goal.

“Let’s stop here for a break,” José suggested.

“Sounds good,” Alexa agreed, relieved to take a respite⁷⁵ from the heavy paddling. José helped her out and then pulled the kayaks up onto the beach.

“Let’s have a snack here. I brought some things for you to try.” José unpacked his backpack under a canopy of palm trees. It was a beautiful

⁶⁹ Incantation: a use of spells or verbal charms spoken or sung as part of a ritual of magic

⁷⁰ Foil: to prevent from attaining an end; thwart

⁷¹ Navigable: deep enough and wide enough to afford passage to ships

⁷² Foray: a brief excursion or attempt, especially outside one’s accustomed sphere

⁷³ Alight: to descend from the air and come to rest

⁷⁴ Oblique: neither perpendicular nor parallel

⁷⁵ Respite: an interval of rest or relief

spot for a picnic. Alexa could see the ocean on one side, the narrow island on the other side, and the verdant jungle across the estuary. She wanted to imprint⁷⁶ this memory in her mind so that she could conjure⁷⁷ up this scene so full of life and beauty whenever she wanted to.

José poured a pale brown juice into large paper cups and handed one to her. “It’s guava juice.”

“Thank you.” Alexa gingerly took a sip, not quite knowing what to expect. It was delicious. As soon as Alexa started drinking, she realized how thirsty she was. Her cup was empty almost immediately.

José smiled as he refilled her cup. “Here is some fresh pineapple—I cut it myself this morning. And this is a special cake—my mother made it,” he added with a smile.

Alexa took a piece of the delicious yellow cake suffused⁷⁸ with a milky sweet substance. It was absolutely divine.⁷⁹ “This is the best cake I’ve ever had,” she said sincerely.

“Have another piece!” José offered. He looked so pleased that she liked it.

“Oh no, thank you...I think I’ll try some of this pineapple now.” Alexa summoned all of her willpower to resist the cake. She wasn’t exaggerating when she said it was the best cake she’d ever had. She really wanted more, but she didn’t want to look like a glutton.⁸⁰ The pineapple, sweet and juicy, was equally potent for her palate.⁸¹ Alexa had had pineapple many times before, but somehow it had never tasted like this.

“This is such an amazingly beautiful place,” Alexa said, feeling a level of contentment both rare and evanescent.⁸² She realized there was

⁷⁶ Imprint: to fix indelibly or permanently

⁷⁷ Conjure: to bring to mind

⁷⁸ Suffuse: to spread over or through in the manner of fluid or light

⁷⁹ Divine: supremely good

⁸⁰ Glutton: one given habitually to greedy and voracious eating and drinking

⁸¹ Palate: the sense of taste

⁸² Evanescent: tending to vanish like vapor

nothing in the world, either in the extant⁸³ world or anything she could possibly conjure up in her imagination, that she would rather be doing than enjoying this moment with José right here and now. It was a moment that was truly ephemeral.⁸⁴

“Yes, this is very beautiful. But I wish I could have shown you the area where Puerto Marino is now. *That* was truly beautiful. Did I tell you that the government expropriated⁸⁵ some land from my uncle for the building of Puerto Marino? For an American company! He wasn’t even given a choice—he had to give up his land.”

“Really?” Alexa asked, as she returned to the present from her reverie. José had managed to curtail her blissful state by bringing up the ponderous⁸⁶ issues that vexed⁸⁷ them unmercifully. Now, the seizing of his uncle’s land was imputed⁸⁸ to Puerto Marino on top of the other grievances he had aired previously. She realized that he had layers upon layers of resentment toward Puerto Marino, and, as she got to know him better, he was exposing these layers like an onion being peeled. He resented that an American company was located on his island, he resented the captive state of the dolphins, and he resented the loss of his uncle’s beautiful property. Alexa thought he probably resented his servile⁸⁹ job there as well. It had to be hard for a person as astute⁹⁰ and resourceful as José to work in such a menial position. He had to clean the kitchen while others, such as herself, had an opportunity to work in an interesting and enlightening⁹¹ environment. She knew that he would love to work in a laboratory and learn about DNA, but that opportunity had never been given to him the way it had been given to her. Alexa silently vowed that she would try

⁸³ Extant: currently or actually existing

⁸⁴ Ephemeral: lasting a very short time

⁸⁵ Expropriate: the action of the state in taking or modifying the property rights of an individual in the exercise of its sovereignty

⁸⁶ Ponderous: of very great weight; heavy

⁸⁷ Vexed: to bring trouble, stress, or agitation to

⁸⁸ Imputed: to lay the responsibility or blame for, often falsely or unjustly; charge, attribute

⁸⁹ Servile: of or befitting a slave or a menial person

⁹⁰ Astute: having or showing shrewdness and perspicacity

⁹¹ Enlighten: to furnish knowledge to

to invite him to the laboratory as much as possible so that he could also be a beneficiary⁹² of her opportunity there. She knew that this gesture couldn't possibly make their situations equitable,⁹³ but she desperately wanted to do *something*.

"Yes, but I'm sorry I brought that up now," José said as his amiable⁹⁴ demeanor returned. He could tell by the look on her face that she did not want to get mired⁹⁵ in those loaded issues right now. Tactfully, he steered the conversation to a more benign⁹⁶ and pleasant topic. "There are so many beautiful places on this island. I would like to show you all of them!"

"That sounds great. I would love to see them." Alexa warmed at the thought of his gracious⁹⁷ offer. It seemed that he liked to make her happy—it was as if he enjoyed her happiness vicariously.⁹⁸ "But speaking of time, I should probably be heading back to work. Don't you have to get to work too?"

"Yes, probably," he sighed. "Although my boss is a benevolent⁹⁹ dictator—he said that I could come late today. But I don't want to antagonize him by being too late, so we'd better go."

"You have a benevolent dictator for a boss and I have an absent dictator! My boss is hardly ever in the lab. My workplace is more akin to anarchy¹⁰⁰ than dictatorship!" They both broke into laughter over her humorous analogy. Alexa continued on a more serious note. "Did you want to work in the lab with me this weekend? I'm almost sure we will

⁹² Beneficiary: one who benefits from something

⁹³ Equitable: fair

⁹⁴ Amiable: friendly, sociable, congenial

⁹⁵ Mire: to cause to get stuck in

⁹⁶ Benign: having no significant effect; harmless

⁹⁷ Gracious: marked by kindness and courtesy

⁹⁸ Vicarious: experienced or realized through imaginative or sympathetic participation in the experience of another

⁹⁹ Benevolent: marked by or disposed to doing good

¹⁰⁰ Anarchy: absence of government

have a profusion¹⁰¹ of Pecas' cells by then—they have been extremely prolific,”¹⁰² Alexa offered. She knew that he would love this—it was like offering candy to a child.

“Yes!” he cried, exultant¹⁰³ at the thought of it. His eyes were inflamed¹⁰⁴ with enthusiasm. “But we’ll have to remember to keep it secret—officially, I’m not allowed to go anywhere but the kitchen at Puerto Marino.”

Alexa nodded in sympathy. “Why don’t we start in the morning on Saturday before you have to go to work?” she suggested as they pushed their kayaks back into the water. It was hard to believe they would have their answer so soon. Then they would need to figure out what to do with it.

¹⁰¹ Profusion: great quantity; lavish display or supply

¹⁰² Prolific: abundant growth, generation, or reproduction

¹⁰³ Exultant: filled with or expressing great joy or triumph; jubilant

¹⁰⁴ Inflamed: to excite to excessive or uncontrollable action or feeling

The DNA Debacle

Saturday morning dawned sunny and bright, an auspicious¹ beginning to the day that Alexa and José had been anticipating with a mixture of trepidation and excitement. Despite the fact that it was a perfect morning to go to the beach, they were deviating from their usual routine. Today was the day they were going to begin their DNA experiments to find out if Pecas' baby was captive at Puerto Marino.

Alexa waited on the steps of the laboratory with two steaming cups of coffee. José arrived on his ramshackle² old bike, wearing a beaming smile that belied the early hour. It was only six o'clock in the morning, but José looked fresh and eager.

"I brought your favorite cake!" José smiled as he waved a brown paper bag in front of her eyes to tease her. It was too early for breakfast at the cafeteria, so the pair had decided to have cake and coffee together before beginning their experiment.

"Sounds good!" Alexa laughed. It was impossible not to feel happy around him, she thought. "I brought you a coffee. Do you mind if we eat out here—we're not supposed to eat in the lab."

¹ Auspicious: affording a favorable auspice (a favorable sign)

² Ramshackle: appearing ready to collapse

“I like to eat outside,” José said as he settled in next to her on the steps of the building. “Then we can hear the howling of the monkeys. Do you hear that?” he asked pointing to the jungle that surrounded the compound. “That’s the sound of the howler monkeys. Isn’t it fantastic?”

“Those are monkeys that are making that noise?” Alexa inquired as she accepted a piece of cake. “I heard that noise the first night I was here and I had no idea what it was! I was frightened by it!” Alexa laughed.

“They can be very loud. If we have time later, we can go look for them in the treetops. You need to see them—it is quite amazing. I’m so happy they are still around here, that they haven’t been eradicated³ by all of this development.” He gestured toward the buildings around them. “Sometimes when the people come, the monkeys must go elsewhere.”

“I would love to see them. But we have just enough time to do the DNA extraction from Pecas’ cells before you have to go to work. You still want to do that, don’t you?”

José laughed. “You know I do! But first, you must have another piece of cake.”

“Excellent idea!” Alexa laughed. This time she wasn’t so shy about seconds. After they had finished their coffee, they headed into the laboratory to begin.

Alexa led José straight to the incubator to pull out the dishes containing Pecas’ cells. “Let’s take a look,” Alexa said, as she placed the dish on the stage of the microscope. “I think we have enough to enable⁴ us to begin right away.” She offered José a look.

“Wow...there are so many cells! Do you think there are 10 million?”

“Yes, there should be. In both of these dishes combined.”

³ Eradicate: to do away with as if by pulling up from the roots

⁴ Enable: to provide with the means or opportunity

“Then let’s go! What do we do next?” José asked eagerly.

“We need to collect all of these cells into a test tube. First we’ll loosen their attachment to the bottom of the dish and to each other using an enzyme that breaks that bond between them. Then, when the cells are floating freely in the solution, we’ll spin them in the centrifuge to make a pellet of cells. Then we break open the cells and pull the DNA out!” Alexa concluded triumphantly.

José was wide-eyed with wonder. “How will we be able to see the DNA—I mean, will we be able to see it?” José asked diffidently.⁵

“Oh, yes, we’ll be able to see it!” Alexa answered. She could tell José was a bit embarrassed by his basic questions and lack of knowledge in this area. But Alexa didn’t mind that he was a novice.⁶ In fact, she relished⁷ the thought of being able to show him DNA for the first time. She knew it would be quite a thrill for him, as it had been for her.

Alexa took him through the initial steps of the DNA extraction. José was an exemplary⁸ student, absorbing her every word as she showed him how the centrifuge worked and how to handle the samples. He especially liked using the micro pipettes—the specialized hand-held devices used for measuring very small volumes of liquids. Initially, he practiced using them with water, and when he was able to manipulate the instrument smoothly, Alexa had him doing all of the pipetting for the experiment.

Finally, the moment arrived when they added the ethanol to their solution to precipitate⁹ the DNA. José deftly pipetted the requisite¹⁰ amount of ethanol into the test tube and closed the cap. Alexa’s hand was trembling with excitement as she picked up the tube and inverted it several times to mix the solutions. She held the tube up to the light in

⁵ Diffident: hesitant in acting or speaking through lack of self-confidence

⁶ Novice: beginner

⁷ Relish: a strong liking

⁸ Exemplary: deserving imitation because of excellence; commendable

⁹ Precipitate: to cause to separate from solution or suspension

¹⁰ Requisite: essential, necessary

between them so that they could both see the delicate thread of DNA congeal.¹¹ Although she had done this before, her previous experience did nothing to diminish the excitement of the moment. Experiencing this moment with José was reminiscent of her own first time seeing DNA.

“Is that it?” José asked with palpable¹² excitement. “The whitish thread there, that is it?”

“Yes it is! We have DNA!” she said triumphantly, handing the tube to José for a closer look.

“Wow! It’s just so amazing to me that this white thread in my hand is DNA from a dolphin. From our dolphin friend Pecas! This is awesome!” José’s eyes were sparkling with wonder. “What do we do next?”

“Well, we need to centrifuge it again to make a small pellet of that DNA there, and then we resuspend it in a buffer solution. Then we’re ready to use it to do the maternity test.”

“I’ll put it in the centrifuge,” José offered. He obviously enjoyed being the one to hold the precious tube and to carry out the manipulations. Alexa didn’t mind. It was fun to watch him enjoying himself so much. He carefully placed the tube in the centrifuge and turned it on. After the spin in the centrifuge, he cautiously poured out the ethanol solution, leaving a small pellet about the size of an ant at the bottom of the tube. Then, Alexa instructed José to add the buffer solution to the tube containing the pellet to complete the DNA prep. José held the tube up to the light where they could see the pellet of DNA with a layer of buffer over it.

“It doesn’t look like it’s dissolving! Isn’t the DNA supposed to dissolve in the solution?” José asked worriedly.

¹¹ Congeal: to change from a fluid state to a solid state

¹² Palpable: easily perceptible

“Here, let me try.” Alexa reached for the tube. “Sometimes the pellet is really hard and you need to break it up with your pipette tip, like this.” Alexa put her pipette tip into the tube and homogenized¹³ the solution with the stirring action of her pipette. “There. I think the pellet is dissolved and it’s all in solution now. See how viscous¹⁴ the solution is now? It’s thick with DNA!” Alexa declared triumphantly. As she held the tube up to the light again for José to see, the tube slipped through her gloved fingers and in an instant, it landed on the floor!

“Oh no!” Alexa cried. “I can’t believe that just happened! It just slipped through my fingers.” They both could see the small puddle of viscous solution on the floor, the empty plastic tube lying on its side. José looked horrified. His high hopes for the experiment were thwarted¹⁵ by her accident. Alexa knew his heart and mind were consumed with this experiment and she felt terrible for causing such a debacle.¹⁶

“Don’t feel bad. We can always do it over again,” José consoled her with his kind words. It didn’t take but a moment for him to regain his composure and his limitless empathy. He was most concerned about her. “And maybe there is still some DNA left in here,” José added as he picked up the empty tube off the floor, snapped the lid shut, and set it on the counter.

“I feel terrible. It will take us another week to grow the cells again!” Alexa said in despair. “It took us a week just to get the cells from Pecas, then it took us a week to grow them. Now we’ll have to wait again!” She felt absolutely disheartened to have put them in such a conundrum¹⁷ when they had been so close to reaching their goal.

¹³ Homogenize: to blend (diverse elements) into a uniform mixture

¹⁴ Viscous: having or characterized by viscosity (the property of resistance to flow in a fluid or semifluid); a thick liquid

¹⁵ Thwart: to oppose successfully, to defeat the hopes or aspirations of

¹⁶ Debacle: a great disaster; fiasco

¹⁷ Conundrum: an intricate and difficult problem

“Don’t feel bad—we’ll get there eventually. But speaking of time, I’m five minutes late for work,” he said ruefully.¹⁸ He looked hesitant to leave her when she was so upset, but he was already tardy. He pointed to the clock—it was 10:35 A.M. “I need to go. Please don’t worry about it. Can you meet me at the beach tomorrow morning?” he asked hopefully on his way out the door.

Alexa nodded and managed to give him a brave smile before he took off. She was thankful that he was not the type to be condescending.¹⁹ By contrast, he was so gracious about her gaffe.²⁰ Nevertheless, her heart sunk as she returned to her desk. All morning, she had been feeling like a consummate²¹ scientist, unraveling a mystery with her partner, who revered her prowess²² in the laboratory. It had been so much fun up until that horrifying moment when she’d dropped the tube. She felt dejected, embarrassed, and close to tears.

Alexa flung herself into the chair and with her elbows on the desk, rested her head in her hands and felt her eyes fill with tears. She couldn’t hold it back any longer. Big tears dropped onto her lab notebook, which lay open on her desk. The words were all blurry through her tears, but Alexa could make out that her tears were falling on the protocol for the DNA maternity test that they had planned to carry out that afternoon. How appropriate, in an ironic sort of way, Alexa thought. It seemed befitting that her tears would stain the instructions for the experiment that was going to elude²³ them for yet another week.

Or would it? she thought as she looked at the protocol. The instructions called for 0.1 micrograms of DNA, she noticed, wiping the tears

¹⁸ Rueful: mournful, regretful

¹⁹ Condescending: to assume an air of superiority

²⁰ Gaffe: a social or diplomatic blunder

²¹ Consummate: extremely skilled and accomplished

²² Prowess: extraordinary ability

²³ Elude: to escape the perception, understanding, or grasp of

from her eyes. Alexa recalled that two weeks ago, when she had made dolphin DNA from Coco, 10 million cells had yielded over a gram of DNA. She hurriedly flipped the pages of her lab notebook back to Coco's DNA extraction. Yes, it had yielded 1.1 grams of DNA. If today's experiment yielded a similar amount, it would have given them 10,000 times more DNA than they needed for the maternity test! So, she calculated excitedly as her spirits rose, even if they spilled 99% of their DNA on the floor and they only had 1% left in the tube, it was still ten times more than they needed!

Alexa ran over to the countertop where José had placed the capped tube. It looked like quite a bit of the viscous solution had stuck to the walls of the test tube. There was probably 20% of the solution still in there, waiting to be analyzed. Alexa was certain now that they had plenty of DNA for the next phase of the experiment. She was elated that her clumsy error wouldn't detract²⁴ from the progress of their experiment at all.

She brought the precious test tube over to her lab bench to begin the next phase of the experiment. It was a bit embarrassing, she thought as she realized what had happened. Whenever she had made DNA in the past, she had always used a large quantity of cells. By default,²⁵ she assumed that she had needed to this time as well. But now, she realized they probably could have gotten enough DNA just from the cheek swab itself. How could I have been so obtuse,²⁶ Alexa chided herself. At least all of their work hadn't been in vain, she thought as she looked at the remaining DNA solution in the test tube.

²⁴ **Detract:** to diminish the importance, value, or effectiveness of something

²⁵ **Default:** a course taken without an active choice

²⁶ **Obtuse:** lacking sharpness or quickness of sensibility or intellect

Alexa couldn't wait to tell José their experiment was still on. They could spend all day tomorrow in the lab, she thought with growing jubilation.²⁷

But right now was the perfect time to send an e-mail update to Laurie back home, who had been eagerly following the developments in Alexa's life at Puerto Marino. Alexa found that having an online pen pal like Laurie was such a tempting diversion²⁸ from work. There was so much to talk about—the dolphins, the big experiment, the clandestine plan, and of course, José. Alexa wrote about it all—uncensored,²⁹ just as if she were talking with Laurie face to face. Lately, Laurie had been writing back almost every day. It was as if their disparate³⁰ summer experiences gave them so much to talk about that their friendship was growing even when they were thousands of miles apart.

Time: 11:16 A.M.

To: "Laurie"

From: "Alexa"

Subject: the big experiment

Dear Laurie,

I was so happy to get your e-mail this morning! I am glad to hear you like your job at CNN and I concur,³¹ you would make an excellent anchorwoman! That would be the perfect career for you. Please tell me more about your new boyfriend! Or better yet, can you send me a picture?

²⁷ Jubilation: an expression of great joy

²⁸ Diversion: the act or an instance of diverting from a course, activity, or use; deviation

²⁹ Uncensored: not examined for the purpose of deleting objectionable or sensitive information; unedited

³⁰ Disparate: containing or made up of fundamentally different and often incongruous elements

³¹ Concur: to express agreement

I know you are dying to hear about our experiment. It's working well so far, despite a huge mishap in the lab this morning. But we are all set...and we should know the answer tomorrow! I can hardly wait! I haven't told Charlotte anything about our plan to free Pecas' baby, and, in fact, I don't even mention José when we go running together in the morning. We still haven't found her bracelet and I feel so bad about that. She seems to have accepted the fact that it's gone and it doesn't really seem to get in the way of our friendship like I thought it would. She is a very special friend.

I have to go now—I have a very important experiment to do! I will write to you tomorrow and let you know the answer!

Friends always,
Alexa

Alexa pressed Send, and then immediately set about the task of setting up the next phase of the experiment. In 15 minutes the cafeteria opened for lunch. Hopefully, she would see José so she could give him the good news.

13

A Moral Ambiguity

Alexa waited on the steps of the laboratory early Sunday morning, waiting for José to arrive. It felt like she had never left—even her dreams the night before had been filled with test tubes, cells, and DNA. Today was the day they should have their answer, and it was hard to think about anything else. José looked as if he had a similar single-mindedness as he rode up to the lab on his bike.

“You brought cake!” Alexa cried, delighted when she saw the bag in his hand.

“Yes, and you get one piece for every tube of DNA that you drop!” José teased.

“Very funny,” Alexa said, her voice filled with sarcasm. “You are treading perilously¹ on thin ice!” she warned as José handed her a piece of cake.

¹ Perilous: full of or involving peril (risk)

“Well, thick ice is kind of hard to find on a tropical island!” he replied, his eyes bright with mischief.

Alexa had to laugh at his perceptive joke. She knew he didn’t mean to be malicious² in his teasing, nor did he wish to alienate³ her. He just wanted to make her laugh. So she let it pass good-naturedly. Alexa didn’t tell him about how she had miscalculated the amount of DNA that they needed for the maternity test. If he knew about that, she would really be in for a barrage⁴ of jokes.

“I can’t wait to see the results of this experiment,” José tactfully changed the subject. “Do you really think we’ll have the answer at the end of the day?”

“Yes—if we start now,” Alexa replied, as she finished her cake. “In today’s experiment, we’re comparing Pecas’ DNA to Coco’s DNA. So we will definitely get an answer to that. If it turns out Coco is unrelated to Pecas, then we’ll need to check the other baby dolphins in separate experiments.” They both eagerly headed into the lab.

“I already carried out the PCR of the STRs yesterday, so today, we just need to run the gels to see the answer,” Alexa explained.

“Whoa! You’ve lost me.” José looked baffled.⁵ “That sounds like an alphabet soup! What’s PCR and STR?”

“Well, STR is short for short tandem repeat. It’s an area of the chromosome that’s highly variable from one individual to the next. But since offspring inherit their chromosomes from their parents, the STRs are usually the same in the parent and the child. So, in other words, if Coco is Pecas’ baby, they should have the same STRs. So what we need to

² Malicious: given to, marked by, or arising from malice (desire to cause pain, injury, or distress to another)

³ Alienate: to make unfriendly, hostile, or indifferent where attachment formerly existed

⁴ Barrage: a vigorous or rapid outpouring or projection of many things at once

⁵ Baffle: to defeat or check (as a person) by confusing or puzzling; disconcert

do is to look at a handful of these STRs. If the STRs are completely different, we can say for sure Pecas is not the mother. If they share the same STRs, Pecas is probably the mother. The more STRs we look at, the more certain it becomes. If we look at more than ten and they match, we can be more than 99% certain.”

“Wow! That is so awesome,” José said. “But how do we look at the STRs?”

“Well, that’s where the PCR comes in. PCR is a technique for amplifying segments of DNA. In this case, we are amplifying the STRs. And to look at them, we run a gel.” Alexa pointed to the rectangular mold containing the Jell-O-like substance. “We are going to deposit the DNA solution in this slot in the gel and then apply an electric field. Since the DNA has a negative charge, it will migrate toward the positive pole. But the smaller pieces of DNA will move faster and the bigger ones move slower. This will separate the molecules based on their size. It takes about an hour.”

José looked at her admiringly as she continued to explain the experiment.

“Then we’re going to visualize it on this computer screen here.” Alexa pulled up an image of one of her previous experiments. “See—it looks kind of like a bar code. When the bars are at the same position in the gel, you have a matching STR,” Alexa pointed out an example on the screen. “And when the bars are at different positions, you have an STR that doesn’t match.”

“I understand,” José nodded. “Let’s get started!”

“OK,” Alexa replied. It was fun to be the teacher for such an enthusiastic student. “I carried out ten PCRs yesterday, so we’ll have data on ten STRs. That should be enough. All we need to do is to get this DNA on the gel and apply the electric field.” Alexa gestured toward the ten miniature plastic test tubes that contained less than a drop of liquid each.

The pair worked side by side, conversing constantly while they worked. José was so attuned⁶ to the subtleties of lab work that he needed minimal guidance from Alexa. It was fun to spend such a long stretch of time together, Alexa thought. This being Sunday, José didn’t have to rush off to work. He loved to talk and he kept her laughing with amusing anecdotes⁷ about his family and his fishing adventures.

After carefully setting up the power supply and the wires to apply the electric field to the gel, Alex turned it on. They both watched anxiously, but there was nothing yet to see. “It’s going to be at least an hour while this runs.” Alexa said. “It’s kind of pointless to hover over it now.”

“Why don’t we go into town and have a quick lunch? That will make the time go faster.” José ushered her out the door. “I have a favorite Mexican restaurant—I want to take you there. The authenticity⁸ of the tacos there are simply unmatched—you have to try them!” He smiled persuasively.

“But how can they be more authentic than the tacos in Mexico?” Alexa laughed as she hopped on her motorbike behind José.

“Just wait until you try them!” José yelled above the noise of the motor. A short ride later, they parked the bike in front of an unprepossessing⁹ establishment. The restaurant looked derelict¹⁰ from the outside.

⁶ Attune: to make aware or responsive

⁷ Anecdote: a usually short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident

⁸ Authentic: worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact

⁹ Unprepossessing: not attractive or tending to create a favorable impression

¹⁰ Derelict: abandoned, especially by the owner or occupant; run-down

José led them in through the tattered doorway, where they were greeted warmly by the proprietor¹¹ and ushered into the courtyard. A lovely fountain, a gentle breeze, and beautiful flowers set the scene for their casual repast.¹²

After a delicious lunch of tacos infused¹³ with hot sauce and supplemented¹⁴ with extra guacamole, Alexa had to acknowledge that José's claim was substantiated.

José flouted¹⁵ convention by drinking hot tea instead of an ice-cold drink like everyone else at the restaurant. Alexa couldn't resist poking fun at him for a change. "How can you drink something hot when it's hot out, the food is hot, and the hot sauce is even hotter?" Alexa teased as she sipped an ice-cold soda.

"Shhh...it's all part of my secret theory about temperature," José whispered conspiratorially. "You see, if you drink something hot, it precludes¹⁶ the effect of the hot sauce. Now you, for instance, drinking something cold, you will have the polarizing¹⁷ effects of the opposites, which will only make the hot sauce taste hotter!"

"What an innovation!"¹⁸ Alexa laughed, playing along. "You should patent¹⁹ your idea!"

"No, actually I don't drink American sodas because I don't want to," José said seriously. I really loathe the TV advertisements for these things.

¹¹ Proprietor: one who has the legal right or exclusive title to something; owner

¹² Repast: the act or time of taking food

¹³ Infused: to cause to be permeated with something

¹⁴ Supplement: something that completes or makes an addition

¹⁵ Flout: to treat with contemptuous disregard

¹⁶ Preclude: to make impossible by necessary consequence, rule out in advance

¹⁷ Polarize: to break up into opposing factions or groupings

¹⁸ Innovation: a new idea, method, or device

¹⁹ Patent: a writing securing to an inventor for a term of years the exclusive right to make, use, or sell an invention

They exemplify²⁰ everything I detest about American materialism. They pander²¹ to people's desires to belong and to be hip. It's just a soda!" he added firmly.

"And I just thought it tasted good," Alexa said, attempting to bring the humor back to their conversation. Alexa had never noticed any lack of integrity²² in the soda commercials, but she could see that José was staunch²³ in his interpretation.²⁴ Even though she didn't really agree with his point—in her opinion the commercials were harmless advertising—she admired the fact that José was the type of person to abide by his convictions. "You know, we really need to be heading back. Our gel will be done in ten minutes."

"Let's go! I can't wait to see it!" José enthused. He insisted on paying the bill for their lunch and left some coins on the table for the gratuity.²⁵ Then the two of them were on their way back to the lab.

There was only one step left in their experiment. They needed to scan the information off of their gels and then look at the picture on the computer screen. The scanning process took only three minutes, but it felt like an eternity. Alexa was tremulous²⁶ with anticipation as the two of them eagerly waited for the scanner to synthesize²⁷ the image on the screen.

As their intent gaze was glued to the screen, the image finally appeared, rolling down the screen from top to bottom. The picture on the screen was filled with bands at various positions.

²⁰ Exemplify: to show or illustrate by example

²¹ Pander: cater or exploit the weakness of others

²² Integrity: firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values

²³ Staunch: steadfast in loyalty or principle

²⁴ Interpretation: the act or the result of interpreting (to conceive in the light of individual belief, judgment, or circumstance)

²⁵ Gratuity: something given voluntarily or beyond obligation usually for some service; especially a tip

²⁶ Tremulous: characterized by or affected with trembling or tremors

²⁷ Synthesize: to combine or produce by synthesis (the composition or combination of parts or elements so as to form a whole)

“What does it say? What does it mean? Did it work? Is Pecas Coco’s mother?” José asked urgently. He was beside himself with excitement and pressed Alexa for the answer with his rapid-fire questions.

“Hold on a minute—it’s going to take a little bit of time to interpret it,” Alexa replied calmly, unruffled²⁸ by his urgent questions. She continued to scrutinize²⁹ the image on the screen. “I think it’ll be easier if we print out the image and then we can orient ourselves properly,” Alexa concluded. “Once we have the picture labeled properly we can interpret it.”

“OK,” José agreed, but he looked as if she was subjecting³⁰ him to torture by delaying the answer one more minute. He pulled the paper out of the printer and put it in front of Alexa, who sat at her desk with her lab notebook open. Glancing at her notes, she carefully labeled the picture. José watched intently over her shoulder.

“OK, so right here are the bands from Pecas and here are the bands from Coco,” Alexa pointed, feeling like a molecular sleuth.³¹ There were several bands in each position, but one band from Pecas was in the exact same position as one of the bands from Coco.

“Look!” José cried. “It matches! Pecas is the mother!” José was wildly excited.

“Hold on a minute! That’s a tenuous³² conclusion at this point. This is only one STR—remember how we need to look at multiple examples to draw a conclusion.”

“Yes, of course. But I know it’s true! Look here!” José pointed to the next example. “There’s another match. And here’s another one!”

²⁸ Unruffled: poised and serene, especially in the face of setbacks or confusion

²⁹ Scrutinize: to examine closely and minutely

³⁰ Subject: to cause or force to undergo or endure

³¹ Sleuth: detective

³² Tenuous: having little substance or strength

Alexa nodded excitedly as she too scanned the image quickly. The cumulative³³ data from all of the STRs gave them an undeniable answer. “I think we have a match at all ten STRs!” Alexa turned to look at José. They were both incredulous at their discovery and a bit stunned that they had actually achieved their goal. The profundity³⁴ of the moment left them momentarily speechless. The conclusion was clear.

“It is so great,” José said, pointing to the experiment, “but at the same time it is sad. It means that Pecas’ baby is in captivity here.” His tone turned serious.

Alexa nodded in response. Pecas’ cryptic³⁵ behavior made so much sense now. They had deciphered what she was trying to tell them.

“We need to free her so that she can go back to her mother where she belongs,” José said solemnly.

Alexa suddenly felt jarred out of her complacency.³⁶ Before they had this answer, she felt justified in postponing any hasty action. But she couldn’t sit on the fence any longer. Pecas’ baby was in captivity at Puerto Marino, and Alexa needed to decide if she was going to go along with the plan that José had concocted³⁷ or if she was going to sit on the sidelines. She looked at José’s earnest expression and made up her mind.

“Yes. We do need to free her,” Alexa said. Finally, she felt that her own conflicting feelings about the dolphins had coalesced. She felt uncomfortable with the way dolphins were treated like commodities.³⁸ In her view they were more like people—they were sentient,³⁹ cerebral,⁴⁰ social beings that appeared to have a full range of emotions. Although

³³ Cumulative: made up of accumulated parts

³⁴ Profundity: the quality or state of being profound (having intellectual depth or insight)

³⁵ Cryptic: having or seeming to have a hidden or ambiguous meaning

³⁶ Complacency: self-satisfaction accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies

³⁷ Concocted: to prepare by combining raw materials; devise

³⁸ Commodities: an economic good, as in an article of commerce (something bought or sold), especially when delivered for shipment

³⁹ Sentient: finely sensitive in perception or feeling; aware

⁴⁰ Cerebral: of or relating to the brain or the intellect

Charlotte had brought up some very valid points about dolphins aiding the Navy, Charlotte didn't know Pecos the way Alexa and José did. Allowing her baby to remain in captivity here devalued⁴¹ the very real bond they shared with Pecos. Alexa decided she was going to draw the line here—it was time to take action. “But how are we possibly going to get her out of there? The dolphin facility is so secure.”

“Well,” José began slowly, “your mother works there, doesn't she?”

“Yes...but how is that going to help us? I can't possibly ask her...”

“If she works there, she has a card key, right? And maybe we could just borrow the card key late at night, set Coco free, and then return the card key while everybody is still sleeping.”

Alexa nodded in agreement, but her conscience bothered her. She was uncomfortable at the thought of taking her mother's card key without her knowledge. Alexa pondered this moral dilemma. Does the end result justify the means? In her mind, it would be infinitely better if they could leave her mother out of this subversive⁴² plan. The idea of “borrowing” her mother's card key felt a bit unscrupulous.⁴³ She didn't want her mother to be culpable⁴⁴ for her actions. Nevertheless, Alexa could see the logic in José's tactics.⁴⁵ Perhaps taking the card key *was* deceitful,⁴⁶ but Alexa felt comfortable that their ultimate goal was not. It was the combination of the two actions, one deceitful and one worthy, that presented the moral ambiguity⁴⁷ in her mind. Was this furtive⁴⁸ plan morally corrupt,⁴⁹ or was it a justifiable solution to the wrenching dilemma that they faced? They really had no other way of getting into the dolphin facility. She knew José

⁴¹ Devalued: to lessen the value of

⁴² Subversive: a cause of overthrow or destruction, especially a systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government by persons working secretly within

⁴³ Unscrupulous: not scrupulous (having moral integrity); unprincipled

⁴⁴ Culpable: guilty; meriting condemnation or blame, especially as wrong or harmful

⁴⁵ Tactics: a device for accomplishing an end

⁴⁶ Deceitful: having a tendency or disposition to deceive; not honest

⁴⁷ Ambiguity: the quality or state of being ambiguous (doubtful or uncertain), especially in meaning

⁴⁸ Furtive: done by stealth; sly

⁴⁹ Corrupt: to change from good to bad in morals, manners, or actions

couldn't get in there without her participation—she was the linchpin⁵⁰ of the scheme.

“When do you think we should do this?” Alexa asked nervously.

“The sooner, the better. I think we should do it tonight. All we were waiting for was this experiment to corroborate our suspicions about Coco. Now we know what the situation is beyond the shadow of a doubt.” José pointed to the pattern of bands on the computer screen to underscore the validity of his assertion. Then, he turned to look her square in the eyes, his florid⁵¹ complexion revealing the depth of his emotional fervor. “We need to rectify the situation immediately,” he concluded.

“Let's think about this for a minute,” Alexa said calmly. “I've only been in the dolphin facility three times. I'm pretty sure I would recognize Coco, but I don't know how to work all of those gates and things. Do you know how to do it? Have you ever been in the facility?”

“No, I haven't. But how difficult can it be? Let's just do it. I can stay here in the lab until 3 A.M. We can meet here then. You'll need to bring the card.” He looked at her questioningly. “Will you meet me here?” His deep brown eyes beseeched her to collude⁵² with him in this daring endeavor.

“Yes,” Alexa agreed. “I'll be here.”

⁵⁰ Linchpin: a central cohesive source of support and stability

⁵¹ Florid: flushed with rosy color

⁵² Collude: conspire, plot

Late-Night Liberation

Alexa had never been so nervous in her entire life. She knew with certainty that sleep would completely elude her. Her mother had finally gone to sleep at 11:30 P.M. Alexa felt a bit disingenuous¹ when she told her mother she wanted to stay up late to write e-mails.

But that uncomfortable feeling she felt when telling a relatively harmless lie paled in comparison to the way she felt now. At this point, her actions made her feel like a dissembler.² Here she was rummaging through her mother's wallet, realizing that she was indeed perfidious.³ Somehow, when she was with José, this plan seemed more credible. His moral certitude⁴ was so persuasive. He saw the situation as black and white. Coco held captive in Puerto Marino was a bad thing, and liberating⁵ her was a good thing. Alexa, on the other hand, felt mired in shades of gray. However noble their ultimate goal was, Alexa felt terrible about the deviousness⁶ of her current actions.

¹ Disingenuous: lacking in candor; calculating

² Dissembler: one who puts on a false appearance; conceals facts, intentions, or feelings under some pretense

³ Perfidious: disloyal or faithless

⁴ Certitude: the state of being or feeling certain

⁵ Liberating: the act of setting free

⁶ Deviousness: not straightforward; deceptive

Retrieving the card key from her mother's wallet was easy. There it was, right where it was supposed to be. Alexa took it out and placed it in her back pocket. Looking at the clock, she realized she would need to wait a few more hours before meeting José. It looked like she would have plenty of time to deal with her feelings about deceiving her mother.

It would be so great to talk to Laurie right now, Alexa thought. While her epistolary⁷ relationship with Laurie was nice, Alexa really longed to talk to her face to face. But since that was not an option, Alexa sat down to write her friend a long, revelatory⁸ e-mail. She explained in painstaking detail the provocative⁹ experimental results that proved Pecas' baby was in captivity at Puerto Marino. Then, Alexa explained how she and José were planning on carrying out their radical plan to free the baby dolphin tonight. She punctuated the long letter with confessions of her conflicted feelings. She found that putting all of these feelings into words was cathartic,¹⁰ and ultimately it had a therapeutic¹¹ effect.

Since the plan to free the baby dolphin was José's conception,¹² Alexa realized that her recurring hesitation about the scheme was in part due to her own aversion to playing a submissive¹³ role. She didn't want to go along with the plan just because José wanted her to. She wanted to take part in it of her own volition.¹⁴

After writing for two hours and vacillating¹⁵ about what was right and what was wrong, Alexa finally felt resolute in her decision to

⁷ Epistolary: contained in or carried on by letters

⁸ Revelatory: serving to reveal something

⁹ Provocative: serving or tending to provoke, excite, or stimulate

¹⁰ Cathartic: characterized by a purification or purgation of the emotions that brings about spiritual renewal or release from tension

¹¹ Therapeutic: providing or assisting in a cure

¹² Conception: the originating of something in the mind; idea

¹³ Submissive: to yield oneself to the authority or will of another

¹⁴ Volition: an act of making a choice or decision

¹⁵ Vacillate: to waver in mind, will, or feeling; hesitate in choice of opinions or courses

partake¹⁶ in the scheme. Her actions would not compromise her own beliefs. She honestly felt that carrying out this plan was genuinely altruistic,¹⁷ and it was the right thing to do.

When Alexa looked at the voluminous e-mail, she was tempted to abridge¹⁸ its contents. But instead she augmented¹⁹ the letter further by adding an addendum.²⁰ “Wish us luck, Laurie, we’re going to need it!” Alexa reread the letter and hesitated for a moment. Finally she took a deep breath and pressed Send. She glanced at the clock—it was time to go.

Alexa grabbed the flashlight she had found earlier in the kitchen drawer and went out the door. The quiet atmosphere in the compound only seemed to accentuate²¹ the noises emanating²² from the jungle. She kept her flashlight turned off to avoid attention. She could see her way along the well-worn path easily enough in the moonlight, but she couldn’t help but be nervous about the various jungle critters, particularly snakes, that might be lurking in the shadows.

The windows of the laboratory were completely dark. Alexa pulled out her own card key and entered the darkened laboratory. José was nowhere in sight. The ultraviolet light emanating from the tissue culture workspace gave the room an eerie purple hue. She could hear the soft hum of the incubator, but otherwise the room was silent.

Alexa walked slowly toward the back of the room. She felt like every nerve in her body was on high alert. Once she reached the back of the

¹⁶ Partake: to take part in or experience something along with others

¹⁷ Altruistic: behavior that is unselfish in its regard for or devotion to the welfare of others

¹⁸ Abridge: to shorten in duration or extent

¹⁹ Augment: to make greater, more numerous, larger, or more intense

²⁰ Addendum: a thing added; an addition

²¹ Accentuate: accent, emphasize

²² Emanate: to come out from a source

room, she could discern the sound of rhythmic breathing. Alexa smiled. José was asleep under her desk! He was curled up in a ball in the small space.

“José! Wake up!” Alexa whispered.

His eyes opened suddenly. He looked momentarily disconcerted.²³

“It’s me, Alexa.”

“*Hola!* Is it time?” José managed a sleepy smile as he climbed out of his space.

“Yes, it’s time. Why were you down there? Wouldn’t it have been more comfortable stretched out here?” Alexa asked.

“Yes, it definitely would have been more comfortable,” he smiled ruefully. “But the guards come around on their watch periodically and look in here. They were here twice already tonight. But they didn’t find me!” he declared triumphantly.

“Oh my gosh! That sounds treacherous!” Alexa looked anxious. “Do you think there are guards inside the dolphin facility?”

“No, not inside. There is a guard who makes his rounds once every two hours. I was watching. First he stops at the dolphin facility—he walks in there with his flashlight and checks it out, then he comes to this building and does the same, and so on down this row of buildings. He was just here ten minutes ago, so we should have at least an hour before he comes back. Did you bring the card?” he inquired.

“Yes, I have it right here,” Alexa replied. The thought of the guard making rounds instilled²⁴ a fear in her that made her stomach churn.

²³ Disconcert: to throw into confusion

²⁴ Instill: to impart gradually

“Great. Then let’s go!” José started for the door. Predictably, there was no question in his mind about whether or not to carry out the plan. In his mind, all of the problems were tractable,²⁵ and the obstacles were surmountable.²⁶ He was not going to be irresolute²⁷ at this juncture, even with the knowledge that the guard was looming outside in the dark night.

“OK,” Alexa said, following José. She was desperately trying to quell her pervasive²⁸ feelings of fear and anxiety. José didn’t appear to have any fear at all—he was intrepid²⁹ in the face of the challenges before them. He held her hand as they headed out the door. Alexa touched the smooth surface of the shark’s tooth that adorned her necklace. If ever there was a moment when she needed to summon her inner reserves and emulate José’s bravery, this was it.

They walked the short distance over to the dolphin facility and stood at the door. Alexa pulled her mother’s card key out of her back pocket and swiped the card through the scanner. The door clicked audibly.

José, looking gratified, immediately pushed open the door and held it for Alexa. Stepping over the threshold, she felt like she had literally crossed the line. Heretofore,³⁰ their plan was just that—a plan. Now it was an immutable³¹ reality.

The hallway was dimly lit, so the two of them proceeded down it without turning on the flashlight. The imposing³² double doors at the end of the hallway were closed. These were the doors that opened to the grand dolphin room. Alexa again swiped her mother’s card through the scanner. Suddenly, the massive double doors swung open automatically.

²⁵ Tractable: easily handled, managed, or wrought

²⁶ Surmountable: able to prevail over; able to overcome

²⁷ Irresolute: indecisive (not resolute or firm)

²⁸ Pervasive: that pervades (to become diffused throughout every part of) or tends to pervade

²⁹ Intrepid: characterized by resolute fearlessness, fortitude, and endurance

³⁰ Heretofore: up to this time; hitherto

³¹ Immutable: not capable of or susceptible to change

³² Imposing: impressive in size, bearing, dignity, or grandeur

José looked at Alexa, his eyes were sparkling with excitement. Exuberantly, he grabbed her hand and the two of them raced through the open doors. On the other side of the threshold, they paused for a moment while their eyes adjusted to the dim light and took in the spectacular scene before them. There was a loud noise as the doors shut audibly behind them.

It felt like they were in another world. The dim lighting was sufficient to see the extent of the capacious³³ facility—there were four pools shimmering in the darkness and the water was teeming with dolphins. Of course, Alexa had been in the facility before, but somehow it was incalculably³⁴ different at night. It felt otherworldly to be in a place where there were dozens of dolphins and only two people.

Thinking back to the first time she'd walked into this room, Alexa couldn't help but recognize just how much her feelings about it had changed. On that very first tour of Puerto Marino, Alexa was entranced by the dolphin facility—in fact, she had wanted to work there. But her friendship with Pecas changed her perspective profoundly. Now, seeing legions³⁵ of dolphins in captivity was a bittersweet vision. It was always a pleasure to be around so many of these charismatic creatures, but at this point she viewed their captivity with a critical eye. Now that they had some insight into the lives of Pecas and Coco, Alexa couldn't help but wonder about the other dolphins in the facility. Did they have a heart-rending story to tell as well?

³³ Capacious: containing or capable of containing a great deal

³⁴ Incalculably: not capable of being calculated; not predictable

³⁵ Legions: a large number; a multitude

José was absolutely stunned by the scene. In the entire time she had known him, Alexa had never seen José at a loss for words. Under normal circumstances, he was not that impressionable.³⁶ But the panorama before them had rendered him inarticulate.³⁷

“We have to try to find Coco,” Alexa prompted. In her pragmatic mind, they didn’t have any time to waste. She felt so susceptible³⁸ just standing there. They had a job to complete before the guard came back.

“Yes! Let’s start looking. I know I would recognize her. I used to see her every day,” José replied, heading toward the nearest pool.

“Whenever I’ve been in here before, Coco has always been in this pool over here,” Alexa pointed to the smaller pool on the right.

“OK, let’s check it out,” José agreed.

Alexa led the way onto the narrow walkway that separated the pools. José followed more slowly. Dolphins were his passion, and the sheer profusion of them here was mesmerizing. José stopped to talk with several dolphins that followed him curiously. These dolphins were quite well adapted to humans and they communicated without hesitation.

“José, we have to find Coco!” Alexa reminded him.

“Yes, of course, let’s go.” José stood up on the narrow walkway and teetered precariously, as if he was about to fall in. He had a big grin on his face.

“José—I’m so afraid the guard is going to come back and catch us!” Alexa pleaded. Normally, she would laugh at his frivolity.³⁹ But this was neither the time nor the place. She knew he was acting silly to make her

³⁶ Impressionable: capable of being easily impressed

³⁷ Inarticulate: incapable of speech, especially under stress of emotion

³⁸ Susceptible: open to some stimulus, influence, or agency

³⁹ Frivolity: playful merriment that lacks substance or purpose

laugh and ease her anxiety, but they really didn't have time for such buffoonery.⁴⁰ Nor did they have time to play with the dolphins indiscriminately.⁴¹ In her mind, the task before them was still a daunting⁴² one. They needed to find Coco and figure out a way to liberate her.

"I think I see her already!" José said, pointing to a dolphin in the distant pool. "Can I use the flashlight?"

Alexa handed over the flashlight and José took it with him to the edge of the smallest pool. He knelt down at the edge and started talking softly in Spanish. Interspersed⁴³ periodically in his soft words he whistled three times, as Alexa had seen him do on many occasions with Pecas. It was his signature call. Alexa ardently⁴⁴ hoped that Coco would remember.

A small dolphin surfaced near José, evidently responding to the stimulus.⁴⁵ Alexa thought it looked like Coco, but her features were difficult to discern in the dim light. José turned the flashlight on, keeping his hand cupped over the light so he didn't startle the young dolphin.

"That's her! That's Coco!" Alexa exclaimed, trying to keep her voice down to a whisper.

José turned around and nodded in agreement, a big smile on his face. "Now we just have to figure out how to get her out of here," José said, his eyes darted around the large room, probing for an answer to their quest.

"I know that the outer pool over there has a gate that opens directly into the ocean," Alexa pointed.

"Let's go take a look at it," José replied. They quickly scurried down the narrow walkway to the outer pool.

⁴⁰ Buffoonery: foolish or playful behavior

⁴¹ Indiscriminately: not marked by careful distinction; deficient in discrimination and discernment; haphazard; random

⁴² Daunting: something that daunts (lessens one's courage)

⁴³ Interspersed: to place something at intervals in or among

⁴⁴ Ardently: characterized by warmth of feeling, typically expressed in eager zealous support or activity

⁴⁵ Stimulus: something that rouses or incites to activity

Alexa had never seen this area configured in such a way before. During the day, the entire back wall of the building lifted up, like a garage door. Apparently at night, the wall was down. The outer pool was now half inside the building and half outside.

“This is going to be easy. There are no dolphins in the outer pool, so all we need to do is to open the gate in between the small pool and the outer pool, and then usher Coco into the outer pool. Then we need to go outside and lift the gate that separates the outer pool from the ocean,” José said confidently as he put the final pieces of the puzzle into their scheme. “Let’s go take a look at the first gate,” he commanded incisively.⁴⁶

Heading back to the narrow walkway that separated the small pool from the outer pool, they focused on the gate mechanism. It looked like it was controlled by a hand crank, which manually lifted the gate. José immediately started to test the gate. As he turned the crank, they could see the gate lifting below the surface. José immediately returned the gate to the closed position.

“Alexa, I think we will need you to operate the gate. I need to lure Coco over to the gate and usher her through, without letting any of the other dolphins through.” They counted at least three other dolphins in the pool besides Coco, but their real number was indeterminate⁴⁷ in this dark atmosphere. “I’m going to have to get in the water.”

“OK—but let’s just make sure that I’m strong enough to do it.”

“It’s actually very easy—here, give it a try,” José replied.

Alexa turned the crank and the gate lifted easily. José nodded in approval and then wasted no time hopping in the pool. The dolphins

⁴⁶ Incisively: impressively direct and decisive (as in manner of presentation)

⁴⁷ Indeterminate: not definitely or precisely determined; vague

took immediate notice of José's plunge into their pool, and several heralded⁴⁸ his presence with loud squeaks and high-pitched whistles. José treaded water near the gate and repeated his signature whistle and his soft words in Spanish.

Coco surfaced near José and replied in an animated series of squeaks that encapsulated⁴⁹ her delight at seeing him in the water next to her. In an instant, there were three other dolphins surrounding him as well.

"Alexa, could you lift the gate?" he asked. "I'm going to swim through and call to Coco from the other side. As soon as she goes through, you need to try to close the gate before the others follow her."

"OK. Here we go," she replied, cranking the gate up to the open position. José maintained eye contact with Coco and kept talking to her as he inched his way backward through the portal.

Opening the gate had a negligible⁵⁰ effect on the dolphins. All of them remained immobile in the small pool. Alexa was so surprised. She had thought that the second they lifted the gate, all of the dolphins would immediately want to get out. Ostensibly,⁵¹ all creatures wanted freedom and the opportunity to live their lives autonomously.⁵² But evidently, the situation here was more complicated than that. Not a single one exploited the opportunity to go through the opening.

José moved a little closer to the gate and started repeating his whistle. It looked like this strategy was inefficacious,⁵³ and Alexa was getting increasingly nervous as the minutes ticked away. If only they had thought to bring along some fish to use as a lure. Their scheme for freeing Coco had been based on the premise⁵⁴ that the dolphin would eagerly swim

⁴⁸ Heralded: to greet, especially with enthusiasm; to hail, publicize, or signal

⁴⁹ Encapsulated: epitomized

⁵⁰ Negligible: so small or unimportant or of so little consequence as to warrant little or no attention

⁵¹ Ostensibly: represented or appearing as such; plausible rather than demonstrably true

⁵² Autonomous: existing or capable of existing independently

⁵³ Inefficacious: lacking the power to produce the desired effect

⁵⁴ Premise: a proposition upon which an argument is based or from which a conclusion is drawn

through the gate if it was opened. But that didn't appear to be the case. Alexa barely resisted her impetus⁵⁵ to call the whole thing off. It was taking so much longer than they anticipated.

Finally, their persistence paid off. Coco moved closer to the gate as the others lagged behind. Alexa prepared to lower the gate as she saw Coco go through. José lavishly extolled⁵⁶ the approaching dolphin while Alexa cranked the gate shut as fast as she could.

“Good job!” Alexa congratulated him for successfully resolving their quandary.⁵⁷ The hard part was over. Now all they needed to do was to open the outer gate and watch Coco swim out of the enclosure⁵⁸ and into the open ocean.

“I’m going to swim under the wall,” José pointed to the barrier that separated them from the outdoor portion of the pool. “Why don’t you go through the door and meet me on the other side.”

Alexa walked through the doorway leading to the outside. From this vantage point, she couldn't help but notice that it was a spectacular evening. The night sky was clear and illuminated with an abundance of stars. A large crescent moon reflected dreamily on the gentle swells of the ocean.

José and Coco swam right under the wall and José hopped out of the pool. Holding Alexa's hand, they walked down the length of the pool to the outer gate. This was the moment they had been waiting for. José cranked the gate open and kept hold of Alexa's hand so they could experience this extraordinary moment together.

⁵⁵ Impetus: a driving force; impulse

⁵⁶ Extolled: praised highly; glorified

⁵⁷ Quandary: a state of perplexity or doubt

⁵⁸ Enclosure: something that encloses (to close in)

Coco, however, failed to realize her role in the profound proceedings. She hovered next to the wall, immobile, as if she was pinioned⁵⁹ to the spot. Her reluctance to move was a substantial hindrance⁶⁰ to the execution⁶¹ of their plan. Alexa was again surprised at this peculiar phenomenon.⁶² She had assumed the dolphin would eagerly swim out to the open ocean. Perhaps it had been presumptuous⁶³ of them to assume they knew what the dolphin wanted, Alexa thought.

“Maybe she doesn’t want to go,” Alexa said.

“Of course she wants to go.” José had no such episodes of self-doubt regarding their venture.⁶⁴ “It’s just that the dolphins don’t like to go through these gates,” José countered, debunking⁶⁵ her theory. “I think that I have to get in again and coax her out.” José hopped into the water without hesitation.

With José in the water, Coco must have felt more reassured. José led her to the gate area and recommenced⁶⁶ his tactics. He positioned himself just outside of the gate and beckoned softly. This time the young dolphin followed him readily. José looked up at Alexa and signaled for her to close the gate behind them.

Alexa cranked the gate shut as she watched Coco intently. José climbed out of the water and took her hand in his as they watched Coco. It took the young dolphin a minute to regain her bearings in the open ocean—she was immobile for a protracted moment. But all of a sudden, she realized where she was and swam away into the darkness.

⁵⁹ Pinioned: to disable or restrain; to bind fast

⁶⁰ Hindrance: the state of being hindered (to make slow or difficult the progress of)

⁶¹ Execution: the act or process of executing (to carry out fully, put completely into effect)

⁶² Phenomenon: an unusual, significant, or unaccountable fact or occurrence

⁶³ Presumptuous: overstepping due bounds (as of propriety or courtesy), taking liberties

⁶⁴ Venture: an undertaking involving chance, risk, or danger

⁶⁵ Debunk: to expose the sham or falseness of

⁶⁶ Recommended: to start again

Alexa felt euphoric⁶⁷ at the sight of this momentous⁶⁸ event. A tear ran down her face. They had just witnessed a profound moment in time. José turned to her and tenderly wiped the tear from her cheek and spoke softly to her in Spanish. She didn't comprehend what he was saying, but it didn't matter. He held her close and Alexa closed her eyes as his lips touched hers. She didn't even notice that he was soaking wet from his swim.

⁶⁷ Euphoric: a feeling of well-being or elation

⁶⁸ Momentous: important, consequential

Friendship— An Eternal Verity

When the alarm rang, Alexa awoke with a start, feeling immensely disoriented, like she was swimming through a dense fog. It was 6:00 A.M. She had barely gotten an hour of sleep. She had returned to the apartment by 4 A.M., replaced the card key in her mother's wallet, and hopped into bed. It had been impossible to sleep after so much excitement, so she'd gotten up and written another e-mail to Laurie to tell her about their successful mission, replete¹ with details. It had all worked so smoothly, thanks to José's craftiness² and his indomitable determination. Alexa had to admit her earlier fears about pulling off this wily³ stunt had been unfounded.⁴

Unfortunately, now it was time to go running with Charlotte. Alexa wished she had had the foresight to cancel this morning's run. But now Charlotte would be waiting for her, so Alexa dragged her body out of bed and dressed for running.

¹ Replete: fully or abundantly provided or filled

² Craftiness: skillfulness, cleverness

³ Wily: full of wiles (a trick or a stratagem intended to ensnare or deceive); crafty

⁴ Unfounded: lacking a sound basis; groundless, unsupported

Charlotte was bubbling with excitement when Alexa trotted up to the steps of the cafeteria building.

“You’re not going to believe what happened! This place is buzzing with activity!” Charlotte exclaimed.

“What’s going on?” Alexa asked. She could feel her stomach react as she began to get more nervous. They started running toward the gate.

“Well, one of the dolphins is missing. Apparently the trainer just noticed it this morning and subsequently,⁵ there’s been chaos. It’s really unprecedented⁶ here—you know how they are about security. Everybody is running around trying to figure out what happened.”

“How do you know about all of this?” Alexa asked.

“Because my stepfather got a call at 5:30 in the morning.”

“Do they know what happened to the dolphin? Do they know who did it?” Alexa asked, trying to hide the nervousness in her voice.

“No, not yet. Right now, everybody is busy blaming each other—they’re looking for a scapegoat.⁷”

Alexa was silent as they ran through the town and approached the beach. But it was hard to keep the dramatic events of the previous night to herself. “Charlotte, can I tell you a secret?” Alexa asked, breathless with exertion.

“Sure,” Charlotte replied.

“Would you promise to keep it secret under all circumstances? I really need you to refrain from telling anybody.”

“Yes, of course. What is it?” Charlotte’s curiosity was piqued after Alexa entreated⁸ her so ardently for secrecy.

⁵ Subsequently: following in time, order, or place

⁶ Unprecedented: having no precedent (previous example); novel

⁷ Scapegoat: one who bears the blame for others

⁸ Entreat: to plead with, especially in order to persuade

“I did it,” Alexa confessed. “José and I freed the dolphin last night.”

“You did *what?*” Charlotte said incredulously. “That’s crazy! Why did you do that?” Charlotte stopped running and faced Alexa. They had arrived at the beach. “José talked you into this, didn’t he? He probably had some crazy pretext⁹ to justify his actions...but why would *you* want to get involved? Why would you fall for that?”

“I didn’t fall for anything! I did what needed to be done! The dolphin was so young—just 12 months old—and her mother lives right out here in the bay.” Alexa gestured toward the water. “José has known her for years—her name is Pecas—she is so friendly! If only you could get to know her too, you would understand.” Alexa spoke rapidly in her heightened state of emotion. She desperately wanted Charlotte’s support and approval. “We proved that it was Pecas’ baby—we analyzed their DNA!” Alexa buttressed¹⁰ her argument with her trump¹¹ card. Alexa looked at Charlotte, gauging¹² her reaction. She could see from the look on her face that Charlotte thought that what they’d done was deplorable.¹³

“I know you and José don’t approve of the dolphins being used by the Navy, but have you ever stopped to think about what the alternative is? All of the tasks that dolphins can do so easily are incredibly difficult and risky for people to do. I’m just being practical about it. I think we need to be more protective of the *people* who serve in the military!”

“But Charlotte, if you spent some time with these dolphins, you would see...they are like people! They have feelings and emotions and so much intelligence! Setting a baby dolphin free is not the impious¹⁴ act you make it out to be! It was the right thing to do!”

⁹ Pretext: a purpose or motive alleged or an appearance assumed in order to cloak the real intention or state of affairs

¹⁰ Buttress: something that supports or strengthens

¹¹ Trump: a card of a suit any of whose cards will win over a card that is not of this suit

¹² Gauge: estimate, judge

¹³ Deplorable: deserving censure or contempt

¹⁴ Impious: not pious, lacking in reverence or proper respect (as for God or one’s parents)

“Alexa, I don’t want to fight.” Charlotte’s voice softened. “I don’t agree with your point of view, that’s all. I’m still your friend—and I’ll always be your friend. So don’t worry, I’ll keep your secret and I’m going to help you get out of this mess. I’ll do my best to help you—you’re going to need salvation¹⁵ from the firestorm that’s sure to ensue¹⁶ when they figure out that you did this. You’re going to need all the help you can get!”

“Why do you say that? Maybe no one will find out,” Alexa replied.

“Alexa, they are going to figure out who did it. It’s just a matter of time. Did you use a card key? If you used a card key to get in, they can easily look at the records to see who entered the building and at what time. Whenever you use a card key, there’s an electronic record of it.” Charlotte looked at her friend with sympathy.

“Oh no...” Alexa’s heart sank as she absorbed the implication¹⁷ of Charlotte’s words. She chided herself for being so imperceptive. Last night, when they were carrying out their plan, she had felt so grown-up and in control. But now she felt like a callow¹⁸ young girl who had been caught doing something naughty.

“I’ll do everything I can to help you, Alexa,” Charlotte said sincerely. “I can talk to my father—he wields¹⁹ a lot of influence with the management here. Maybe we can convince them not to go to the police.”

“Thank you. Thank you for being such a good friend.” Alexa was fighting back the tears. She was terrified at the thought of the maelstrom²⁰ that would face her when she returned to Puerto Marino. Inevitably, there would be grave charges levied²¹ against her and José. At

¹⁵ Salvation: deliverance from danger or difficulty

¹⁶ Ensur: to take place afterward or as a result

¹⁷ Implication: the act of implying, the state of being implied (indicate by inference, association, or necessary consequence rather than by direct statement)

¹⁸ Callow: lacking adult maturity or experience

¹⁹ Wields: to exert one’s authority

²⁰ Maelstrom: a powerful, often violent whirlpool sucking in objects within a given radius

²¹ Levy: to impose or collect by legal authority

the same time, she was deeply touched by Charlotte's loyalty and integrity. Charlotte's actions revealed so clearly her honorable priorities—she regarded friendship as an eternal²² verity.²³

Alexa looked out at the ocean and pondered²⁴ her fate. There were going to be some serious repercussions²⁵ of her actions, and she didn't relish the thought of returning to face the music. As she stared at the ocean pensively,²⁶ she saw a dolphin jumping in the distance.

"Charlotte, let's go out on the point! Will you come with me? I see a dolphin and I want to see if it's Pecas!" Alexa pleaded.

"OK, let's go," Charlotte readily agreed. She looked as if she would do anything to help Alexa at this moment, she was so consumed with sympathy for her friend. The girls scurried over the rocks to reach the end of the outcrop.

Alexa strained her eyes to see. It looked like two dolphins—one big and one small. Alexa couldn't contain her excitement. Could it be Pecas and her baby, Coco?

"I'm going in the water!" Alexa called back to Charlotte, who lagged behind a few paces. Reaching the end of the outcrop, Alexa hurriedly pulled her sneakers off and jumped in the water. The dolphins continued to swim closer. Alexa could barely contain her excitement.

"It *is* Pecas! And Coco—her baby!" Alexa yelled to Charlotte. "This is the young dolphin we set free and this is her mother, Pecas." Alexa explained to Charlotte, who stood on the rocks with a look of amazement. "You see—they wanted to be together! We could tell, José and I."

²² Eternal: having infinite duration; everlasting

²³ Verity: the quality or state of being true or real, especially a fundamental and inevitably true value

²⁴ Ponder: to think or consider, especially quietly, soberly, and deeply

²⁵ Repercussion: a widespread, indirect, or unforeseen effect of an act, action, or event

²⁶ Pensive: musingly or dreamily thoughtful

As soon as Alexa said his name, she realized that she missed him dearly at this moment. She wished he was here right now to see this—the gratifying result of their endeavor. Pecas and Coco swam closer and Alexa held her arm out to stroke Pecas as she swam by.

“I think I can see why you did it,” Charlotte said, as she watched the mother and daughter dolphin swim together. Coco swam on Pecas’ right side, just slightly behind her. The two dolphins moved in synchronous²⁷ harmony as if they were one. Whenever Pecas would dive or surface, Coco would perform the same action in a concomitant²⁸ fashion. “They really are special animals.”

“*Very* special!” Alexa emphasized. She was so elated to see Pecas and her baby together—and free. At least there was one undeniably positive manifestation²⁹ of their scheme, Alexa thought. It made it much easier to face the inevitable repercussions that she would soon be subjected to.

The two dolphins were in a frolicsome³⁰ mood as they swam around Alexa playfully. This was the first time Alexa swam alone with the dolphins. Previously, she was always swimming with José. Alexa scanned the horizon, looking for José’s fishing boat. It was nowhere in sight. She couldn’t help but think about him. She knew that he would love this.

Pecas swam close, allowing Alexa to stroke her as she swam by. Coco mirrored her mother’s every move. Pecas surfaced to look directly in Alexa’s eyes and then dove under the surface in a way that was so familiar to Alexa. She was diving to retrieve an object, a piece of seaweed or sponge, to play with. Resurfacing, she tossed the object with the tip of her

²⁷ Synchronous: happening, existing, or arising at precisely the same time

²⁸ Concomitant: occurring or existing at the same time

²⁹ Manifestation: the act, process, or instance of manifesting (readily perceived by the senses, especially by sight)

³⁰ Frolicsome: full of gaiety; playful

nose over to Alexa. The shiny object landed in the water right in front of Alexa with a plop, and it sunk to the white, sandy ocean floor at her feet.

Curiously, she looked down through the crystal-clear water at the object below. Alexa went underwater to pick it up and resurfaced with a look of profound amazement. She opened her hand and the sunshine reflected brightly off of the object in her palm. It was Charlotte's bracelet.

16

A Preponderance of Evidence

Alexa returned to the apartment glowing with satisfaction. Pecos had been reunited with Coco, and Charlotte had her beloved bracelet back around her wrist. Alexa felt righteous and invulnerable. She was ready to face the inevitable.

And then she saw her mother's face. Helen was sitting in the kitchenette waiting for Alexa's return. The creases etched on her forehead revealed her strain. She looked puzzled and concerned.

Alexa couldn't bear to meet her gaze. She looked down at the floor.

"Alexa, I got a phone call from Mr. Janowitz—the person who runs the whole operation here. We're supposed to go down to the security building immediately, although I don't know why he would want to talk to us. It sounded urgent. Why are you all wet?"

"I hopped in the water to cool off while Charlotte and I were out for our run," Alexa said softly. The damp, synthetic¹ material of her running outfit felt clammy against her skin.

¹ Synthetic: something resulting from synthesis rather than occurring naturally, especially a product (as a drug or plastic) of chemical synthesis

The two of them headed out the door for the short walk to the security building. Alexa thought about explaining everything to her mother, but it seemed like such a daunting task. Before she could even fathom how to begin explaining the whole story, they arrived at their destination.

Alexa felt butterflies in the pit in her stomach as she entered the room. Inside, Mr. Janowitz, Dr. Villeponce, Colonel Brandt, and Myles, the chief security officer, were all sitting around the conference table, waiting for their arrival.

"Please, sit down, Helen and Alexa," Janowitz offered in an overly polite voice. He gestured to the two empty chairs at the conference table.

"Thank you," Helen replied. It took her only a few seconds to assess the grave faces of the men gathered around the table. "I'm anxious to hear why you've asked us here today. Is there some sort of problem?"

"Unfortunately, yes," Janowitz began. "At 5:30 this morning, the dolphin trainers noticed there was one dolphin missing from the facility—dolphin number 36—I think her nickname is Coco."

"Coco is missing? Where did she go?" Helen asked, obviously puzzled.

"We've just figured out where she went. This morning at 3:04, your card key was used to gain access to the dolphin facility."

"But I haven't been in the facility since 6:30 last night when I finished work," Helen said with a puzzled and concerned look on her face.

"We know that," Janowitz replied. "Myles, could you play the tape?"

Myles obediently jumped out of his chair to retrieve the television monitor, which was mounted on a cart with wheels. He positioned the cart at the end of the table and then popped a videotape into the VCR.

“This is a tape from our security cameras,” Janowitz said with aplomb.² A grainy black-and-white image appeared on the screen.

He might just as well have dropped a bomb in the room for the effect it had on Alexa. Security cameras! Why hadn’t she thought of that?

All eyes were on the screen as the image showed Alexa and José in the hallway. It then showed Alexa swiping the card key through the scanner. The room was silent as everybody watched the video intently. The tape was patchy in places, like it was spliced together from different cameras, but the content was unmistakable. The screen now showed an image of Alexa cranking the gate open while José coaxed the dolphin over the threshold and into the outer pool.

The video jumped to an outdoor shot where remarkably, the image quality was much sharper. Everyone in the room watched closely as the screen showed an image of Alexa and José walking hand in hand down the length of the pool. Alexa could feel her face turning crimson with embarrassment. Especially since she knew what was coming next.

The camera angle didn’t allow them to see Coco, but the image of José cranking open the gate was clear as a bell. José disappeared from the screen momentarily (Alexa recalled that he had to jump in the water to help Coco get through the last gate) and then he was back and holding Alexa’s hand. And then they were kissing. Myles jumped out of his chair and flicked the television off.

Alexa was absolutely mortified.³ It was bad enough to be censured⁴ in front of this roomful of people, but to have her private moment with José aired on the screen for all to view—it was absolutely humiliating. Couldn’t they have cut that part out? Perhaps they were trying to

² **Aplomb:** complete and confident composure or self-assurance

³ **Mortified:** subjected to severe and vexing embarrassment

⁴ **Censured:** to find fault with and criticize as blameworthy

demean⁵ her as part of her punishment, Alexa thought. She could feel her cheeks burning.

The room was silent for a moment. There was no question of how the dolphin escaped. The condemning videotape made the situation quite clear. The only question now was, what were they going to do about it? Would they call the police? Alexa looked at the people around the table. Charlotte hadn't had the opportunity to talk to her stepfather yet. It didn't look like there was anyone sympathetic in the room. Alexa looked over at Dr. Villeponce, but he looked down at the table, avoiding eye contact.

"Who is that boy in the video?" Helen asked.

Before Alexa had a chance to answer and begin to tell her side of the story, Myles spoke up. "His name is José Consuales. He's a local who works here in the kitchen. We already reported him to the local authorities and they took him into custody at 6:00 this morning," Myles reported dutifully. "With this preponderance⁶ of evidence, I don't think there's any doubt that he'll be convicted of this crime."

"You did what?" Janowitz yelled at Myles. He was livid with anger. "I thought you were under strict instructions to keep all security breaches⁷ *internal* unless I say otherwise! We have a strict code of confidentiality here! I can't believe you did that! What were you thinking?"

"This is a disaster!" Colonel Brandt concurred, shaking his head at Janowitz like a disappointed parent would look at a misbehaving child. "You know our contracts have a strict confidentiality clause. If there is a breach, you can forget about renewal."

⁵ Demean: to lower in character, status, or reputation

⁶ Preponderance: a superiority in weight, power, importance, or strength

⁷ Breach: infraction or violation of a law, obligation, tie, or standard

“I can go down to the police station and drop the charges. I can tell them it was a big mistake...a misunderstanding,” Myles offered meekly.

“Yes! Do it right now. And you had better make it quick, because if the local media gets hold of this...” Janowitz rolled his eyes, looking exasperated.

“I’ll run down there right now. It will only take a minute! I’ll be right back,” Myles replied. He rushed out of the room.

“We’ll take care of this. I don’t think there’s any cause for concern,” Janowitz reassured Colonel Brandt.

The Colonel shrugged in response. He was not reassured yet.

“And now for you, young lady. May I ask why? Why did you do this? Did your boyfriend talk you into it?” Janowitz asked pointedly.

“No,” Alexa’s voice wavered with emotion, but she was determined to fight back the tears. She didn’t want to invoke⁸ sympathy when she explained the justification for her actions. “I participated based on my own decision.” Alexa took a deep breath. “The dolphin that you call Coco, number 36, is only 12 months old. She is the baby of one of the dolphins in the bay that José had known for years. Coco must have been captured here, in this bay, without a permit. Nobody has permission to catch wild dolphins here and put them into captivity. And then sell them. It’s illegal according to the local laws,” Alexa added, gaining confidence as she spoke. “We merely returned the young dolphin to its rightful home.”

“You can’t possibly prove that this dolphin was caught around here,” Janowitz challenged her.

⁸ Invoke: to resort to; use or apply

“Yes, I can,” Alexa spoke assuredly now. “We proved by DNA analysis that Coco is the progeny of the dolphin that has lived in this bay for her whole life. The test was 99.9999% conclusive. The mother’s name is Pecas, and all of the local fishermen know her. Everybody saw Pecas with a baby earlier this year. Then the baby disappeared a month ago, and now her baby is back with her swimming by her side. I saw them this morning out in the bay.”

All of the men in the room exchanged looks.

“Look, Janowitz,” Colonel Brandt looked at Al like a disappointed parent, “my position is clear. If you guys can’t run a clean—I mean immaculate—operation, we will have to sever our relationship with you. Everything has to be squeaky clean—and this doesn’t sound good. I was under the impression this whole operation was in accordance with the local laws.”

Janowitz tried to maintain his composure in the face of this calamity, but he looked like his world had just come crashing down on his shoulders. His cost-cutting measure was coming back to bite him. The only place where he had a permit that allowed him to capture dolphins was off of the coast of Florida. But it was very expensive to send a team to Florida and then to charter a plane to transport the dolphins back to Central America. He figured nobody would ever know if he occasionally took a dolphin from the local waters. And it certainly increased his profit margin. That was the reason why he convinced the management at the Marino Enterprise (the parent company) to set up Puerto Marino in such a remote location. Even if the local authorities managed to find out he had been taking dolphins from local waters, he thought he could probably handle that situation with a well-placed bribe or two—as long as it was handled secretly. But this situation was getting out of control.

“Helen, why don’t you and Alexa step outside for a moment,” Janowitz said. We have a few things to discuss here privately. Would you mind waiting in the outer room? We’ll call you back in a few moments.” Janowitz stood up and opened the door for them. He ushered them out and closed the door behind them.

Alexa and Helen sat on the couch, and Alexa felt the tears start to run down her face. The stress of the past 24 hours had caught up with her. The emotional highs and lows had been precipitous and had taken their toll. She was also extremely worried about José. All of these things, combined with sleep deprivation, had left Alexa in a fragile emotional state. Now she needed to face her mother.

“Mom, I’m sorry I took your card key,” Alexa broke down, sobbing. Helen put her arms around her and comforted her.

“Alexa, I wish you had come to me with all of this. There are other ways this problem could have been resolved. I would have helped you. Believe me, I can identify with the concerns that you’ve raised. But I don’t approve of the way you and your friend handled it. I don’t agree with taking the law into your own hands.”

Alexa nodded. She was too upset to talk coherently. She felt terrible for hurting her mother’s feelings and betraying her trust. She rested her head on her mother’s shoulder. They sat quietly for a few minutes.

Janowitz popped his head out of the conference room door. “Why don’t the two of you come in now.” He opened the door and ushered them in. Alexa stood up and courageously walked in to face the inevitable castigation.⁹

⁹ Castigation: to subject to severe punishment, reproof, or criticism

“I think we have a resolution that will be satisfactory to everyone,” Janowitz began. “We would like to keep this incident quiet. We are willing to drop any charges against Alexa, but we would like to have your agreement to confidentiality. As long as this whole incident is kept under wraps, we are willing to absolve Alexa of any charges.”

“What about José?” Alexa asked, her voice wavering.

“And may I also ask about my ongoing work here?” Helen asked pointedly. Alexa could see that her mother had little respect for Janowitz and his proposed covenant¹⁰ of silence. Dr. Villeponce, who looked extremely uncomfortable throughout the proceedings, remained silent. It seemed rather self-serving, Alexa thought, the way he preserved his neutrality.¹¹

“Helen, I think you would agree that perhaps, given the circumstances, we mutually agree to immediately suspend your consulting contract?” Janowitz raised his eyebrows in a symbolic question mark as he met Helen’s direct gaze. “Here at Puerto Marino, we abide by the precepts¹² of honesty and integrity,” he added pedantically.¹³

“I see,” Helen replied coolly, her eyes narrowing with the anger that was bubbling inside. She didn’t appreciate sermonizing¹⁴ in general, and when the source was a hypocrite¹⁵ such as Janowitz—it was too much for her to tolerate. His sanctimonious¹⁶ preaching of ethics was not going to go unchallenged. “And thank you for the lesson in morality—coming from someone who is so eminently¹⁷ qualified to adjudicate,¹⁸ we can all learn from the example you’ve set,” Helen said sarcastically. She was not

¹⁰ Covenant: a usually formal, solemn, and binding agreement

¹¹ Neutrality: the quality or state of being neutral, especially refusal to take part in a war between other powers

¹² Precept: a command or principle intended as a general rule of action

¹³ Pedantic: a style of teaching characterized by formality and undue attention to minutiae

¹⁴ Sermonize: to preach to or on at length

¹⁵ Hypocrite: a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion

¹⁶ Sanctimonious: affecting piousness, hypocritically devout

¹⁷ Eminently: to a high degree; very

¹⁸ Adjudicate: to act as judge

the type of person to hurl insults in slang or colloquial¹⁹ expressions. Rather, she preferred veiling²⁰ her insults in sophisticated language and circumlocutions²¹ that were peppered with sarcasm.

Alexa was relieved to see that her mother was on her side and was so supportive. But her mother's staunch devotion only made Alexa feel worse about the ramifications²² of her own behavior. Now her mother was out of a job, undoubtedly without a good reference from Puerto Marino. And what about José? Alexa felt sick when she thought about the consequences for her friend. If he lost his job, would he ever be able to save enough money to go to college? And what kind of retribution²³ would he face for their actions?

Suddenly, Myles came bursting through the door, gasping for breath. He looked as if he had run all of the way back from the police station in town.

"What's going on, Myles? Did you drop the charges?" Janowitz demanded while Myles struggled to regain his composure. Janowitz was growing increasingly cantankerous.²⁴

"I couldn't get into the police station!" Myles said breathlessly. "It was a madhouse of the media there. There were CNN people all over the place! And there's a CNN truck out at the security gate. They are trying to come in to get a statement from you."

"*What?*" Janowitz bellowed. "What's going on?" He was absolutely livid.

¹⁹ Colloquial: characteristic of familiar and informal conversation

²⁰ Veil: to cover, provide, obscure, or conceal with or as if with a veil

²¹ Circumlocutions: the use of an unnecessarily large number of words to express an idea

²² Ramification: consequence, outcome

²³ Retribution: something given or exacted in recompense, especially punishment

²⁴ Cantankerous: difficult or irritating to deal with

“I think they’re doing a story on the dolphin being set free. They said they already got a statement from the boy and from the local police. They’ve got people talking to the locals...” Myles dutifully delivered the update without skirting²⁵ the contentious²⁶ issue, but he looked as reticent as a lamb being sent for a rendezvous with a pack of carnivores.²⁷

“This is a disaster!” Janowitz fumed. “How could you have been so stupid!” he yelled with a ferocity²⁸ that was unparalleled.

“We’d better see what’s going on,” Colonel Brandt said calmly. He embodied²⁹ the image of calm under dire circumstances. He rose from his chair, turned on the television, and flipped through the channels to find CNN.

They had a moment to wait while Colonel Brandt found the station, and Alexa was consumed with thought. CNN? Could Laurie have anything to do with this? Alexa had told Laurie via e-mail about the DNA tests and freeing the dolphin. Could her friend be behind this media frenzy?

On the television screen, a well-dressed anchorwoman was reporting on location in front of the ocean. A gentle breeze ruffled her perfectly coiffed hair as she spoke, and her high heels looked incredibly awkward on the rocky terrain. Alexa realized with a start that this was being filmed from the rocky outcrop right here, on the same beach where she went every day!

“This story has all of the heart, all of the compassion of a contemporary *Free Willy* saga. At its heart it is about this dolphin mother and

²⁵ Skirt: to avoid, especially because of difficulty or fear of controversy

²⁶ Contentious: likely to cause contention (controversy or debate); controversial

²⁷ Carnivores: any of an order (Carnivora) of typically flesh-eating mammals that includes dogs, foxes, bears, raccoons, and cats

²⁸ Ferocity: the quality or state of being ferocious (exhibiting or given to extreme fierceness and unrestrained violence and brutality)

²⁹ Embody: to represent in human or animal form; personify

her baby,” the reporter gushed, as if she were an entertainment reporter talking about a movie. The image on the screen switched to a shot of Pecas and Coco, swimming happily next to the boat where the camera was positioned. Her voice turned serious as she continued. “But also at the core of this story is the saga of the dolphins that are captured, trained, and sold into service. Sometimes their lives are filled with frivolity.” The image switched to a scene of a dolphin playing with a ball at Marineland. “But for some of these dolphins, their lives are consumed with more serious and dangerous pursuits.” The screen shifted to battle scenes from the Vietnam era and then shifted to black-and-white footage of dolphins cavorting.³⁰

“Here on a remote island off the east coast of Central America, a private company has set up a dolphin training facility. It is widely purported, although not officially confirmed, that the Navy obtains some of its dolphins from this facility.” The screen showed an image of Puerto Marino taken from a vantage point in the bay. “Suffice it to say that the dolphins here are destined to a life in captivity, be it in the military or in one of the numerous dolphin show ventures that can be found in seaside resort communities worldwide. Unless a maverick³¹ dissident³² changes their fate,” the reporter intoned dramatically, leading into the next shot, which was José!

Alexa’s heart was racing as she saw José’s face on the television screen. He looked so composed and intelligent. He calmly stated his position with such an understated eloquence. “My family has lived here and fished in

³⁰ Cavorting: prancing

³¹ Maverick: an independent individual who does not go along with a group or party

³² Dissident: disagreeing with an opinion or group

these waters for generations. If you spend any amount of time here, you will see that the people in this area have a very special relationship with the dolphins that live in this bay. We respect each other and live in harmony. It came to my attention that one of the young dolphins—the daughter of a dolphin that lives right here—was unlawfully captured and held in captivity at Puerto Marino.” José took a deep breath and looked squarely into the lens of the camera. He was not squirming or fidgeting under the immense pressure, but faced the issue directly and continued his speech in a self-assured tone. He was a natural orator,³³ Alexa thought.

“Nobody has the right, either legal or ethical, to take a dolphin from these waters. It broke my heart to see this travesty³⁴ of justice and freedom. I did what any other compassionate person would do.” José paused for dramatic effect, like a master elocutionist.³⁵ “I set the young dolphin free.”

A spontaneous cheer arose from the boisterous³⁶ crowd that was undeniably in support of José and the inspiring ethos³⁷ he evoked with his words. The camera briefly panned the throng³⁸ of people and then cut back to the reporter, who explained that José was being held by the local authorities. He was charged with multiple crimes and would face prison time if convicted. Finally, the news piece ended.

Alexa was bursting with emotions. Watching the broadcast was a surreal³⁹ experience. It was hard to believe that last night she and José had freed a dolphin, and today it was turning into a sensationalized⁴⁰ story on international television.

³³ Orator: one distinguished for skill and power as a public speaker

³⁴ Travesty: a debased, distorted, or grossly inferior imitation

³⁵ Elocutionist: one who is effective in the art of public speaking

³⁶ Boisterous: noisily turbulent; rowdy

³⁷ Ethos: the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution

³⁸ Throng: a multitude of assembled persons

³⁹ Surreal: having the intense irrational reality of a dream

⁴⁰ Sensationalize: to present in a manner intended to arouse strong interest, especially by the inclusion of exaggerated or lurid details

Alexa was so proud of José and his ability to stand tall and proud in a situation of great adversity.⁴¹ The way he explained what had taken place, with a combination of emotion and logic, was so compelling that it had a resounding⁴² effect. He didn't overtly⁴³ proselytize,⁴⁴ he simply made felicitous⁴⁵ comments that argued his position effectively. Taken together with the reporter's provocative editorial,⁴⁶ it was almost as if the entire piece was formulated to draw out the emotions of the audience. Just watching it made them want to help those beautiful ocean creatures and the poor young man who had intervened⁴⁷ to make the world a better place. It made others feel like it was a grave injustice to imprison this young man who was able to engender⁴⁸ such a feeling of idealism with his poignant⁴⁹ speech.

Janowitz was fuming at the sight of the images on the television screen. He was living his worst nightmare. Not only was the illegal procurement of Coco exposed, their entire business was shown in a negative light on international television. He preferred to run a quiet operation away from any sort of public exposure. There were so many people who objected to the buying and selling of dolphins as commodities, not to mention all the animal rights groups that didn't like to see any animals in

⁴¹ Adversity: a state or condition contrary to one of well-being

⁴² Resounding: emphatic, unequivocal

⁴³ Overtly: in a manner that is open to view

⁴⁴ Proselytize: to recruit someone to join one's party, institution, or cause

⁴⁵ Felicitous: very well-suited or expressed; apt

⁴⁶ Editorial: a newspaper or magazine article that gives the opinions of the editors or publishers; also an expression of opinion that resembles such an article

⁴⁷ Intervene: to come in or between by way of hindrance or modification

⁴⁸ Engender: to cause to exist or develop

⁴⁹ Poignant: deeply affecting; touching

captivity. These factions⁵⁰ could cause him grave problems if they organized protests and disseminated⁵¹ negative information. He knew that if he had a tarnished image, the public outcry might cause his government contracts to dry up. Janowitz had purposely picked an extremely remote place to build his business, far away from the prying eyes of the dissenters and the media. Or so he'd thought.

"Myles, did you drop the charges against this young man?" Janowitz fumed, barely able to maintain his composure.

"I tried, but I couldn't get into the police station—it's a madhouse," he replied meekly.

"Then call!" Janowitz yelled.

"I tried...but all of the lines were busy," Myles tried to say something else, but he was gibbering⁵² unintelligibly, obviously flustered under the pressure.

"Then send a fax! Now!" Janowitz shouted, his scathing⁵³ voice filling the room with his fury. His truculent⁵⁴ nature was revealing itself. Myles scurried out of the room, and Janowitz turned his attention back to Helen.

"You have my resignation," Helen said coolly. "I'll have a formal letter of resignation on your desk within the hour. And we will leave as soon as I can make the travel arrangements."

"I think that would be best for everyone," Janowitz replied in a much calmer tone. "I will see to it that we arrange for fair and equitable remuneration⁵⁵ for you for the time and effort you have put into your work here. In turn, may I ask that you refrain from speaking with the media?"

⁵⁰ Faction: a party or group (as within a government) that is often contentious or self-seeking

⁵¹ Disseminate: to disperse throughout

⁵² Gibbering: to speak rapidly, inarticulately, and often foolishly

⁵³ Scathing: to assail with withering denunciation

⁵⁴ Truculent: feeling or displaying ferocity; cruel, savage

⁵⁵ Remuneration: an act or fact of remunerating (to pay an equivalent to someone for a service, loss, or expense); recompense

“We have no intention of speaking to the media,” Helen replied in a glacial⁵⁶ tone.

“Thank you. I appreciate your cooperation in this area.” Janowitz looked relieved. Helen’s assurance that she would refrain from talking to the media was like a tonic⁵⁷ for Al. He was regaining his composure. “I hope you understand that, given the circumstances, I will need to confiscate⁵⁸ your card keys.”

Alexa and her mother retrieved their card keys from their respective pockets and laid them on the table. As she surrendered her card key, Alexa realized that now that her freedom to enter the laboratory had been revoked,⁵⁹ she couldn’t retrieve the DNA evidence that proved Coco was Pecas’ baby. Undoubtedly, it would be destroyed by the management here at Puerto Marino.

“If we’re all done here, I would like to leave and prepare our travel arrangements,” Helen said.

Janowitz nodded in response. Helen and Alexa walked out of the room and a feeling of relief washed over Alexa. This traumatic episode was finally over.

⁵⁶ **Glacial:** devoid of warmth and cordiality

⁵⁷ **Tonic:** one that invigorates, restores, refreshes, or stimulates

⁵⁸ **Confiscate:** to seize by or as if by authority

⁵⁹ **Revoke:** to annul by recalling or taking back; rescind

A Nebulous Future

When they walked into the apartment, Helen immediately got on the telephone to reschedule their flight home. Alexa plopped down on the couch. It was a huge relief to have the proceedings over, but she was so sad at the thought of leaving this place. Of course she had always known that her stay there was impermanent,¹ but the decision to leave had been made so precipitously, and she didn't have any say in it. It wasn't her choice to come here in the first place, and now, ironically, it wasn't her choice to leave. Her life back home seemed so prosaic² in comparison. The thought of reintegrating³ back into the same old routine at home made her realize that she didn't want to go home just yet.

"Alexa, your father is on the phone." Helen handed the phone to her. She looked weary from stress. "I'm going to take a shower now."

As soon as she heard her father's voice, she broke into tears. She tried to explain to him what had happened. He had already seen the news

¹ Impermanent: not permanent; transient

² Prosaic: dull, unimaginative

³ Reintegrating: restoring to a condition of integration or unity

piece on CNN, but was unaware of her involvement. Her father listened calmly while Alexa told him the whole story.

“So that’s why you wanted me to send you the papers on how to determine familial relationships through DNA analysis?” her father asked incredulously. “You tested the maternity of a dolphin?”

“Yes,” Alexa meekly replied. She was wary of being reprimanded yet again, but on the other hand, she was tired of all the pretense.⁴ It was a huge relief to confess this story that she had kept shrouded⁵ in secrecy for so long.

“And you carried out the experiment on one dolphin from the wild and one dolphin in captivity?” he inquired, sounding surprised and actually quite proud.

“Yes, we had to get some cells from the dolphin in the wild. José did that part.”

“Was that your friend José who I saw on CNN?” he asked.

“Yes, that’s him.” Alexa started crying as she thought about José and his future. “Dad,” Alexa sobbed, “I feel terrible—I don’t know what’s going to happen to him. At the very least, he’s lost his job. That job was the only way he could even conceive of making enough money to go to college. He wants to go to college in the United States—to Cornell, actually. He’s so smart and he works so hard. It just doesn’t seem fair!” Alexa cried.

“I know, honey.” Her father spoke soothingly. “I don’t want to lecture you right now about this, but you need to know that I agree with your mother—I don’t approve of you taking the law into your own hands. You and your friend are really lucky that you’re not headed for incarceration⁶

⁴ Pretense: false show

⁵ Shroud: something that covers, screens, or guards

⁶ Incarceration: time spent in prison

or litigation.⁷ There are all sorts of grave consequences, as I think you're beginning to see. I'm really sorry to hear about your friend's predicament. It sounds like you really care about him."

"I do care about him...I just wish I'd thought more carefully about what we did and how it might affect his whole future," Alexa said as the tears streamed down her face.

"You really don't need to take that burden upon yourself. I sincerely doubt that you are the bane⁸ of his future. People choose their own fates. Did you talk him into this scheme?"

"No," Alexa said, still crying.

"Then it was his own choice. Although I have to say, he did appear quite astute on CNN this morning. His ability to speak in public is quite precocious.⁹ If his scholastic aptitude is anywhere near as great as his media acumen,¹⁰ he may be eligible for some type of scholarship. I think some of the charitable¹¹ donations here at the University are earmarked¹² for foreign student scholarships."

"Really?" Alexa replied.

"Yes. I can look into it if you like. I'll call the financial aid office here and see what types of things he may be eligible for."

"That would be great!" Alexa said, brightening up considerably at the thought of being a benefactor¹³ of José's future.

"Yes, but please don't get your hopes up too high—these scholarships are not indiscriminately philanthropic.¹⁴ He would need to be an outstanding student as well. There's always a stringent selection process.

⁷ Litigate: to contest in law

⁸ Bane: a source of harm or ruin; curse

⁹ Precocious: exhibiting mature qualities at an unusually early age

¹⁰ Acumen: keenness and depth of perception, discernment, or discrimination, especially in practical matters; shrewdness

¹¹ Charitable: of or relating to charity (generosity and helpfulness, especially toward the needy)

¹² Earmark: to designate (as funds) for a specific use or owner

¹³ Benefactor: one who confers a benefit, especially one who makes a gift or bequest

¹⁴ Philanthropic: of, relating to, or characterized by philanthropy (active effort to promote human welfare)

Do you know if he took the SAT? That would almost certainly be a prerequisite.”

“I don’t know, but I can find out,” Alexa replied.

“Check your e-mail later today—I’ll send some information for your friend.”

“Thanks, Dad!”

Alexa said goodbye to her father and immediately went to the computer to check her e-mail. She had a sinking feeling about the integrity of her friendship with Laurie. Could Laurie have been behind the story at CNN? Could she have told them everything Alexa had naively revealed to her in great detail?

Alexa opened up her e-mail and sure enough, there was a message waiting from Laurie.

Time: 10:47 A.M.

To: “Alexa”

From: “Laurie”

Subject: the big scoop

Dear Lexxie,

Did you see the story on CNN? It’s so incredible, I can’t believe it! When I told my boss about how you and José had freed that dolphin, he said that I had ingeniously¹⁵ found a unique angle to position our story! All we needed was some independent confirmation. My boss called the police station in your town to see if anything was going on, and sure enough, they were holding José for setting that dolphin free. And then the story just took

¹⁵ Ingenious: marked by originality, resourcefulness, and cleverness in conception or execution

off! And my future career took off with it! I am so excited. José did so well on camera—I can see why you like him. He is really cute! You have to write to me and tell me what's going on now!

Laurie

Alexa reread Laurie's e-mail, her revulsion¹⁶ mounting with each sentence. Friendship is supposed to be synonymous¹⁷ with trust. Didn't Laurie feel the same way? Why couldn't Laurie have honored her most personal revelations as confidential information? Alexa realized that she hadn't explicitly told Laurie her e-mails were secret. But couldn't she have assumed as much? Wasn't it obvious? It was absolutely ludicrous¹⁸ for Laurie to use her secrets as fodder¹⁹ for an international newscast. Alexa couldn't help but think it was patently²⁰ self-serving for Laurie to betray her this way. She thought for a moment about sending a scathing missive²¹ in reply, but then thought better of it. She really needed to see Laurie in person to discuss this.

"Alexa," Helen walked into the room, "we have reservations to leave for home the day after tomorrow. Why don't we leave Puerto Marino now, and go do some sight-seeing before we head home? Or maybe we could go to one of the other islands and spend a day relaxing on the beach."

"Oh, Mom, couldn't we stay one more day? I want to say goodbye to Charlotte and José!" Alexa's heart was in her throat. Everything was happening so fast.

¹⁶ Revulsion: a sense of utter distaste or repugnance

¹⁷ Synonymous: having the same connotations, implications, or reference

¹⁸ Ludicrous: amusing or laughable through obvious absurdity, incongruity, exaggeration, or eccentricity

¹⁹ Fodder: inferior or readily available material used to supply a heavy demand

²⁰ Patently: readily visible or intelligible; obvious

²¹ Missive: written communication; letter

“OK,” Helen relented. “It does seem a bit abrupt to leave right now. I really need to talk to Dr. Villeponce before we go anyway. I need to try to salvage what I can from this research project.”

“Why didn’t he say anything at the meeting this morning?” Alexa asked. Under normal circumstances, Dr. Villeponce was always fawning over Helen like a sycophant.²² But in the proceedings this morning, he never once spoke a word in support of Helen or Alexa.

“Oh, he was probably worried about his own job and his stature in the company. He’s in the lofty position of running the dolphin facility and he doesn’t want to be deposed.²³ Some people have the fortitude and integrity to stand up for their friends and others don’t,” Helen said cynically. In her experience, selfish behavior in the context of a friendship was not unprecedented. She was shrugging it off as if it was something she had seen before.

But Alexa couldn’t help but dwell on the notion of spurious²⁴ friendships—relationships that appear to be true friendships, but when they are tested by some sort of external force, buckle under pressure. Was that really the nature of her friendship with Laurie? Alexa wondered. She felt deeply hurt by Laurie’s actions. From her perspective, Laurie had been unduly²⁵ self-serving.

Alexa consciously decided not to think about Laurie right now. She didn’t want to squander²⁶ the precious time she had left at Puerto Marino. While she had always known her stay there was transient,²⁷ it always seemed like her departure was far off in the nebulous²⁸ future. Now, it was imminent.

²² Sycophant: a servile self-serving flatterer

²³ Deposed: to remove from a throne or other high position

²⁴ Spurious: outwardly similar or corresponding to something without having its genuine qualities; false

²⁵ Unduly: in an undue manner; excessively

²⁶ Squander: to spend extravagantly or foolishly

²⁷ Transient: passing through or by a place with only a brief stay or sojourn

²⁸ Nebulous: indistinct, vague

The Proverbial Invitation

The gentle morning sun reflected off the placid water of the bay. Alexa sat on the rocky outcrop as she had done so many mornings before. This time, however, was different. Today was her last day in this beautiful place, and the temperate¹ ocean breeze was suffused with a melancholy² aura.

Alexa knew that this was her last opportunity to see José. He didn't even know she was leaving. Yesterday, she had come to the beach hoping to see him, but he wasn't there. The fact that he didn't have a phone was utterly confounding.³ They had no way of reaching each other. She knew that yesterday must have been a crazy day for him. There were the television cameras, the charges that had been pressed against him and then dropped, and the crowd of supporters to deal with.

¹ Temperate: marked by moderation, not extreme or excessive; mild

² Melancholy: depression of spirits; dejection

³ Confounding: baffling, frustrating

Alexa hoped with all of her heart that he wanted to see her, too. If he wanted to see her, she knew he would come here this morning. This was their routine.

Her heart skipped a beat when she saw his boat on the horizon and the familiar wave as he navigated ever closer.

“*Hola!*” José yelled over the noise of the motor. “Let’s go to Coconut Bay! The dolphins are there!” Having vanquished⁴ the opponents and succeeded at their mission, he looked inestimably⁵ content.

They had met like this dozens of times before. The proverbial⁶ invitation to seek out the dolphins was the same as always. But Alexa knew this was not the canonical⁷ rendezvous it appeared to be. It was their last rendezvous. She felt so encumbered⁸ with this heart-rending⁹ knowledge that she could barely respond to his invitation.

Even from a distance of 50 feet, José could tell something was wrong. In deference¹⁰ to Alexa’s melancholy, he refrained from acting like a jester.¹¹ Normally, he would perform some silly and humorous antics—something to make her laugh. He was a quintessential¹² comedian. But

⁴ Vanquish: to defeat in a conflict or contest

⁵ Inestimably: incapable of being estimated

⁶ Proverbial: that has become a proverb or byword; commonly spoken of

⁷ Canonical: conforming to a general rule or acceptable procedure; orthodox

⁸ Encumbered: weighed down, burdened

⁹ Heart-rending: heartbreaking

¹⁰ Deference: in consideration of

¹¹ Jester: fool

¹² Quintessential: the most typical example or representative

today's encounter was not a prototype¹³ of the many that had preceded it. José turned off the motor, dropped the anchor in the shallow water, and waded toward the outcrop.

"What's wrong?" he asked tenderly when he saw her tears. He put his arms around her. "Tell me, what happened? Was there lots of trouble for you because of what we did?"

"No, it's not that. José...we're leaving tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow! That is so soon!" José replied, stunned. This was an outcome he hadn't anticipated. They sat in silence for a moment, holding each other.

"Well, how am I going to free all the rest of the dolphins at Puerto Marino if my cohort¹⁴ isn't here to help me?" he joked. For José, humor was the universal antidote.¹⁵

Alexa laughed at the notion of freeing the entire trove¹⁶ of dolphins. Its implausibility¹⁷ made it funny. Now that José was permanently banished¹⁸ from Puerto Marino, it seemed quite dubious¹⁹ he would be able to engineer such a grandiose²⁰ scheme.

"Well, if I can't be here in person to help you with the sequel, I'll be with you in spirit. And I can follow all of the pertinent²¹ developments on CNN!" Alexa added with a wry smile. Now they both burst out laughing.

"Why don't we make the best of our day together? Let's go to Coconut Bay and swim with the dolphins," José urged convincingly.

"I'd like that," Alexa agreed. She took the outstretched hand he offered her and they waded out to the boat.

¹³ Prototype: a standard or typical example

¹⁴ Cohort: companion, colleague

¹⁵ Antidote: something that relieves, prevents, or counteracts

¹⁶ Trove: a valuable collection; treasure

¹⁷ Implausible: not plausible; provoking disbelief

¹⁸ Banish: to require by authority to leave

¹⁹ Dubious: giving rise to uncertainty

²⁰ Grandiose: impressive because of uncommon largeness, scope, effect, or grandeur

²¹ Pertinent: having a clear decisive relevance to the matter at hand



The picturesque scenery of Coconut Bay struck Alexa profoundly when they pulled their boat ashore. Its beauty was so uplifting, but it was hard not to dwell on the fact that she might not see this special place again for a long time. Alexa knew she would always feel nostalgic²² about this spectacular place and the time she spent here.

“I think Pecas and her baby are swimming right over there,” José pointed. He took her hand to wade out into deeper water. “Did you see? They are together again! They found each other!” José’s voice cracked with emotion.

“I know. I saw them yesterday. Isn’t it beautiful?” Alexa remarked.

“It’s the way it should be,” José replied.

Pecas and Coco swam around them in circles, frolicking playfully. Alexa couldn’t believe her good fortune. It seemed unimaginably poetic that on her last day, she would be able to swim together with José, Pecas, and Coco.

“José, what are you going to do now that you can’t work at Puerto Marino anymore?” Alexa asked. “Will you be able to find another job to save money for college? You’re not going to dive for lobsters, are you?”

“No, don’t worry. I promised my father I wouldn’t, and I will keep my promise. I don’t know where I’ll find another job, but I will. I know I won’t be able to find something that paid as well as Puerto Marino.” He looked serious and pensive for a moment. “It just means that it will take longer for me to get there—to college.” He paused again, as if he were

²² Nostalgic: a wistful or excessively sentimental, sometimes abnormal yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition

choosing his words carefully. “But I have no regrets about what we did. Some things are worth the consequences, whatever they may be.”

“My father e-mailed me some information on scholarships at Cornell. There are a few you would be qualified for,” Alexa said hopefully.

“Really?” José replied, brightening up considerably. “There are scholarships for foreigners?”

“Yes,” Alexa nodded. “If you want, maybe we could spend this afternoon at the library. If we can use the computer there, I can pull up his e-mail and we can start to fill out some of the applications.”

“That sounds great!” José said. He looked so touched that she had looked into this for him. “Thank you so much. That’s the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me...aside from my mother, of course!” José laughed.

“Oh, it was nothing, really,” Alexa brushed off his compliment. “Oh—my dad said you would need to take the SAT to be considered for the scholarships.”

“I already did.”

“You did?” Alexa was a bit surprised. Evidently, José was quite serious about going to an American university. Although he scorned American soda, he lauded²³ American institutions of higher learning. He must have at least considered emigrating²⁴ to the United States for college if he took the SAT.

“How did you do?” Alexa asked hesitantly. She didn’t want to put him on the spot, but it *was* pertinent to their discussion.

²³ Lauded: praise, extol

²⁴ Emigrate: to leave one’s place of residence or country to live elsewhere

“I got a 1590,” he answered simply, without a trace of self-aggrandizement.²⁵ He was not a braggart.²⁶ She had asked him, and he had merely complied with a straightforward answer.

“Oh my gosh! That’s amazing! You’ll have an excellent chance of getting a scholarship! How did you do it? I don’t know anyone who scored that well! That’s nearly perfect!” Alexa was astounded.

“Well, actually...I did score perfectly on the math section, but the verbal section was my nemesis. I think I missed one or two questions because of the vocabulary—it always boils down to whether or not you know the words!”

²⁵ Self-aggrandizement: to make oneself appear greater; to praise oneself

²⁶ Braggart: a loud, arrogant boaster

Vocabulary Exercises

Chapter 1

A Futile Request

1. hierarchy
2. incessantly
3. speculate
4. emulate
5. conventional
6. exacerbate
7. exclusive
8. pretentious
9. haughty
10. disdainful
11. miff
12. perpetuate
13. incline
14. contemporaries
15. incongruous
16. transformation
17. modest
18. demeanor
19. detached
20. venerate
21. rudiment
22. machination
23. emergent
24. interlude
25. embroil
26. unswerving
27. vocation
28. burgeoning
29. chasm
30. inept
31. lurid
32. indifferent
33. aesthetics
34. adept
35. abhor
36. mundane
37. archetypal
38. cloying
39. bereft
40. enduring

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 41. gregarious | 55. reverence |
| 42. camaraderie | 56. preamble |
| 43. endorsement | 57. gingerly |
| 44. cherished | 58. volubly |
| 45. elation | 59. disparaging |
| 46. ardor | 60. invariably |
| 47. imminent | 61. rhetoric |
| 48. persevere | 62. discourse |
| 49. brooding | 63. ambivalent |
| 50. cognizant | 64. tacit |
| 51. perception | 65. flippancy |
| 52. cajole | 66. futile |
| 53. clientele | 67. resolute |
| 54. esteem | |

- The **mundane rhetoric** and passive **demeanor** of the mayoral candidate left the assembled crowd feeling _____ about his candidacy.
 - evoked
 - embroiled
 - ambivalent
 - cherished
 - ardor
- After years of enduring the **incessant** scrutiny of the media, the governor had learned to become _____ of how his actions were perceived by others.
 - haughty
 - cajoling
 - bereft
 - disparaging
 - cognizant

3. The **esteemed** teacher was **cherished** by her students for her _____ style of teaching. She managed to convey the _____ of history in an **unconventional** manner that kept her students chuckling while they learned the essentials.
- A. **invariable...preamble**
 - B. **gregarious...rudiments**
 - C. **inept...chasm**
 - D. **resolute...contemporaries**
 - E. **exacerbated...perception**
4. The genuine _____ among the members of the baseball team was an integral part of their **enduring** team spirit.
- A. **camaraderie**
 - B. **interlude**
 - C. **speculation**
 - D. **disdain**
 - E. **transformation**
5. Suzanne was a(n) _____ salesperson who always tried to **cajole** her **clients** into spending more money than they initially intended.
- A. **futile**
 - B. **disparaging**
 - C. **detached**
 - D. **archetypal**
 - E. **inept**
6. Sam, a **burgeoning** political activist, **abhorred** the _____ that many of his **contemporaries** showed for political debates.
- A. **rapport**
 - B. **indifference**
 - C. **machinations**
 - D. **elation**
 - E. **perseverance**

7. Once she picked her intended **vocation**, Clairissa was _____ in her choice, despite the plethora of career options available to her.
- A. **flippant**
 - B. **lurid**
 - C. **miffed**
 - D. **detached**
 - E. **unswerving**
8. The **cloyingly** sweet final scene was a(n) _____ ending to a play that began with such a dark, **brooding** tone.
- A. **incongruous**
 - B. **ambivalent**
 - C. **innate**
 - D. **perpetual**
 - E. **disparaging**
9. Since he knew that lucrative commercial **endorsements** were _____, the **venerated** quarterback was inclined to stay with his hometown team, despite the **modest** salary.
- A. **cognizant**
 - B. **reverent**
 - C. **tacit**
 - D. **imminent**
 - E. **emulated**
10. The **pretentious** _____ of the **exclusive** resort contrasted sharply with the **modest** dwellings around it.
- A. **hierarchy**
 - B. **discourse**
 - C. **chasm**
 - D. **ascetic**
 - E. **aesthetics**

Answers Chapter 1

1. C ambivalent
2. E cognizant
3. B gregarious...rudiments
4. A camaraderie
5. D archetypal
6. B indifference
7. E unswerving
8. A incongruous
9. D imminent
10. E aesthetics

Chapter 2

Captivating Creatures

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 68. genial | 98. enveloped |
| 69. affable | 99. remote |
| 70. harbor | 100. verdant |
| 71. pique | 101. prompt |
| 72. punctuate | 102. peruse |
| 73. extenuating | 103. legitimacy |
| 74. evoke | 104. perfunctory |
| 75. innate | 105. profoundly |
| 76. rapport | 106. sarcastically |
| 77. procure | 107. admonish |
| 78. arid | 108. nondescript |
| 79. utopia | 109. colossal |
| 80. garish | 110. austere |
| 81. crass | 111. collaborator |
| 82. voluminous | 112. portal |
| 83. oblivious | 113. vast |
| 84. embittered | 114. torpid |
| 85. emissary | 115. charismatic |
| 86. vivid | 116. potentate |
| 87. cartographer | 117. supple |
| 88. foreboding | 118. captivate |
| 89. encompasses | 119. precarious |
| 90. perplexed | 120. contiguous |
| 91. oration | 121. periphery |
| 92. unyielding | 122. periodically |
| 93. undermine | 123. presiding |
| 94. strife | 124. rambled |
| 95. interlocutor | 125. rousing |
| 96. portentously | 126. preempted |
| 97. interminable | 127. comparatively |

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| 128. compelling | 137. compassionately |
| 129. arduous | 138. coerce |
| 130. formidable | 139. exasperated |
| 131. assiduous | 140. empathetic |
| 132. fortitude | 141. forlorn |
| 133. awestruck | 142. foster |
| 134. cordial | 143. redeeming |
| 135. articulate | 144. grievance |
| 136. yearning | |

1. Despite her **grievances** about the **voluminous** length of the text-book, Kara attacked the **colossal** assignment _____.
 - A. **assiduously**
 - B. **remotely**
 - C. **contiguously**
 - D. **comparatively**
 - E. **precariously**
2. The audience was **awestruck** by the **rousing oration** of the candidate who managed to **articulate** his ideas in such a(n) _____ fashion.
 - A. **torpid**
 - B. **compelling**
 - C. **supple**
 - D. **unyielding**
 - E. **periodic**
3. The **remote** island _____ thousands of species of birds in its _____ jungle.
 - A. **enveloped...portal**
 - B. **evoked...punctuated**
 - C. **admonished...arid**
 - D. **harbored...verdant**
 - E. **captivated...crass**

4. **Exasperated** by her _____ **collaborator**, Gigi was **prompted** to seek the advice of her supervisor.
- A. **vivid**
 - B. **redeeming**
 - C. **affable**
 - D. **genial**
 - E. **unyielding**
5. The poignant plea for peace from the **forlorn** orphan managed to _____ **compassion** among the warring tribes, while the more **coercive** tactics of the government failed to alleviate the continual **strife** in the region.
- A. **foster**
 - B. **embitter**
 - C. **austere**
 - D. **innate**
 - E. **extenuate**
6. **Embittered** by the **indifference** of his supervisor, John decided to seek a new mentor who would not be so _____ to his **formidable** efforts.
- A. **procured**
 - B. **oblivious**
 - C. **crass**
 - D. **cordial**
 - E. **supple**
7. The jury looked _____ while the prosecutor **rambled** on _____ in a **portentous** opening argument.
- A. **foreboding...succinctly**
 - B. **charismatic...profoundly**
 - C. **utopian...remotely**
 - D. **perplexed...interminably**
 - E. **arduous...comparatively**

8. The teacher **admonished** Jared for his **sarcastic** remark about the Watergate scandal, even though his comment had a rather insightful nuance that _____ her interest.
- A. **yearned**
 - B. **exasperated**
 - C. **presided**
 - D. **undermined**
 - E. **piqued**
9. The discerning judge **presiding** over the case _____ the documents provided by the prosecution in order to verify their **legitimacy**.
- A. **perused**
 - B. **coerced**
 - C. **compelled**
 - D. **enveloped**
 - E. **punctuated**
10. The corporation's designated **interlocutor** made a **perfunctory** statement that failed to _____ the growing aura of scandal that **enveloped** the embattled CEO.
- A. **procure**
 - B. **embitter**
 - C. **preempt**
 - D. **admonish**
 - E. **yearn**
11. Although the crime itself was **garish**, the **extenuating** circumstances of the perpetrator's upbringing garnered _____ from the jury.
- A. **fortitude**
 - B. **orations**
 - C. **strife**
 - D. **utopia**
 - E. **empathy**

Answers Chapter 2

1. A assiduously
2. B compelling
3. D harbored...verdant
4. E unyielding
5. A foster
6. B oblivious
7. D perplexed...interminably
8. E piqued
9. A perused
10. C preempt
11. E empathy

Chapter 3

A Serendipitous Find

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 145. animated | 175. encampment |
| 146. domestic | 176. perspective |
| 147. limitation | 177. deprived |
| 148. covet | 178. mendicant |
| 149. deliberate | 179. beseech |
| 150. cultivating | 180. subsist |
| 151. desolate | 181. penurious |
| 152. wary | 182. patrons |
| 153. usurp | 183. ethnicity |
| 154. consign | 184. ostracized |
| 155. debatable | 185. scurried |
| 156. comrade | 186. translucent |
| 157. flourish | 187. serendipitously |
| 158. denounce | 188. decadent |
| 159. disgruntled | 189. archaic |
| 160. emphatically | 190. dingy |
| 161. affirming | 191. unintelligible |
| 162. asserted | 192. deflect |
| 163. upstart | 193. lithe |
| 164. hospitable | 194. exorbitantly |
| 165. elaborate | 195. extricate |
| 166. protocol | 196. evade |
| 167. empowering | 197. perspicacity |
| 168. impulsively | 198. proximity |
| 169. omnipresent | 199. divulge |
| 170. authoritatively | 200. indiscretion |
| 171. impetuous | 201. discretionary |
| 172. parched | 202. feigned |
| 173. ubiquitous | 203. efficaciously |
| 174. franchise | 204. inundate |

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 205. foraged | 211. enigmatic |
| 206. corrosive | 212. propensity |
| 207. soluble | 213. debilitating |
| 208. dénouement | 214. bequeathing |
| 209. lull | 215. invigorating |
| 210. coalesce | |

- In order to keep her **lithe** frame toned and trim for the upcoming track season, Sandy _____ herself to a summer filled with **invigorating** exercise.
 - consigned**
 - feigned**
 - foraged**
 - parched**
 - animated**
- Although the directions were **unintelligible**, Harry _____ found his way to the **desolate** location.
 - beseechingly**
 - hospitably**
 - translucently**
 - serendipitously**
 - elaborately**
- During a **lull** in the debate, Jill's **elaborate** strategy _____ in her mind.
 - bequeathed**
 - coalesced**
 - coveted**
 - parched**
 - deprived**

4. Even though his security guards were **omnipresent**, the Army captain was increasingly _____ of the rebels in the neighboring **encampment**.
- A. **dingy**
 - B. **archaic**
 - C. **flourished**
 - D. **wary**
 - E. **scurried**
5. The _____ expensive purchase of **decadent** chocolate was an **impulsive** decision that exceeded the spending _____ David and Sue had set for themselves.
- A. **animatedly...franchise**
 - B. **corrosively...denouement**
 - C. **exorbitantly...limitations**
 - D. **domestically...comrade**
 - E. **enigmatically...mendicant**
6. After setting strict _____ on her budget, Rory was able to save for college quite **efficaciously**, although at times, she felt _____ of luxurious treats.
- A. **limitations...deprived**
 - B. **indiscretions...asserted**
 - C. **upstarts...empowered**
 - D. **lulls...deflected**
 - E. **encampments...evaded**
7. The _____ employee emphatically **denounced** the deplorable working conditions at the fast-food **franchise** before handing in his resignation.
- A. **flourished**
 - B. **serendipitous**
 - C. **protocol**
 - D. **affirming**
 - E. **disgruntled**

8. At times, Sheila was **ostracized** from her group of friends because of her _____ to **divulge** secrets.
- A. **perspicacity**
 - B. **propensity**
 - C. **proximity**
 - D. **discretionary**
 - E. **protocol**
9. Even though the prosecution's witness had received numerous death threats and his safety was **debatable**, none of the authorities had the _____ to enroll him in a witness protection program.
- A. **perspicacity**
 - B. **cultivation**
 - C. **indiscretion**
 - D. **lithe**
 - E. **limitation**
10. After **deliberating** over the restaurant's décor, Angie decided that she would attempt to **cultivate** an international aura that would complement the _____ cuisine.
- A. **parched**
 - B. **ethnic**
 - C. **discretionary**
 - D. **soluble**
 - E. **wary**

Answers Chapter 3

1. A consigned
2. D serendipitously
3. B coalesced
4. D wary
5. C exorbitantly...limitations
6. A limitations...deprived
7. E disgruntled
8. B propensity
9. A perspicacity
10. B ethnic

Chapter 4

An Old Maxim

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 216. stifling | 233. parsimony |
| 217. uplifting | 234. eclectic |
| 218. sensibilities | 235. fantasize |
| 219. explicitly | 236. maxim |
| 220. prophetic | 237. pigeonhole |
| 221. surreptitiously | 238. dimension |
| 222. fervently | 239. querulous |
| 223. universal | 240. confrontation |
| 224. anemic | 241. mechanisms |
| 225. gourmand | 242. coherently |
| 226. affront | 243. livid |
| 227. envision | 244. indecorous |
| 228. affectation | 245. dissipated |
| 229. frugal | 246. digress |
| 230. ensemble | 247. toady |
| 231. vitiate | 248. untenable |
| 232. bourgeois | 249. unalterable |

1. The **uplifting** quality of the concerto was _____ by the abhorrent acoustics of the auditorium.
- A. **livid**
 - B. **vitiated**
 - C. **gourmand**
 - D. **pigeonholed**
 - E. **envisioned**

-
2. After halting a violent **confrontation** between two students, the teacher made it clear that such _____ behavior was simply **untenable** in the classroom.
- A. **gourmand**
 - B. **frugal**
 - C. **ensemble**
 - D. **parsimonious**
 - E. **indecorous**
3. **Digressing** into an **eclectic** variety of topics, Randy's essay failed to focus on a(n) _____ theme.
- A. **coherent**
 - B. **maxim**
 - C. **toady**
 - D. **stifling**
 - E. **ensemble**
4. The _____ debate in the student council meeting was an **affront** to their advisor, who always taught them to resolve their differences in a well-mannered fashion.
- A. **mechanism**
 - B. **dimension**
 - C. **dissipated**
 - D. **querulous**
 - E. **unalterable**
5. Gillian's desire to buy a designer handbag **dissipated** when she decided that the highly visible designer labels on the exterior were a(n) _____ symbol that she did not aspire to own.
- A. **parsimonious**
 - B. **bourgeois**
 - C. **envisioned**
 - D. **dissipated**
 - E. **querulous**

6. The **stifling** heat in the auditorium gave Adam a(n) _____ desire to slip out of the back door **surreptitiously**.
- A. **fervent**
 - B. **frugal**
 - C. **livid**
 - D. **anemic**
 - E. **toady**

Answers Chapter 4

1. B vitiated
2. E indecorous
3. A coherent
4. D querulous
5. B bourgeois
6. A fervent

Chapter 5

A Surprising Revelation

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 250. unambiguously | 274. sentiment |
| 251. arbitrarily | 275. indomitable |
| 252. apathetic | 276. juxtaposition |
| 253. alleviate | 277. introspective |
| 254. anticipating | 278. intelligentsia |
| 255. resplendent | 279. elusive |
| 256. wavered | 280. predetermined |
| 257. immerse | 281. subsidize |
| 258. transparent | 282. disparity |
| 259. iridescent | 283. elitist |
| 260. idealistic | 284. egalitarian |
| 261. languidly | 285. malingering |
| 262. restorative | 286. reiterate |
| 263. stagnating | 287. tentatively |
| 264. cacophony | 288. ignite |
| 265. kinship | 289. exploit |
| 266. legitimating | 290. illicit |
| 267. circumscribe | 291. tranquility |
| 268. linguistic | 292. deftly |
| 269. visceral | 293. apparatus |
| 270. lummoX | 294. revelation |
| 271. penchant | 295. fritter |
| 272. jovial | 296. inauspicious |
| 273. propelled | 297. surfeit |

1. After **frittering** away the first 30 minutes of her allotted time, Alicia finally _____ herself in the task of writing an essay.
 - A. **reiterated**
 - B. **immersed**
 - C. **circumscribed**
 - D. **predetermined**
 - E. **idealized**

2. The **juxtaposition** of the **resplendent** hotel next to the **subsidized** housing unit underscored the _____ between the tourists and the local population.
 - A. **arbitrary**
 - B. **tranquility**
 - C. **apparatus**
 - D. **iridescence**
 - E. **disparity**

3. The dictator's intent to **exploit** his country's resources of natural gas was **unambiguously** demonstrated by his _____ statements at the environmental summit meeting.
 - A. **elusive**
 - B. **frittering**
 - C. **kinship**
 - D. **transparent**
 - E. **stagnating**

4. David's _____ attitude toward his homework **legitimated** his mother's growing concern about his education.
 - A. **apathetic**
 - B. **deft**
 - C. **reiterated**
 - D. **surfeit**
 - E. **linguistic**

5. The _____ of the mountain retreat was conducive to **languid** afternoons spent in **introspective** thought.
- A. **cacophony**
 - B. **disparity**
 - C. **revelation**
 - D. **transparency**
 - E. **tranquility**
6. Far from being an **elitist** politician, the councilman _____ his **egalitarian** policies several times during his speech.
- A. **frittered**
 - B. **reiterated**
 - C. **alleviated**
 - D. **maligned**
 - E. **circumscribed**
7. Bill's _____ for old cars **propelled** him to visit even the most **inauspicious** places to look for **elusive** car parts.
- A. **apparatus**
 - B. **egalitarian**
 - C. **tentative**
 - D. **penchant**
 - E. **utopian**
8. Suzanne's **deft** maneuvers on the **apparatus** **ignited** the crowd of gymnastics enthusiasts into a(n) _____ of applause and cheers.
- A. **cacophony**
 - B. **exploitations**
 - C. **stagnation**
 - D. **languid**
 - E. **intelligentsia**

-
9. The startling _____ about a new planet in the solar system was eagerly **anticipated** by the press, many of whom had heard rumors about the exciting discovery.
- A. **exploitation**
 - B. **juxtaposition**
 - C. **revelation**
 - D. **disparity**
 - E. **lummox**

Answers Chapter 5

1. B immersed
2. E disparity
3. D transparent
4. A apathetic
5. E tranquility
6. B reiterated
7. D penchant
8. A cacophony
9. C revelation

Chapter 6

Pecas' Plea

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 298. ascetic | 328. delineated |
| 299. utilitarian | 329. feral |
| 300. sparsely | 330. reticent |
| 301. virtuoso | 331. folly |
| 302. pronouncement | 332. ethical |
| 303. preoccupied | 333. heinous |
| 304. discourteous | 334. inconsequential |
| 305. encroaching | 335. indignant |
| 306. wrath | 336. illogical |
| 307. indefensible | 337. antagonistic |
| 308. combativeness | 338. entangled |
| 309. placating | 339. friction |
| 310. rectify | 340. impassion |
| 311. advocate | 341. erratic |
| 312. adversary | 342. goading |
| 313. vindictive | 343. alacrity |
| 314. exculpate | 344. quest |
| 315. preconceptions | 345. uncanny |
| 316. unmitigated | 346. symptomatic |
| 317. solicitous | 347. theorized |
| 318. botched | 348. specter |
| 319. amorphous | 349. condemn |
| 320. assurance | 350. reprehensible |
| 321. analogous | 351. promulgate |
| 322. cynicism | 352. statute |
| 323. satire | 353. razed |
| 324. meticulously | 354. incumbent |
| 325. methodically | 355. formulate |
| 326. refurbish | 356. rational |
| 327. circuitous | |

1. After an unsuccessful attempt to unseat the incumbent, Bill was _____ to run for office again when the **specter** of defeat **preoccupied** his mind.
 - A. **reticent**
 - B. **promulgated**
 - C. **feral**
 - D. **unmitigated**
 - E. **formulated**

2. The defendant was **indignant** that the _____ evidence was omitted from the trial due to the **botched** police investigation.
 - A. **ascetic**
 - B. **preoccupied**
 - C. **virtuoso**
 - D. **exculpatory**
 - E. **encroaching**

3. The **heinous** act of aggression was _____ by the international community.
 - A. **refurbished**
 - B. **condemned**
 - C. **encroached**
 - D. **razed**
 - E. **reticent**

4. Ruth ignored the _____ comments by her **adversary** in the debate because she didn't want to become **entangled** in a _____ exchange of insults.
 - A. **rational...folly**
 - B. **illogical...placating**
 - C. **sparse...uncanny**
 - D. **statute...satire**
 - E. **antagonistic...vindictive**

-
5. In an attempt to **formulate** a **rational** hypothesis, Doug reviewed the evidence _____.
- A. **methodically**
 - B. **illogically**
 - C. **indefensibly**
 - D. **inconsequentially**
 - E. **discourteously**
6. After **encroaching** on the **feral** bear's territory, John attempted to _____ the **combative** animal.
- A. **placate**
 - B. **refurbish**
 - C. **formulate**
 - D. **quest**
 - E. **delineate**
7. The _____ concerns raised by the board of directors were vindicated when they discovered that the company's bookkeeping had not been carried out in a **meticulous** fashion.
- A. **feral**
 - B. **analogous**
 - C. **virtuoso**
 - D. **utilitarian**
 - E. **ethical**
8. Gina _____ taking a **circuitous** route back to the trailhead, even though her exhausted fellow hikers thought that her idea was **illogical**.
- A. **exculpated**
 - B. **advocated**
 - C. **botched**
 - D. **encroached**
 - E. **refurbished**

9. The spate of **impassioned** anti-war rallies in the 1960s was **symptomatic** of the growing _____ the citizens felt about their involvement in the Vietnam War.
- A. **cynicism**
 - B. **goadng**
 - C. **alacrity**
 - D. **quest**
 - E. **assurance**
10. Chris typically didn't require any **goadng** from his parents about doing his homework, but this particular assignment was so _____ and poorly **delineated**, he didn't know where to begin.
- A. **methodical**
 - B. **incumbent**
 - C. **rational**
 - D. **amorphous**
 - E. **preoccupied**

Answers Chapter 6

1. A reticent
2. D exculpatory
3. B condemned
4. E antagonistic...vindictive
5. A methodically
6. A placate
7. E ethical
8. B advocated
9. A cynicism
10. D amorphous

Chapter 7

The Clandestine Mission

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 357. agile | 374. monstrosity |
| 358. clandestine | 375. lavish |
| 359. endeavor | 376. espouse |
| 360. crystallize | 377. rhapsody |
| 361. cunning | 378. understate |
| 362. ecstatic | 379. tenacity |
| 363. hypothesis | 380. jollity |
| 364. preconceived | 381. whimsical |
| 365. notions | 382. plaintive |
| 366. scrupulous | 383. compulsive |
| 367. radical | 384. vehemently |
| 368. vengeance | 385. talisman |
| 369. scheme | 386. embellish |
| 370. conjecture | 387. narratives |
| 371. verifiable | 388. unutterable |
| 372. solidarity | 389. underscore |
| 373. ominously | |

1. Jerry **vehemently** refused to _____ Terry's **hypothesis** because he thought that Terry did not **scrupulously** analyze the data.
- A. **espouse**
 - B. **agile**
 - C. **conjecture**
 - D. **understate**
 - E. **talisman**

2. After working **tenaciously** for a whole year on a big project, Velma was **ecstatic** to complete the _____ endeavor.
 - A. **vengeance**
 - B. **notion**
 - C. **plaintive**
 - D. **monstrous**
 - E. **underscored**

3. Throughout the **narrative**, the _____ cry of the wolf symbolized the anguish of the animals in the burning forest and **underscored** the prevailing theme of man's destruction of nature.
 - A. **whimsical**
 - B. **jolly**
 - C. **verifiable**
 - D. **clandestine**
 - E. **plaintive**

4. The _____ style of the hotel lobby lacked the extravagant furniture and **lavish embellishments** that are prevalent in contemporary decorating **schemes**.
 - A. **unutterable**
 - B. **understated**
 - C. **rhapsodic**
 - D. **solidarity**
 - E. **preconceived**

5. Once the soldier came to grips with the _____ reality of his capture, a **cunning** plan of escape **crystallized** in his mind.
 - A. **whimsical**
 - B. **agile**
 - C. **ominous**
 - D. **lavish**
 - E. **compulsive**

Answers Chapter 7

1. A espouse
2. D monstrous
3. E plaintive
4. B understated
5. C ominous

Chapter 8

Not a Nemesis

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 390. adorned | 403. munificence |
| 391. adulation | 404. decorous |
| 392. couched | 405. nonchalance |
| 393. harmonious | 406. compatriot |
| 394. hackneyed | 407. permeate |
| 395. harangue | 408. innuendo |
| 396. correlation | 409. melodiously |
| 397. interweave | 410. misconception |
| 398. inherent | 411. negate |
| 399. pariah | 412. narcissistic |
| 400. modicum | 413. insular |
| 401. perceptiveness | 414. nemesis |
| 402. morose | 415. mandated |

1. After being **harangued** and outcast by his teammates, Sean tried to act **nonchalant**, but in reality, he felt deeply saddened to be treated like a(n) _____.
 - A. **innuendo**
 - B. **morose**
 - C. **hackneyed**
 - D. **pariah**
 - E. **compatriot**
2. Having grown up in a(n) _____ environment with little exposure to world politics, Gary's outlook was **permeated** with **misconceptions** about the United Nations.
 - A. **insular**
 - B. **adorned**
 - C. **negated**
 - D. **permeated**
 - E. **inherent**

3. It only took a **modicum** of _____ to understand the thinly veiled **innuendo** of the political cartoon.
- A. **decorum**
 - B. **adulation**
 - C. **nonchalance**
 - D. **mandate**
 - E. **perceptiveness**
4. **Interweaving** words of _____ for the military with sharp criticism for the president, the political candidate hoped that his **compatriots** would see him as a compassionate leader who cared deeply for the fate of the young men and women in the armed forces.
- A. **harangue**
 - B. **adulation**
 - C. **misconception**
 - D. **narcissism**
 - E. **negation**
5. Harry enjoyed handing out lavish gifts at the orphanage because the kids showered him with **adulation** and genuinely seemed to appreciate his _____.
- A. **nemesis**
 - B. **misconception**
 - C. **decorum**
 - D. **munificence**
 - E. **nonchalance**

Answers Chapter 8

1. D pariah
2. A insular
3. E perceptiveness
4. B adulation
5. D munificence

Chapter 9

A Contemptuous Claim

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 416. inequities | 442. inordinately |
| 417. jaded | 443. intemperate |
| 418. protract | 444. egregious |
| 419. prominent | 445. protégé |
| 420. stylistic | 446. lobbyist |
| 421. renovation | 447. pundits |
| 422. ornate | 448. onerous |
| 423. purposefully | 449. vivacity |
| 424. antiquated | 450. unearthed |
| 425. vestige | 451. inception |
| 426. circuitry | 452. objective |
| 427. repose | 453. paramount |
| 428. eloquent | 454. organic |
| 429. fathom | 455. novelty |
| 430. veneer | 456. opulent |
| 431. efface | 457. paradox |
| 432. purportedly | 458. prudent |
| 433. deduction | 459. pragmatist |
| 434. contemptuously | 460. practical |
| 435. ostentatious | 461. proliferate |
| 436. outlandish | 462. exalted |
| 437. literally | 463. fallacious |
| 438. modulate | 464. resolve |
| 439. malice | 465. intuitively |
| 440. morass | 466. anticlimactic |
| 441. disillusionment | |

1. John **intuitively** knew that it was of **paramount** importance to rectify the _____ in the report before anyone read the **outlandish** lies.
 - A. **novelties**
 - B. **fallacies**
 - C. **inceptions**
 - D. **practicalities**
 - E. **protégés**

2. The compelling speech **eloquently** expressed the political **objectives** of the **lobby** group without getting mired down in a(n) _____ discussion of the complicated issue.
 - A. **protracted**
 - B. **prudent**
 - C. **pragmatic**
 - D. **practical**
 - E. **unearthed**

3. When the **novelty** of staying at the **opulent** hotel wore off, Kara _____ thought about her strained budget.
 - A. **stylistically**
 - B. **ostentatiously**
 - C. **prudently**
 - D. **exaltedly**
 - E. **fallaciously**

4. Although his **objective** was **purposefully malicious**, _____, his actions resulted in a vastly improved working environment.
 - A. **vivaciously**
 - B. **opulently**
 - C. **organically**
 - D. **prominently**
 - E. **paradoxically**

5. Since its **inception**, the **ostentatious** restaurant _____ to serve the best French food in all of Chicago.
- A. **purported**
 - B. **jaded**
 - C. **fathomed**
 - D. **effaced**
 - E. **unearthed**
6. The _____ of the **organic** cuisine wore off rather quickly for the _____ clientele.
- A. **practicality...antidormative**
 - B. **novelty...jaded**
 - C. **repose...prominent**
 - D. **proliferation...exalted**
 - E. **malice...pundit**
7. Although the palace had undergone extensive **renovations** in recent years, it retained some **vestiges** of its _____ past.
- A. **lobbyist**
 - B. **pundit**
 - C. **protégé**
 - D. **organic**
 - E. **opulent**
8. Even though Alice had **resolved** to tackle _____ assignments with a good attitude, she resented being coerced into the _____ boring task of filing a mountain of papers.
- A. **onerous...inordinately**
 - B. **prudent...vivaciously**
 - C. **egregious...vivaciously**
 - D. **deduced...paradoxically**
 - E. **fathomed...eloquently**

Answers Chapter 9

1. B fallacies
2. A protracted
3. C prudently
4. E paradoxically
5. A purported
6. B novelty...jaded
7. E opulent
8. A onerous...inordinately

Chapter 10

A Conflagration Ignites

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 467. perpetually | 497. adeptness |
| 468. bolster | 498. contrary |
| 469. tabled | 499. curtail |
| 470. discredit | 500. serene |
| 471. temerity | 501. deviate |
| 472. supplant | 502. impropriety |
| 473. pessimistic | 503. insidious |
| 474. remiss | 504. desecrate |
| 475. fickle | 505. conviction |
| 476. vociferous | 506. righteous |
| 477. resonate | 507. decry |
| 478. augurs | 508. idealist |
| 479. procrastinating | 509. habitable |
| 480. audacious | 510. counteract |
| 481. chagrin | 511. degradation |
| 482. chide | 512. inducement |
| 483. destitute | 513. constructive |
| 484. cosmopolitan | 514. mirage |
| 485. derisively | 515. refined |
| 486. pompous | 516. pliable |
| 487. insinuate | 517. restrained |
| 488. derogatory | 518. detritus |
| 489. restate | 519. immobilized |
| 490. penitence | 520. insight |
| 491. irreverent | 521. scorn |
| 492. generalizations | 522. vanity |
| 493. rigor | 523. unfetter |
| 494. quell | 524. superficial |
| 495. arrest | 525. sully |
| 496. belie | 526. adverse |

-
527. integral
528. vital
529. assuredly
530. proponent
531. hostility
532. impugn
533. raging
534. conflagration
535. cynically
536. flabbergast
537. belligerent
538. berate
539. offensive
540. resentment
541. condone
542. derision
543. rancorously
544. bickering
545. recrimination
546. inflammatory
547. loathed
548. burrow
549. calamity
550. allegiance
551. sagacity
552. empathy
553. obstinate
554. salvage
555. repentance
556. mollify
557. obstreperous
558. insolent
559. flagrant
560. shun
561. obdurate
562. vigilant
563. ruminare
564. reverberate
565. latent
566. irrefutable
567. liberal
568. microcosm
569. reactionary
570. renunciation
571. cataclysmic
572. nefarious
573. repudiate
574. misgiving
575. callous
576. malign
577. malediction
578. raucous
579. clairvoyant
580. melodrama
581. mediate
582. reconciliation
583. refractive
584. variegated
585. absolve
586. tenacious
587. suppress
588. pallid
589. squelch
590. stoic
591. conciliatory
592. accord
593. appalling
594. arbitrating

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 595. acrimonious | 599. discretion |
| 596. aversion | 600. divisive |
| 597. disputant | 601. defer |
| 598. drub | 602. impassive |

- The _____ dispute over the **divisive** issue of taxes was an **appalling** display of _____ **bickering**.
 - acrimonious...rancorous
 - pallid...burrow
 - conviction...derogatory
 - desecrated...tabled
 - destitute...cosmopolitan
- The **disputants** _____ each other **tenaciously** before the **mediator** intervened to _____ the **raucous** fight.
 - ruminated...reverberate
 - scorned...pompous
 - drubbed...mollify
 - resonated...augur
 - curtailed...mirage
- Jim's **flagrantly callous** behavior lacked _____.
 - reverberation
 - scorn
 - microcosm
 - assuredness
 - discretion
- Hal's **conciliatory** gesture was ignored by Jill, as she was still feeling **resentful** about the _____ comments he made earlier.
 - bolstered
 - salvaged
 - vigilant
 - derisive
 - integral

-
5. After a lengthy period of **arbitration**, a peace **accord** was signed that attempted to _____ the persistent _____ between the **belligerent** countries.
- A. **restate...rigor**
 - B. **absolve...hostility**
 - C. **sully...sagacity**
 - D. **shun...empathy**
 - E. **immobilize...condoning**
6. Fred's _____ judgment in stock purchases allowed him to **perpetually** overcome **adverse** market conditions.
- A. **insolent**
 - B. **scorned**
 - C. **penitent**
 - D. **inflammatory**
 - E. **sagacious**
7. Although the truth of the matter was **irrefutable**, Gina **loathed** being wrong and she continued to argue _____.
- A. **vociferously**
 - B. **procrastinating**
 - C. **calamity**
 - D. **immobilized**
 - E. **clairvoyantly**
8. Feeling _____ about his **idealistic** viewpoint, Nolan was an **obstinate** _____ of the environmental conservation movement.
- A. **remiss...detritus**
 - B. **vanity...obdurate**
 - C. **nefarious...clairvoyant**
 - D. **righteous...proponent**
 - E. **latent...reactionary**

9. The audience watching the debate was **flabbergasted** when the conservative candidate _____ his **liberal** opponent with **inflammatory** remarks about his personal life.
- A. **impugned**
 - B. **salvaged**
 - C. **condoned**
 - D. **loathed**
 - E. **reverberated**
10. The endless _____ continued as the **scorned** candidate **decried** his opponent's shady business dealings.
- A. **mollifying**
 - B. **restraint**
 - C. **vitality**
 - D. **proponent**
 - E. **recrimination**
11. Although the prince never formally _____ his rights to the throne, his **misgivings** about the **superficial** duties of the reigning monarchy were evident in his comments to the press.
- A. **variegated**
 - B. **bolstered**
 - C. **renounced**
 - D. **refined**
 - E. **ruminated**
12. Tom **squelched** his desire to verbalize a vindictive retort to the **offensive** insult and instead maintained a _____ silence.
- A. **stoic**
 - B. **raucous**
 - C. **salvaged**
 - D. **habitable**
 - E. **fickle**

-
13. The _____ act of **hostility** was so **inflammatory** that it derailed the fragile peace in the war-torn region.
- A. **serene**
 - B. **pallid**
 - C. **shunned**
 - D. **insightful**
 - E. **nefarious**
14. The _____ pressures of working on Wall Street eventually caused Frank to become **cynical** about material desires.
- A. **restrained**
 - B. **insidious**
 - C. **clairvoyant**
 - D. **vigilant**
 - E. **habitable**
15. Claire's _____ ranting **belied** the **serene** disposition that she normally displayed at the office.
- A. **integral**
 - B. **sullied**
 - C. **counteracted**
 - D. **obstreperous**
 - E. **tabled**

Answers Chapter 10

1. A acrimonious...rancorous
2. C drubbed...mollify
3. E discretion
4. D derisive
5. B absolve...hostility
6. E sagacious
7. A vociferously
8. D righteous...proponent
9. A impugned
10. E recrimination
11. C renounced
12. A stoic
13. E nefarious
14. B insidious
15. D obstreperous

Chapter 11

A Stealthy Scheme

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 603. contrite | 632. emancipation |
| 604. inanimate | 633. eccentric |
| 605. enmity | 634. inviolable |
| 606. impenitent | 635. consecrate |
| 607. discomfited | 636. entitlement |
| 608. endear | 637. treacherous |
| 609. disavow | 638. compromise |
| 610. altercation | 639. consensus |
| 611. intransigent | 640. facile |
| 612. precipitate | 641. stealthy |
| 613. attribute | 642. theoretically |
| 614. dissent | 643. trivialize |
| 615. enumerated | 644. doctrinaire |
| 616. emend | 645. implementation |
| 617. zealous | 646. illimitable |
| 618. phlegmatic | 647. heightened |
| 619. diminished | 648. innovative |
| 620. enervated | 649. indefatigable |
| 621. dire | 650. ineffable |
| 622. warranted | 651. boundless |
| 623. substantiate | 652. culminate |
| 624. defiantly | 653. imperceptible |
| 625. scoffed | 654. discern |
| 626. idolatry | 655. surmise |
| 627. subjective | 656. inferred |
| 628. despoiling | 657. industrious |
| 629. corroboration | 658. factual |
| 630. complying | 659. contemporary |
| 631. corollary | 660. anachronistic |

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 661. inexorable | 684. evanescent |
| 662. dispel | 685. extant |
| 663. indiscernible | 686. ephemeral |
| 664. foliage | 687. expropriate |
| 665. unrelenting | 688. ponderous |
| 666. predatory | 689. vexed |
| 667. trepidation | 690. imputed |
| 668. parasite | 691. servile |
| 669. plethora | 692. astute |
| 670. facilitate | 693. enlighten |
| 671. incantation | 694. beneficiary |
| 672. foil | 695. equitable |
| 673. navigable | 696. amiable |
| 674. foray | 697. mire |
| 675. alight | 698. benign |
| 676. oblique | 699. gracious |
| 677. respite | 700. vicarious |
| 678. imprint | 701. benevolent |
| 679. conjure | 702. anarchy |
| 680. suffuse | 703. profusion |
| 681. divine | 704. prolific |
| 682. glutton | 705. exultant |
| 683. palate | 706. inflamed |

1. Mike's **astute** insight about the potential of embryonic stem cells _____ an enormous amount of **innovation** in the field.
- A. **precipitated**
 - B. **foiled**
 - C. **expropriated**
 - D. **antagonized**
 - E. **taunted**

2. **Theoretically**, the task before them was **facile**; however, Joe worried about getting _____ in the myriad of details.
 - A. **emancipated**
 - B. **expropriated**
 - C. **mired**
 - D. **endeared**
 - E. **imprinted**

3. With **boundless** enthusiasm, George worked _____ to **implement** legislation that reflected his viewpoint on the issue of abortion.
 - A. **obliquely**
 - B. **contritely**
 - C. **ephemerally**
 - D. **benignly**
 - E. **zealously**

4. The growing _____ between the two neighboring countries began with a **trivial altercation** between two diplomats, but it ultimately **culminated** in a **treacherous** battle.
 - A. **idolatry**
 - B. **enmity**
 - C. **beneficiary**
 - D. **palate**
 - E. **evanescence**

5. Sam's **prolific** reading about European monarchies allowed him to experience _____ the life of a royal.
 - A. **stealthily**
 - B. **endearingly**
 - C. **intransigently**
 - D. **vicariously**
 - E. **imperceptibly**

6. Giving the data a **discerning** review, Velma **enumerated** the inconsistencies with the evidence and _____ that no conclusions could be drawn.
- A. **inferred**
 - B. **antagonized**
 - C. **facilitated**
 - D. **entitled**
 - E. **diminished**
7. The teacher looked **scornfully** at the **dire** situation in the unruly classroom and decided that the circumstance _____ immediate action on her part.
- A. **enumerated**
 - B. **vexed**
 - C. **compromised**
 - D. **warranted**
 - E. **suffused**
8. Looking with _____ at the **profusion** of poisonous ants on the trail, Fred shuddered with fear and decided to abort his **foray** into the jungle.
- A. **graciousness**
 - B. **benevolence**
 - C. **respite**
 - D. **idolatry**
 - E. **trepidation**
9. The tell-all book was _____ with details about the **eccentric** rock star that **corroborated** earlier articles in the tabloid press.
- A. **replete**
 - B. **alight**
 - C. **indiscernible**
 - D. **dispelled**
 - E. **disavowed**

10. Her face flushed with embarrassment, Suzanne looked _____ when the **unrelenting** taunting became increasingly personal.
- A. **exultant**
 - B. **navigable**
 - C. **zealous**
 - D. **discomfited**
 - E. **equitable**
11. The _____ figure skating of champion Michelle Kwan is **attributable** to her **indefatigable** competitive attitude and her **divine** talent.
- A. **foiled**
 - B. **illimitable**
 - C. **palate**
 - D. **imperceptible**
 - E. **consensus**
12. Taking a brief _____ from his **servile** duties as a janitor, Gerry sat down and **pondered** how he might find a job that was more challenging for his active mind.
- A. **respite**
 - B. **foliage**
 - C. **imprint**
 - D. **beneficiary**
 - E. **implementation**
13. The _____ opinion put forth by the victim's family **inflamed** the feud over the death penalty.
- A. **subjective**
 - B. **objective**
 - C. **benign**
 - D. **navigable**
 - E. **alighted**

Answers Chapter 11

1. A precipitated
2. C mired
3. E zealously
4. B enmity
5. D vicariously
6. A inferred
7. D warranted
8. E trepidation
9. A replete
10. D discomfited
11. B illimitable
12. A respite
13. A subjective

Chapter 12

The DNA Debacle

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 707. auspicious | 723. conundrum |
| 708. ramshackle | 724. rueful |
| 709. eradicate | 725. condescending |
| 710. enable | 726. gaffe |
| 711. diffidently | 727. consummate |
| 712. novice | 728. prowess |
| 713. relish | 729. elude |
| 714. exemplary | 730. detract |
| 715. precipitate | 731. default |
| 716. requisite | 732. obtuse |
| 717. congeal | 733. jubilation |
| 718. palpable | 734. diversion |
| 719. homogenize | 735. uncensored |
| 720. viscous | 736. disparate |
| 721. thwart | 737. concur |
| 722. debacle | |

1. Although the debate began **auspiciously** for Brenda, the judges **concurred** that her **gaffe** in the second half _____ from her overall performance.
 - A. **homogenized**
 - B. **detracted**
 - C. **congealed**
 - D. **relished**
 - E. **uncensored**

2. Sara's _____ behavior off of the tennis court belied the **pro**wess she displayed when playing on the Grand Slam circuit.
- A. **diffident**
 - B. **ramshackle**
 - C. **relished**
 - D. **enabled**
 - E. **homogenized**
3. The **debacle** about his shady real estate deal besmirched the candidate's otherwise **exemplary** record and ultimately _____ his efforts to get elected.
- A. **condescended**
 - B. **jubilated**
 - C. **enabled**
 - D. **congealed**
 - E. **thwarted**
4. The couple's _____ views on the **eradication** of the death penalty provided the source for many heated debates.
- A. **viscous**
 - B. **disparate**
 - C. **rueful**
 - D. **auspicious**
 - E. **ramshackle**
5. Ruth was a(n) _____ chef who **relished** fussing over the nuances of each dish she prepared.
- A. **eluded**
 - B. **obtuse**
 - C. **diverted**
 - D. **consummate**
 - E. **gaffe**

Answers Chapter 12

1. B detracted
2. A diffident
3. E thwarted
4. B disparate
5. D consummate

Chapter 13

A Moral Ambiguity

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 738. perilous | 764. synthesize |
| 739. malicious | 765. unruffled |
| 740. alienate | 766. scrutinize |
| 741. barrage | 767. subject |
| 742. baffle | 768. sleuth |
| 743. attune | 769. tenuous |
| 744. anecdote | 770. cumulative |
| 745. authentic | 771. profundity |
| 746. unprepossessing | 772. cryptic |
| 747. derelict | 773. complacency |
| 748. proprietor | 774. concocted |
| 749. repast | 775. commodities |
| 750. infused | 776. sentient |
| 751. supplement | 777. cerebral |
| 752. flout | 778. devalued |
| 753. preclude | 779. subversive |
| 754. polarize | 780. unscrupulous |
| 755. innovation | 781. culpable |
| 756. patent | 782. tactics |
| 757. exemplify | 783. deceitful |
| 758. pander | 784. ambiguity |
| 759. integrity | 785. furtive |
| 760. staunch | 786. corrupt |
| 761. interpretation | 787. linchpin |
| 762. gratuity | 788. florid |
| 763. tremulous | 789. collude |

1. The boy's **cryptic** behavior _____ his parents.
 - A. **repast**
 - B. **baffled**
 - C. **infused**
 - D. **corrupted**
 - E. **synthesized**

2. Because of the _____ actions of a few criminals, all air-line passengers are now **subjected** to increased **scrutiny** at the airport security checkpoints.
 - A. **unscrupulous**
 - B. **complacent**
 - C. **cerebral**
 - D. **patent**
 - E. **sleuth**

3. After Greg _____ the rules of play and came close to injuring a teammate, his position on the football team was **tenuous**.
 - A. **cumulated**
 - B. **polarized**
 - C. **supplemented**
 - D. **florid**
 - E. **flouted**

4. Brenda came **perilously** close to _____ her friend when she accosted her with a **barrage** of criticism.
 - A. **colluding**
 - B. **alienating**
 - C. **supplementing**
 - D. **unprepossessing**
 - E. **authenticating**

5. Although everyone **interpreted** her absence at the fundraiser as a(n) _____ of her duties as campaign manager, Fiona was **unruffled** in the face of the harsh criticism.
- A. **innovation**
 - B. **commodity**
 - C. **exemplification**
 - D. **gratuity**
 - E. **dereliction**
6. _____ the **subversive tactics** of career criminals, Captain Hines was a perceptive detective.
- A. **Attuned to**
 - B. **Deceitful of**
 - C. **Culpable for**
 - D. **Baffled by**
 - E. **Precluded of**
7. Karen was **staunch** in her opinion that the search for _____ life forms in outer space was a quest of unparalleled **profundity**.
- A. **devalued**
 - B. **concocted**
 - C. **anecdotal**
 - D. **sentient**
 - E. **proprietary**
8. The marketing team **concocted** a reprehensible ad campaign that _____ to the consumer's basest emotions.
- A. **repast**
 - B. **pandered**
 - C. **unruffled**
 - D. **cumulated**
 - E. **flouted**

Answers Chapter 13

1. B baffled
2. A unscrupulous
3. E flouted
4. B alienating
5. E dereliction
6. A Attuned to
7. D sentient
8. B pandered

Chapter 14

Late-Night Liberation

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 790. disingenuous | 820. immutable |
| 791. dissembler | 821. imposing |
| 792. perfidious | 822. capacious |
| 793. certitude | 823. incalculably |
| 794. liberating | 824. legions |
| 795. deviousness | 825. impressionable |
| 796. epistolary | 826. inarticulate |
| 797. revelatory | 827. susceptible |
| 798. provocative | 828. frivolity |
| 799. cathartic | 829. buffoonery |
| 800. therapeutic | 830. indiscriminately |
| 801. conception | 831. daunting |
| 802. submissive | 832. interspersed |
| 803. volition | 833. ardently |
| 804. vacillate | 834. stimulus |
| 805. partake | 835. incisively |
| 806. altruistic | 836. indeterminate |
| 807. abridge | 837. heralded |
| 808. augment | 838. encapsulated |
| 809. addendum | 839. negligible |
| 810. accentuate | 840. ostensibly |
| 811. emanate | 841. autonomous |
| 812. disconcert | 842. inefficacious |
| 813. instill | 843. premise |
| 814. tractable | 844. impetus |
| 815. surmountable | 845. extolled |
| 816. irresolute | 846. quandary |
| 817. pervasive | 847. enclosure |
| 818. intrepid | 848. pinioned |
| 819. heretofore | 849. hindrance |

850. execution	854. debunk
851. phenomenon	855. recommenced
852. presumptuous	856. euphoric
853. venture	857. momentous

1. Although it was rather **presumptuous** of Gina to _____ on Sara's hospitality for so long, Sara appeared to enjoy the company.
 - A. **inarticulate**
 - B. **impose**
 - C. **liberate**
 - D. **disconcert**
 - E. **instill**
2. Before **recommencing** the **daunting** task of reading *War and Peace*, Jane decided to **partake** of some more _____ works of fiction that were filled with **buffoonery** rather than serious social issues.
 - A. **irresolute**
 - B. **intrepid**
 - C. **immutable**
 - D. **frivolous**
 - E. **instilled**
3. Although the lucrative consulting contract with the pharmaceutical company would have significantly **augmented** his own salary, Dr. Reed decided not to accept because he did not want to compromise his _____ goal of making life-saving **therapies** affordable for the poor.
 - A. **interspersed**
 - B. **disingenuous**
 - C. **devious**
 - D. **epistolary**
 - E. **altruistic**

4. The **revelatory** article about the candidate was _____ in nature, although **ostensibly** it outlined the main issues of the election.
- A. **provocative**
 - B. **pinioned**
 - C. **enclosed**
 - D. **emanating**
 - E. **instilled**
5. The general's own disloyal behavior inspired many _____ acts among the enlisted men, who succumbed to the **pervasive** sentiment in that battalion.
- A. **capacious**
 - B. **perfidious**
 - C. **heralded**
 - D. **indeterminate**
 - E. **extolled**
6. The _____ version of *Frankenstein* managed to **encapsulate** the major elements of the plot in a **tractable** fashion; however, the shortened version wasn't nearly as **provocative** as the original.
- A. **vacillating**
 - B. **quandary**
 - C. **therapeutic**
 - D. **susceptible**
 - E. **abridged**
7. At a **momentous** meeting of the National Academy of Sciences, the prize-winning scientist _____ the widely **heralded** theory of how life began and then **incisively** outlined his own new theory.
- A. **debunked**
 - B. **recommended**
 - C. **enclosed**
 - D. **emanated**
 - E. **stimulated**

-
8. Since his parents were not there to **impose** their strict rules on his behavior, Fred was tempted to exploit his _____ at college by staying out late every night.
- A. **phenomenon**
 - B. **addendum**
 - C. **hindrance**
 - D. **autonomy**
 - E. **epistolary**
9. With convincing **certitude**, the Scout leader proclaimed that the challenges they faced were indeed _____ and that their **venture** would be successful.
- A. **interspersed**
 - B. **surmountable**
 - C. **executed**
 - D. **impetus**
 - E. **inarticulate**
10. Trying to **accentuate** the positive aspects of their performance, the conductor of the orchestra _____ the musicians and **instilled** a sense of pride in the group of novices.
- A. **pinioned**
 - B. **dissembled**
 - C. **interspersed**
 - D. **extolled**
 - E. **recommended**

Answers Chapter 14

1. B impose
2. D frivolous
3. E altruistic
4. A provocative
5. B perfidious
6. E abridged
7. A debunked
8. D autonomy
9. B surmountable
10. D extolled

Chapter 15

Friendship—An Eternal Verity

858. replete	873. ensue
859. craftiness	874. implication
860. wily	875. callow
861. unfounded	876. wield
862. subsequently	877. maelstrom
863. unprecedented	878. levy
864. scapegoat	879. eternal
865. entreat	880. verity
866. pretext	881. ponder
867. buttress	882. repercussion
868. trump	883. pensive
869. gauge	884. synchronous
870. deplorable	885. concomitant
871. impious	886. manifestation
872. salvation	887. frolicsome

1. Staring **pensively** out the window, David _____ the inevitable **repercussions** of his **deplorable** act of disloyalty.
 - A. **pondered**
 - B. **unfounded**
 - C. **buttressed**
 - D. **trumped**
 - E. **frolicked**
2. Helga _____ state and local officials to **levy** an additional tax to pay for the new social programs.
 - A. **unprecedented**
 - B. **buttressed**
 - C. **pondered**
 - D. **entreated**
 - E. **deplored**

3. The **callow** young man gave a statement to the press that ignited a _____ of controversy.
- A. **frolic**
 - B. **verity**
 - C. **wily**
 - D. **replete**
 - E. **maelstrom**
4. The wide-ranging _____ of the scientific discovery **manifest** themselves in a variety of different disciplines.
- A. **synchronous**
 - B. **implications**
 - C. **gauging**
 - D. **wiles**
 - E. **frolics**
5. Michael's _____ remark at the church service shocked his fellow parishioners and inspired the congregation to pray for his **salvation**.
- A. **impious**
 - B. **frolicsome**
 - C. **synchronous**
 - D. **pensive**
 - E. **subsequent**

Answers Chapter 15

1. A pondered
2. D entreated
3. E maelstrom
4. B implications
5. A impious

Chapter 16

A Preponderance of Evidence

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 888. synthetic | 918. maverick |
| 889. aplomb | 919. dissident |
| 890. mortified | 920. orator |
| 891. censured | 921. travesty |
| 892. demean | 922. elocutionist |
| 893. preponderance | 923. boisterous |
| 894. breach | 924. ethos |
| 895. invoke | 925. throng |
| 896. castigation | 926. surreal |
| 897. covenant | 927. sensationalize |
| 898. neutrality | 928. adversity |
| 899. precept | 929. resounding |
| 900. epedantic | 930. overtly |
| 901. sermonize | 931. proselytize |
| 902. hypocrite | 932. felicitous |
| 903. sanctimonious | 933. editorial |
| 904. eminently | 934. intervene |
| 905. adjudicate | 935. engender |
| 906. colloquial | 936. poignant |
| 907. veil | 937. faction |
| 908. circumlocutions | 938. disseminate |
| 909. ramification | 939. gibbering |
| 910. retribution | 940. scathing |
| 911. cantankerous | 941. truculent |
| 912. skirt | 942. remuneration |
| 913. contentious | 943. glacial |
| 914. carnivores | 944. tonic |
| 915. ferocity | 945. confiscate |
| 916. embody | 946. revoke |
| 917. cavorting | |

1. After feeding the lions regularly for three years, the zookeeper knew that ample portions of meat acted as a(n) _____ for the **ferocious carnivores**.
 - A. **surreal**
 - B. **tonic**
 - C. **aplomb**
 - D. **condemnation**
 - E. **ramification**

2. The **throng** of people **castigated** the _____ for his **resounding** criticism of the government.
 - A. **truculent**
 - B. **engendered**
 - C. **ethos**
 - D. **intervened**
 - E. **dissident**

3. His first public speech managed to _____ the contentious issue with **sanctimonious** preaching and poetic **circumlocutions**.
 - A. **skirt**
 - B. **confiscate**
 - C. **intervene**
 - D. **revoke**
 - E. **aplomb**

4. After **cavorting** with the enemy, Bob faced the _____ of his cohorts, many of whom viewed him as a **hypocrite**.
 - A. **engendering**
 - B. **retribution**
 - C. **synthetic**
 - D. **covenant**
 - E. **neutrality**

5. After the supervisor **disseminated scathing** criticism to all of his employees, the atmosphere in the meeting became _____.
- A. colloquial
 - B. invoked
 - C. sensationalized
 - D. glacial
 - E. confiscated
6. Relentlessly **proselytizing** and **sermonizing**, John worked tirelessly to communicate the _____ of his beloved faith.
- A. factions
 - B. throngs
 - C. veiling
 - D. truculence
 - E. precepts
7. Penelope's driver's license was _____ when she **overtly** ran a red light and then acted **cantankerous** when the police officer confronted her.
- A. demeaned
 - B. adjudicated
 - C. revoked
 - D. skirted
 - E. resounded
8. The _____ ending of the movie **invoked** the sentiments of the audience.
- A. intervened
 - B. gibbering
 - C. synthetic
 - D. breached
 - E. poignant

-
9. The guard was _____ by his angry employer after a major **breach** in security happened during his watch.
- A. engendered
 - B. disseminated
 - C. confiscated
 - D. censured
 - E. maverick

Answers Chapter 16

1. B tonic
2. E dissident
3. A skirt
4. B confiscate
5. D glacial
6. E precepts
7. C revoked
8. E poignant
9. D censured

Chapter 17

A Nebulous Future

947. impermanent	961. ingenious
948. prosaic	962. revulsion
949. reintegrating	963. synonymous
950. pretense	964. ludicrous
951. shroud	965. fodder
952. incarceration	966. patently
953. litigate	967. missive
954. bane	968. sycophant
955. precocious	969. deposed
956. acumen	970. spurious
957. charitable	971. unduly
958. earmark	972. squander
959. benefactor	973. transient
960. philanthropic	974. nebulous

1. Sam, a generous _____ of several **charitable** organizations, always **earmarked** his donations for specific **philanthropic** endeavors.
 - A. **bane**
 - B. **prosaic**
 - C. **benefactor**
 - D. **sycophant**
 - E. **missive**
2. The **nebulous** apparition, seen only in the dim light of the moon, was **shrouded** in mystery and served as _____ for many ghost stories.
 - A. **squander**
 - B. **impermanent**
 - C. **incarceration**
 - D. **revulsion**
 - E. **fodder**

3. Although the accusation was **patently** false, the attorney knew that it was going to take all of his **litigation** skills to acquit the accused of the _____ charge.
- A. **spurious**
 - B. **synonymous**
 - C. **precocious**
 - D. **prosaic**
 - E. **transient**
4. Although the published review described the book as **ingeniously** poetic and imaginative, Rory disagreed when she described the book as _____.
- A. **earmarked**
 - B. **deposed**
 - C. **prosaic**
 - D. **philanthropic**
 - E. **synonymous**

Answers Chapter 17

1. C benefactor
2. E fodder
3. A spurious
4. C prosaic

Chapter 18

The Proverbial Invitation

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 975. temperate | 988. cohort |
| 976. melancholy | 989. antidote |
| 977. confounding | 990. trove |
| 978. vanquish | 991. implausible |
| 979. inestimably | 992. banish |
| 980. proverbial | 993. dubious |
| 981. canonical | 994. grandiose |
| 982. encumbered | 995. pertinent |
| 983. heart-rending | 996. nostalgic |
| 984. deference | 997. lauded |
| 985. jester | 998. emigrate |
| 986. quintessential | 999. self-aggrandizement |
| 987. prototype | 1000. braggart |

1. The **temperate** climate of the South provides the perfect _____ for those who are tired of the frigid, snow-laden winters of the North.
 - A. **melancholy**
 - B. **proverb**
 - C. **antidote**
 - D. **jester**
 - E. **deference**
2. Although his **cohort** insisted that he had completed the task, Jerry was _____ because it seemed rather **implausible** that he could have finished the work so quickly.
 - A. **nostalgic**
 - B. **banished**
 - C. **temperate**
 - D. **lauded**
 - E. **dubious**

-
3. Although he was not typically such a **braggart**, Josh indulged in a bit of _____ when he launched into **nostalgic** tales of his own heroic bravery during the war.
- A. **self-aggrandizement**
 - B. **pertinence**
 - C. **vanquish**
 - D. **dubiousness**
 - E. **emigration**
4. Although the couple did not want to be **encumbered** with the bills incurred by such a **grandiose** wedding, they had a large reception in _____ to their parents.
- A. **implausibility**
 - B. **deference**
 - C. **melancholy**
 - D. **vanquish**
 - E. **self-aggrandizement**
5. The **jester** was _____ from the king's court when he told a **heart-rending, melancholy** tale rather than the humorous stories that the king preferred.
- A. **encumbered**
 - B. **trove**
 - C. **lauded**
 - D. **confounded**
 - E. **banished**

Answers Chapter 18

1. C antidote
2. E dubious
3. A self-aggrandizement
4. B deference
5. E banished

Vocabulary List

- Abhor** to regard with extreme repugnance; loathe
- Abridge** to shorten in duration or extent
- Absolve** to set free from an obligation or the consequences of guilt
- Accentuate** accent, emphasize
- Accord** to bring into agreement
- Acrimonious** caustic, biting, or rancorous, especially in feeling language or manner
- Acumen** keenness and depth of perception, discernment, or discrimination, esp. in practical matters; shrewdness
- Addendum** a thing added; an addition
- Adept** thoroughly proficient; skillful
- Adeptness** thoroughly proficient; expert
- Adjudicate** to act as judge
- Admonish** to express warning or disapproval especially in a gentle, earnest, or solicitous manner
- Adorned** to enliven or decorate as if with ornaments
- Adulation** to flatter or admire excessively or slavishly
- Adversary** one who contends with, opposes, or resists; opponent, rival
- Adverse** acting against or in a contrary direction; hostile
- Adversity** a state or condition contrary to one of well-being
- Advocate** one who pleads the cause of another; specifically one who pleads the cause of another before a tribunal or judicial court
- Aesthetics** a pleasing appearance or effect; beauty
- Affable** being pleasant and at ease talking to others

- Affectation** mannerisms, especially pretentious ones
- Affirming** expressing dedication
- Affront** to insult especially to the face by behavior or language
- Agile** marked by a ready ability to move with a quick, easy grace
- Alacrity** promptness in response; cheerful readiness
- Alienate** to make unfriendly, hostile, or indifferent where attachment formerly existed
- Alight** to descend from the air and come to rest
- Allegiance** devotion or loyalty to a person, group, or cause
- Alleviate** to make (as suffering) more bearable her sympathy *alleviated* his distress; ease, lessen,
- Altercation** a noisy, heated, angry dispute; also a noisy controversy
- Altruistic** behavior that is unselfish in its regard for or devotion to the welfare of others
- Ambiguity** the quality or state of being ambiguous (doubtful or uncertain), especially in meaning
- Ambivalent** simultaneous and contradictory feelings (as attraction and repulsion) toward an object, person, or action
- Amiable** friendly, sociable, congenial
- Amorphous** without shape or form
- Anachronistic** a person or a thing that is chronologically out of place, especially one from a former age that is incongruously in the present
- Analogous** showing an analogy or a likeness that permits one to draw an analogy
- Anarchy** absence of government
- Anecdote** a usually short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident
- Anemic** lackluster, insipid
- Animated** full of movement and activity

Antagonistic marked by or resulting from antagonism (actively expressed opposition or hostility)

Anticipating to look forward to as certain; expect

Anticlimactic of, relating to, or marked by anticlimax; an event (as at the end of a series) that is strikingly less important than what has preceded it

Antidote something that relieves, prevents, or counteracts

Antiquated old-fashioned, old or obsolete

Apathetic having little or no interest or concern; indifferent

Applomb complete and confident composure or self-assurance

Appalling inspiring horror, dismay, or disgust

Apparatus an instrument or appliance designed for a specific operation

Arbitrarily based on or determined by individual preference or convenience rather than by necessity or the intrinsic nature of something

Arbitrating acting as an arbitrator (one who decides in the case of a dispute)

Archaic characteristic of an earlier or more primitive time

Archetypal classic example, model example

Ardently characterized by warmth of feeling, typically expressed in eager zealous support or activity

Ardor extreme vigor or energy; intensity

Arduous hard to accomplish or achieve

Arid excessively dry

Arrest to bring to a stop

Articulate expressing oneself readily, clearly, or effectively

Ascetic plain, stark, simple; austere in appearance, manner, or attitude (not to be confused with aesthetic, which means pleasing in appearance or effect; beauty)

Asserted to declare forcefully

Assiduous marked by careful unremitting attention or persistent application

Assurance something that inspires or tends to inspire confidence

Assuredly without a doubt; certainly

Astute having or showing shrewdness and perspicacity

Attribute to explain by indicating a cause

Attune to make aware or responsive

Audacious intrepidly daring

Augment to make greater, more numerous, larger, or more intense

Augurs to foretell

Auspicious affording a favorable auspice (a favorable sign)

Austere stern and cold in appearance or manner

Authentic worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact

Authoritatively with authority, commandingly, convincingly

Autonomous existing or capable of existing independently

Aversion a feeling of repugnance toward something with a desire to avoid or turn from it

Awestruck filled with awe (emotion in which dread, veneration, and wonder are variously mingled)

Baffle to defeat or check (as a person) by confusing or puzzling; disconcert

Bane a source of harm or ruin; curse

Banish to require by authority to leave

Barrage a vigorous or rapid outpouring or projection of many things at once

Belie to give a false impression of

Belligerent inclined to or exhibiting assertiveness, hostility, or combativeness

- Benefactor** one who confers a benefit, esp. one who makes a gift or bequest
- Beneficiary** one who benefits from something
- Benevolent** marked by or disposed to doing good
- Benign** having no significant effect; harmless
- Bequeathing** handing down, transmitting
- Berate** to scold or condemn vehemently and at length
- Bereft** deprived or robbed of possession of something
- Besech** to beg for urgently or anxiously
- Bickering** to engage in a petulant or petty quarrel
- Boisterous** noisily turbulent; rowdy
- Bolster** to give a boost to
- Botched** to foul up hopelessly; failed, spoiled
- Boundless** having no boundaries; vast
- Bourgeois** marked by a concern for material interests and respectability and a tendency toward mediocrity, usually used disparagingly
- Braggart** a loud, arrogant boaster
- Breach** infraction or violation of a law, obligation, tie, or standard
- Brooding** to dwell gloomily on a subject, worrying
- Buffoonery** foolish or playful behavior
- Burgeoning** growing and expanding rapidly
- Burrow** a hole or excavation in the ground made by an animal (such as a rabbit) for shelter and habitation
- Buttress** something that supports or strengthens
- Cacophony** harsh or discordant sound; dissonance
- Cajole** to persuade with flattery or gentle urging, especially in the face of reluctance
- Calamity** an extraordinarily grave event marked by great loss and lasting distress

- Callous** feeling no sympathy for others
- Camaraderie** a spirit of friendly good fellowship
- Canonical** conforming to a general rule or acceptable procedure; orthodox
- Cantankerous** difficult or irritating to deal with
- Capacious** containing or capable of containing a great deal
- Captivate** to influence and dominate by some special charm, art, or trait and with an irresistible appeal
- Carnivores** any of an order (Carnivora) of typically flesh-eating mammals that includes dogs, foxes, bears, raccoons, and cats
- Cartographer** one who makes maps
- Castigation** to subject to severe punishment, reproof, or criticism
- Cataclysmic** a momentous and violent event marked by overwhelming upheaval and demolition
- Cathartic** characterized by a purification or purgation of the emotions that brings about spiritual renewal or release from tension
- Cavorting** prancing
- Censured** to find fault with and criticize as blameworthy (note that the word censure is similar in appearance to the word censor (footnote 733), but different in meaning)
- Cerebral** of or relating to the brain or the intellect
- Certitude** the state of being or feeling certain
- Chagrin** disquietude or distress of mind caused by humiliation, disappointment, or failure
- Charismatic** having, exhibiting, or based on charisma (a special magnetic charm or appeal)
- Charitable** of or relating to charity (generosity and helpfulness especially toward the needy)
- Chasm** a marked division, separation, or difference
- Cherished** to hold dear; feel or show affection for
- Chide** reproach in a usually mild and constructive manner; scold

- Circuitous** having a circular or winding course; roundabout, indirect
- Circuitry** the components of an electric circuit
- Circumlocutions** the use of an unnecessarily large number of words to express an idea
- Circumscribe** to surround by or as if by a boundary
- Clairvoyant** the ability to perceive matters beyond the range of ordinary perception
- Clandestine** marked by, held in, or conducted with secrecy
- Clientele** customers, patrons
- Cloying** excessively sweet or sentimental
- Coalesce** to arise from the combination of distinct elements; to unite into a whole
- Coerce** to compel to an act or choice
- Cognizant** knowledgeable about something, especially through personal experience; mindful
- Coherently** logically or aesthetically ordered or integrated
- Cohort** companion, colleague
- Collaborator** co-worker, colleague; a person working jointly with others, especially in an intellectual endeavor
- Colloquial** characteristic of familiar and informal conversation
- Collude** conspire, plot
- Colossal** of a bulk, extent, power, or effect approaching the stupendous or incredible
- Combativeness** marked by eagerness to fight or contend
- Commodities** an economic good as in an article of commerce (something bought or sold), especially when delivered for shipment
- Comparatively** considered as if in comparison to something else; relatively
- Compassionately** having or showing compassion (sympathetic consciousness of others' distress, together with a desire to alleviate it)

- Compatriot** fellow countryman
- Compelling** demanding attention
- Complacency** self-satisfaction accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies
- Complying** to conform or adapt one's actions to another's wishes, to a rule, or to a necessity
- Compromise** to adjust or settle by mutual concessions (see also footnote 802 for a different usage)
- Compulsive** obsessive, habitual, or irrational behavior
- Comrade** an intimate friend or associate; companion
- Conception** the originating of something in the mind; idea
- Conciliatory** to make compatible; reconcile
- Concocted** to prepare by combining raw materials; devise
- Concur** to express agreement
- Condemn** to declare to be bad, wrong, or evil
- Condescending** to assume an air of superiority
- Condone** to pardon or overlook voluntarily; *especially* to treat as if trivial, harmless, or of no importance
- Confiscate** to seize by or as if by authority
- Conflagration** fire, especially a large disastrous fire
- Confounding** baffling, frustrating
- Confrontation** the clashing of forces or ideas; conflict
- Congeval** to change from a fluid state to a solid state by or as if by cold
- Conjecture** a conclusion deduced by surmise or guesswork
- Conjure** to bring to mind
- Consciousness** the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself
- Consecrate** to make inviolable or venerable (can also mean to declare sacred)

- Consensus** general agreement; unanimity
- Consign** commit, especially to a final destination or fate
- Constructive** promoting improvement or development
- Consummate** extremely skilled and accomplished
- Contemporaries** one of the same age or nearly the same age as another
- Contemporary** marked by characteristics of the present period; modern
- Contemptuously** with contempt, disdain
- Contentious** likely to cause contention (rivalry, competition)
- Contiguous** touching or connected throughout in an unbroken sequence
- Contrary** a fact or condition incompatible with another; opposite
- Contrite** grieving and penitent for sin or shortcoming
- Conundrum** an intricate and difficult problem
- Conventional** according with, sanctioned by, or based on convention (a principle or procedure accepted as true or correct); ordinary, conformist, predictable
- Conviction** a strong persuasion or belief
- Cordial** warmly and genially affable
- Correlation** a relation existing between phenomena or things or between mathematical or statistical variables which tend to vary, be associated, or occur together in a way not expected on the basis of chance alone
- Corroboration** to support with evidence or authority
- Corrosive** having the power to break down or eat away at something (can also mean very sarcastic)
- Corrupt** to change from good to bad in morals, manners, or actions
- Cosmopolitan** having wide international sophistication
- Couched** to lay (oneself) down for rest or sleep
- Counteract** to make ineffective or restrain or neutralize the usually ill effects of by an opposite force

- Covenant** a usually formal, solemn, and binding agreement
- Covet** to wish for enviously
- Craftiness** skillfulness, cleverness
- Crass** having or indicating such grossness of mind as precludes delicacy and discrimination
- Cryptic** having or seeming to have a hidden or ambiguous meaning
- Crystallize** to cause to take a definite form
- Culminate** to reach the highest or a climactic or decisive point
- Culpable** guilty; meriting condemnation or blame, especially as wrong or harmful
- Cultivating** fostering, furthering, encouraging
- Cumulative** made up of accumulated parts
- Cunning** displaying keen insight
- Curtail** to make less by or as if by cutting off or away some part; shorten
- Cynically** having a sneering disbelief in sincerity or integrity
- Cynicism** having or showing the attitude or temper of a cynic (a fault-finding captious critic)
- Daunting** something that daunts (lessens one's courage)
- Debacle** a great disaster; fiasco
- Debatable** arguable, worthy of debate or consideration
- Debilitating** impairing the strength of
- Debunk** to expose the sham or falseness of
- Decadent** self-indulgent
- Deceitful** having a tendency or disposition to deceive; not honest
- Decorous** marked by propriety and good taste
- Decry** to express strong disapproval of; condemn
- Deduction** a conclusion reached by logic or reasoning

- Default** a selection automatically used by a computer program in the absence of a choice made by the user; a course taken without an active choice
- Defer** postpone, put off
- Deference** in consideration of
- Defiantly** full of defiance (disposition to resist, willingness to contend or fight)
- Deflect** to turn from a straight course or fixed direction; bend
- Deftly** characterized by facility and skill
- Degradation** the act or process of degrading (to impair in respect to some physical property)
- Deliberate** characterized by or resulting from careful and thorough consideration
- Delineated** to mark the outline of; demarcated
- Demean** to lower in character, status, or reputation
- Demeanor** behavior toward others, outward manner; conduct
- Dénouement** finale, conclusion
- Denounced** to pronounce, especially publicly, to be bad, blameworthy, or evil
- Deplorable** deserving censure or contempt
- Deprived** marked by deprivation, especially a lack of the necessities of life or of healthful environmental influences
- Derelict** abandoned, esp. by the owner or occupant; run-down
- Derision** the use of ridicule or scorn to show contempt
- Derisively** expressing ridicule, scorn, or contempt
- Derogatory** expressive of a low opinion, disparaging
- Desecrate** to treat disrespectfully, irreverently, or outrageously
- Desolate** deserted, isolated
- Despoiling** to strip of belongings and value; pillage

Destitute lacking possessions and resources; especially suffering extreme poverty

Detached exhibiting an aloof objectivity; disconnected, removed

Detract to diminish the importance, value, or effectiveness of something

Detritus loose material (such as rock fragments or organic particles) that results directly from disintegration

Devalued to lessen the value of

Deviate to depart from an established course or norm; stray

Deviousness not straightforward; deceptive

Diffidently hesitant in acting or speaking through lack of self-confidence

Digress to turn aside especially from the main subject of attention or course of argument

Dimension one of the elements or factors making up a complete personality or entity

Diminished reduced in scope or size

Dingy dirty, discolored

Dire warning of disaster

Disavow deny responsibility for

Discern to recognize or identify as separate and distinct; discriminate

Discomfited to put in a state of perplexity and embarrassment

Disconcert to throw into confusion

Discourse talk, converse

Discourteous lacking courtesy; rude, impolite

Discredit to refuse to accept as true or accurate

Discretion the quality of being discreet, especially cautious reserve in speech

Discretionary left to discretion, exercised at one's own discretion (the quality of being discreet; cautious reserve in speech)

Disdainful full of a feeling of contempt for what is beneath one; scornful

- Disgruntled** discontent, unhappy
- Disillusionment** to leave without illusion or naive faith and trust
- Disingenuous** lacking in candor; calculating
- Disparaging** to speak slightingly about; decry
- Disparate** containing or made up of fundamentally different and often incongruous elements
- Disparity** containing or made up of fundamentally different and often incongruous elements
- Dispel** to drive away by or as if by scattering; dissipate
- Disputant** one who is engaged in a dispute
- Dissembler** one who puts on a false appearance; conceals facts, intentions or feelings under some pretense
- Disseminate** to disperse throughout
- Dissent** to differ in opinion
- Dissident** disagreeing with an opinion or group
- Dissipated** to cause to spread thin or scatter and gradually vanish (one's sympathy is eventually *dissipated*)
- Diversion** the act or an instance of diverting from a course, activity, or use; deviation
- Divine** supremely good
- Divisive** creating disunity or dissension
- Divulge** reveal, tell
- Doctrinaire** one who attempts to put into effect an abstract doctrine or theory with little or no regard for practical difficulties
- Domestic** devoted to home duties and pleasures
- Drub** to abuse with words; berate
- Dubious** giving rise to uncertainty
- Earmark** to designate (as funds) for a specific use or owner
- Eccentric** deviating from conventional or accepted usage or conduct, especially in odd or whimsical ways

- Eclectic** composed of elements drawn from different sources
- Ecstatic** of, relating to, or marked by ecstasy (a state of overwhelming emotion, especially rapturous delight)
- Editorial** a newspaper or magazine article that gives the opinions of the editors or publishers; also an expression of opinion that resembles such an article (a television *editorial*)
- Efface** to eliminate or make indistinct by or as if by wearing away a surface
- Efficaciously** effective; having the power to achieve the desired effect
- Egalitarian** one who believes in human equality, especially with respect to social, economic, and political rights
- Egregious** conspicuously bad; flagrant
- Elaborate** give details, expand upon a subject
- Elation** marked by high spirits; exultant
- Elitist** consciousness of being or belonging to an elite (a socially superior group)
- Elocutionist** one who is effective in the art of public speaking
- Eloquent** vividly or movingly expressive or revealing
- Elude** to escape the perception, understanding, or grasp of
- Elusive** tending to elude, as in tending to evade grasp or pursuit
- Emanate** to come out from a source
- Emancipation** to free from restraint, control, or the power of another
- Embellish** to heighten the attractiveness of by adding ornamental details
- Embittered** having bitter feelings
- Embody** to represent in human or animal form; personify
- Embroider** to involve in conflict or difficulties
- Emend** to correct
- Emergent** newly formed or prominent

- Emigrate** to leave one's place of residence or country to live elsewhere
- Eminently** to a high degree; very
- Emissary** one designated as the agent of another
- Empathetic** being understanding of, aware of, and sensitive to the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another
- Empathy** the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner
- Emphatically** with emphasis, forcefully
- Empowering** yielding power or authority
- Emulate** try to be like, imitate
- Enable** to provide with the means or opportunity
- Encampment** the state of being encamped (to place or establish in a camp)
- Encapsulated** epitomized
- Enclosure** something that encloses (to close in)
- Encompasses** to form a circle about, enclose
- Encroaching** to enter by gradual steps or by stealth into the possessions or rights of another
- Encumbered** weighed down, burdened
- Endear** to cause to become beloved or admired
- Endeavor** to attempt (as the fulfillment of an obligation) by exertion of effort
- Endorsement** backing, sanction, approval
- Enduring** lasting
- Enervated** lacking physical, mental, or moral vigor; to lessen the vitality or strength of
- Engender** to cause to exist or develop

- Enigmatic** something hard to understand or explain; mysterious
- Enlighten** to furnish knowledge to
- Enmity** positive, active, and typically mutual hatred or ill will
- Ensemble** a complete costume of harmonizing or complementary clothing and accessories
- Ensnare** to take place afterward or as a result
- Entangled** to involve in a perplexing or troublesome situation
- Entitlement** the state or condition of being entitled; right
- Entreated** to plead with, esp. in order to persuade
- Enumerated** counted, tallied
- Enveloped** to enclose or enfold completely with or as if with a covering
- Envision** to picture to oneself
- Ephemeral** lasting a very short time
- Epistolary** contained in or carried on by letters
- Equitable** fair
- Eradicate** to do away with as if by pulling up from the roots
- Erratic** characterized by lack of consistency, regularity, or uniformity; deviating from what is ordinary or standard
- Espouse** to take up and support as a cause; become attached to
- Esteem** to regard highly
- Eternal** having infinite duration; everlasting
- Ethical** involving or expressing moral approval or disapproval
- Ethnicity** ethnic quality or affiliation
- Ethos** the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person group or institution
- Euphoric** a feeling of well-being or elation
- Evade** avoid, dodge
- Evanescent** tending to vanish like vapor

- Evoke** to call forth or up; conjure
- Exacerbate** to make more violent, bitter, or severe
- Exalted** to raise in status (can also mean to praise, glorify, or honor)
- Exasperated** irritated or annoyed
- Exclusive** restricted in distribution, use, or appeal because of expense
- Exculpate** to clear from alleged fault or guilt
- Execution** the act or process of executing (to carry out fully; put completely into effect)
- Exemplary** deserving imitation because of excellence; commendable
- Exemplify** to show or illustrate by example
- Exorbitantly** excessively; exceedingly
- Explicitly** clearly, unambiguously
- Exploit** a deed or an act
- Expropriated** the action of the state in taking or modifying the property rights of an individual in the exercise of its sovereignty
- Extant** currently or actually existing
- Extenuating** to mitigate; to lessen or try to lessen the serious or extent of by making partial excuses
- Extolled** praised highly; glorified
- Extricate** get out, remove oneself
- Exultant** filled with or expressing great joy or triumph; jubilant
- Facile** easily accomplished or attained
- Facilitate** to make easier, help bring about
- Faction** a party or group (as within a government) that is often contentious or self-seeking
- Factual** restricted to or based on fact
- Fallacious** untrue; tending to deceive or mislead
- Fantasize** to indulge in fantasy or reverie; daydream

- Fathom** comprehend
- Feigned** fictitious, faked; artificial
- Felicitous** very well suited or expressed; apt
- Feral** not domesticated or cultivated; wild
- Ferocity** the quality or state of being ferocious (exhibiting or given to extreme fierceness and unrestrained violence and brutality)
- Fervently** exhibited or marked by great intensity of feeling; zealously
- Fickle** marked by lack of steadfastness, constancy, or stability; given to erratic changeableness
- Flabbergast** to overwhelm with shock, surprise, or wonder
- Flagrant** conspicuously offensive
- Flippancy** unbecoming levity or pertness, especially in respect to grave or sacred matters
- Florid** tinged with red
- Flourish** grand gesture, display (also has another meaning, to thrive)
- Flout** to treat with contemptuous disregard
- Fodder** inferior or readily available material used to supply a heavy demand
- Foil** to prevent from attaining an end; thwart
- Foliage** the leaves of one or more plants
- Folly** lack of good sense or normal prudence and foresight; foolishness
- Foraged** searched; rummaged
- Foray** a brief excursion or attempt especially outside one's accustomed sphere
- Foreboding** to have an inward conviction of (as coming ill or misfortune)
- Forlorn** being in poor condition; miserable
- Formidable** causing fear, dread, or apprehension
- Formulate** to reduce to or express in a formula

- Fortitude** strength of mind that enables a person to encounter danger or adversity with courage
- Foster** to promote the growth or development of
- Franchise** the license granted to an individual or group to market a company's goods or services in a particular territory
- Friction** the clashing between two persons or parties of opposed views
- Fritter** to spend or waste bit by bit on trifles, or without commensurate return
- Frivolity** playful merriment that lacks substance or purpose
- Frolicsome** full of gaiety; playful
- Frugal** characterized by economy in the expenditure of resources
- Futile** serving no useful purpose; completely ineffective
- Gaffe** a social or diplomatic blunder
- Garish** offensively or distressingly bright; glaring
- Gauge** estimate, judge
- Generalizations** to make vague or indefinite statements
- Genial** marked by sympathy or friendliness; kindly
- Gibbering** to speak rapidly, inarticulately and often foolishly
- Gingerly** very cautiously or carefully
- Glacial** devoid of warmth and cordiality
- Glutton** one given habitually to greedy and voracious eating and drinking
- Goading** to incite or rouse as if with a goad; provoking, prodding
- Gourmand** one who is heartily interested in good food and drink
- Gracious** marked by kindness and courtesy
- Grandiose** impressive because of uncommon largeness, scope, effect, or grandeur
- Gratuity** something given voluntarily or beyond obligation usually for some service, esp. a tip

- Gregarious** marked by or indicating a liking for companionship; sociable
- Grievance** a cause of distress (as an unsatisfactory working condition) felt to afford reason for complaint
- Habitable** capable of being lived in; suitable for habitation
- Hackneyed** lacking in freshness or originality; trite
- Harangue** a ranting speech or writing
- Harbor** to hold a thought or feeling of
- Harmonious** having the parts agreeably related; congruous
- Haughty** blatantly and disdainfully proud; snooty, conceited
- Heart-rending** heartbreaking
- Heightened** to increase the amount or degree of
- Heinous** hatefully or shockingly evil
- Heralded** to greet, especially with enthusiasm; to hail, publicize, or signal
- Heretofore** up to this time; hitherto
- Hierarchy** the classification of a group of people according to ability or to economic, social, or professional standing; pecking order, chain of command
- Hindrance** the state of being hindered (to make slow or difficult the progress of)
- Homogenize** to blend (diverse elements) into a uniform mixture
- Hospitable** promising or suggesting generous and cordial welcome
- Hostility** deep-seated, usually mutual, ill will
- Hypocrite** a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion
- Hypothesis** a tentative assumption made in order to draw out and test its logical or empirical consequences; theory
- Idealism** the practice of forming ideals or living under their influence
- Idealist** one guided by ideals, especially one who places ideals before practical considerations
- Idealistic** characteristic of idealism (the practice of forming ideals or living under their influence)

- Idolatry** immoderate attachment or devotion to something
- Ignite** to heat up; excite
- Illicit** not permitted; against the rules or law
- Illimitable** incapable of being limited or bounded
- Illogical** not observing the principles of logic; not reasonable or sound
- Immerse** to plunge into something that surrounds or covers; especially to plunge or dip into a fluid
- Imminent** ready to take place; looming, about to happen
- Immobilized** incapable of moving
- Immutable** not capable of or susceptible to change
- Impassion** to arouse the feelings or passions of
- Impassive** giving no sign of feeling or expression
- Impenitent** not penitent (feeling or expressing humble or regretful pain or sorrow for sins or offenses)
- Imperceptible** not perceptible by a sense or by the mind, extremely slight, gradual, or subtle
- Impermanent** not permanent; transient
- Impetuous** marked by impulsive vehemence or passion
- Impetus** a driving force; impulse
- Impious** not pious; lacking in reverence or proper respect (as for God or one's parents)
- Implausible** not plausible; provoking disbelief
- Implementation** to carry out; to give practical effect to and ensure of actual fulfillment by concrete measures
- Implication** the act of implying, the state of being implied (indicate by inference, association, or necessary consequence rather than by direct statement)
- Imposing** impressive in size, bearing, dignity, or grandeur
- Impressionable** capable of being easily impressed
- Imprint** to fix indelibly or permanently

Impropriety an improper or indecorous act or remark; especially an unacceptable use of a word or of language

Impugn to assail by words or arguments; oppose or attack as false or lacking integrity

Impulsively spontaneously, on a whim

Imputed to lay the responsibility or blame for, often falsely or unjustly; charge, attribute

Inanimate not endowed with life or spirit

Inarticulate incapable of speech, esp. under stress of emotion

Inauspicious not auspicious or favorable; ominous

Incalculably not capable of being calculated as in not predictable

Incantation a use of spells or verbal charms spoken or sung as part of a ritual of magic

Incarceration to put in prison

Inception an act, process, or instance of beginning

Incessantly non-stop, never ending

Incisively impressively direct and decisive (as in manner of presentation)

Incline to lean, tend, or become drawn toward an opinion or course of conduct

Incongruous lacking congruity, not harmonious, incompatible

Inconsequential of no significance or importance

Incumbent obligatory, imposed as a duty (is also commonly used to refer to a politician who is currently in office)

Indecorous not decorous; conflicting with accepted standards of good conduct or good taste

Indefatigable incapable of being fatigued; untiring

Indefensible incapable of being justified or excused; inexcusable

Indeterminate not definitely or precisely determined; vague

Indifferent apathetic, unconcerned

- Indignant** filled with or marked by indignation (anger aroused by something unjust, unworthy, or mean)
- Indiscernible** incapable of being discerned; not recognizable as distinct
- Indiscretion** something (an act or a remark) marked by a lack of discretion
- Indiscriminately** not marked by careful distinction; deficient in discrimination and discernment; haphazard; random
- Indomitable** incapable of being subdued; unconquerable
- Inducement** a motive or consideration that leads one to action
- Industrious** persistently active; zealous
- Ineffable** incapable of being expressed in words; indescribable
- Inefficacious** lacking the power to produce the desired effect
- Inept** generally incompetent; bungling
- Inequities** unequal things or situations
- Inestimably** incapable of being estimated
- Inexorable** not to be persuaded or moved by entreaty (pleas); relentless
- Inferred** derived as a conclusion from facts or premises
- Inflamed** to excite to excessive or uncontrollable action or feeling
- Inflammatory** tending to excite anger, disorder, or tumult
- Infused** to cause to be permeated with something
- Ingenious** marked by originality, resourcefulness, and cleverness in conception or execution
- Inherent** involved in the constitution or essential character of something, belonging by nature or habit
- Innate** existing in, belonging to, or determined by factors present in an individual from birth
- Innovation** a new idea, method, or device
- Innovative** characterized by, tending to, or introducing innovations (a new idea, method, or device)

- Innuendo** an oblique allusion; hint, insinuation
- Inordinately** exceeding reasonable limits; excessively
- Insidious** having a gradual and cumulative effect
- Insight** the power or act of seeing into a situation
- Insinuate** to impart or communicate with artful or oblique reference
- Insolent** insultingly contemptuous in speech or conduct; overbearing
- Instill** to impart gradually
- Insular** characteristic of an isolated people, especially having a narrow provincial viewpoint
- Integral** essential to completeness
- Integrity** firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values
- Intelligentsia** intellectuals who form an artistic, social, or political vanguard or elite
- Intemperate** not temperate (moderate); extreme, immoderate
- Interlocutor** those who take part in a dialogue or conversation
- Interlude** an intervening or interruptive period, space or event; interval
- Interminable** having or seeming to have no end
- Interpretation** the act or the result of interpreting (to conceive in the light of individual belief, judgment, or circumstance)
- Interspersed** to place something at intervals in or among
- Intervene** to come in or between by way of hindrance or modification
- Interweave** to mix or blend together
- Intransigent** refusing to compromise or abandon an extreme position or attitude; uncompromising
- Intrepid** characterized by resolute fearlessness, fortitude, and endurance
- Introspective** a reflective looking inward; an examination of one's own thoughts and feelings
- Intuitively** known or perceived by intuition (quick and ready insight); instinctively

- Inundate** to overwhelm; to cover with a flood
- Invariably** not changing or capable of change; constant
- Inigorating** stimulating, energizing
- Inviolable** secure from violation or profanation; unbreakable
- Invoke** bring about; cause
- Iridescent** a lustrous rainbowlike play of color caused by differential refraction of light waves (as from an oil slick, soap bubble, or fish scales) that tends to change as the angle of view changes
- Irrefutable** impossible to refute or deny
- Irresolute** indecisive (not resolute or firm)
- Irreverent** lacking proper respect or seriousness
- Jaded** world-weary, cynical
- Jester** fool
- Joie de vivre* (French) joy of living; keen or buoyant enjoyment of life
- Jollity** the quality or state of being jolly (full of high spirits)
- Jovial** markedly good-humored, especially as evidenced by jollity and conviviality
- Jubilation** an expression of great joy
- Juxtaposition** the act or an instance of placing two or more things side by side
- Kinship** the quality or state of being kin; relationship
- Languidly** lacking force or quickness of movement; slow
- Latent** present and capable of becoming, though not now visible, obvious, or active
- Lauded** praise, extol
- Lavish** expending or bestowing profusely
- Legitimacy** the quality or state of being legitimate (being exactly as purposed, neither spurious nor false)
- Legitimizing** to show or affirm to be justified

- Levy** to impose or collect by legal authority
- Liberal** of or constituting a political party advocating or associated with the principles of political liberalism
- Liberate** to set free
- Limitation** something that limits; restraint
- Linchpin** one that serves to hold together the elements of a complex
- Literally** actually, in a literal sense or manner
- Lithe** characterized by easy flexibility and grace
- Litigate** to contest in law
- Livid** very angry; enraged
- Loathed** to dislike greatly and often with disgust or intolerance
- Lobbyist** one who attempts to influence or sway (as a public official) toward a desired action; activist, campaigner
- Ludicrous** amusing or laughable through obvious absurdity, incongruity, exaggeration, or eccentricity
- Lull** quiet period
- Lummock** clumsy person
- Lurid** causing horror or revulsion; ghastly
- Machination** a scheming or crafty action or artful design intended to accomplish some usually evil end
- Maelstrom** a powerful often violent whirlpool sucking in objects within a given radius
- Malediction** to speak evil of
- Malice** intent to commit an unlawful act or cause harm without legal justification or excuse
- Malicious** given to, marked by, or arising from malice (desire to cause pain, injury, or distress to another)
- Malign** to utter injuriously misleading reports about; to speak evil of
- Malingering** to pretend incapacity (as illness) so as to avoid duty or work; shirk

- Mandated** to make mandatory, obligatory
- Manifestation** the act, process, or instance of manifesting (readily perceived by the senses, esp. by sight)
- Maverick** an independent individual who does not go along with a group or party
- Maxim** a saying of a proverbial nature; adage
- Mechanisms** a process or technique for achieving a result
- Mediate** to bring accord out of by action as an intermediary
- Melancholy** depression of spirits; dejection
- Melodiously** having a pleasing sound or melody
- Melodrama** a drama characterized by extravagant theatricality
- Mendicant** beggar
- Methodically** habitually proceeding according to method; systematically
- Meticulously** extremely carefully, painstakingly
- Microcosm** a little world; especially the human race or human nature seen as an epitome of the world or the universe
- Miff** to put into ill humor; offend
- Mirage** an optical effect that is sometimes seen at sea, in the desert, or over a hot pavement, that may have the appearance of a pool of water
- Mire** a troublesome or intractable situation
- Misconception** a mistaken idea or concept
- Misgiving** to suggest doubt or fear to
- Missive** written communication; letter
- Modest** unassuming, unpretentious; limited in size, amount, or scope
- Modicum** a small amount
- Modulate** to adjust to or keep in proper measure or proportion; temper
- Mollify** to soothe in temper or disposition; placate, calm
- Momentous** important, consequential

Monstrosity an object of great and often frightening size, force, or complexity

Morass something that traps, confuses, or impedes

Morose having a sullen or gloomy disposition

Mortified subjected to severe and vexing embarrassment

Mundane characterized by the practical, transitory, and ordinary; commonplace

Munificence characterized by great liberality or generosity

Naïve deficient in worldly wisdom or informed judgment

Narcissistic excessive concern or love of oneself

Narratives something that is narrated; a story

Navigable deep enough and wide enough to afford passage to ships

Nebulous indistinct, vague

Nefarious flagrantly wicked or impious; evil, malicious

Negate to cause to be ineffective or invalid

Negligible so small or unimportant or of so little consequence as to warrant little or no attention

Nemesis a formidable and usually victorious rival or opponent

Neutrality the quality or state of being neutral, esp. refusal to take part in a war between other powers

Nonchalance having an air of easy unconcern or indifference

Nondescript lacking distinctive or interesting qualities; dull

Nostalgic a wistful or excessively sentimental, sometimes abnormal, yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition

Notions a theory or belief held by a person or group

Novelty something new and fresh

Novice beginner

Obdurate resistant to persuasion or softening influences; stubborn

- Objective** expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations; without bias
- Oblique** neither perpendicular nor parallel
- Oblivious** lacking active conscious knowledge or awareness
- Obstinate** perversely adhering to an opinion, purpose, or course in spite of reason, arguments, or persuasion; stubborn, inflexible
- Obstreperous** marked by unruly or aggressive noisiness
- Obtuse** lacking sharpness or quickness of sensibility or intellect
- Offensive** making attack
- Ominously** being or exhibiting an omen, especially foreboding or foreshadowing evil
- Omnipresent** present in all places at all times
- Onerous** involving, imposing, or constituting a burden
- Opulent** exhibiting or characterized by opulence (wealth, affluence); magnificent, lavish
- Oration** speech; an elaborate discourse delivered in a formal and dignified manner
- Orator** one distinguished for skill and power as a public speaker
- Organic** of, relating to, or containing carbon compounds
- Ornate** elaborately or excessively decorated
- Ostensibly** being such in appearance; plausible rather than demonstrably true
- Ostentatious** marked by or fond of conspicuous or vainglorious and sometimes pretentious display
- Ostracized** to exclude from a group by common consent
- Outlandish** exceeding proper or reasonable limits or standards
- Overtly** in a manner that is open to view
- Palate** the sense of taste

- Pallid** deficient in color; wan
- Palpable** easily perceptible
- Pander** cater or exploit the weakness of others
- Paradox** a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true
- Paramount** superior to all others; supreme
- Parasite** an organism living in, with, or on another organism
- Parched** dehydrated
- Pariah** outcast
- Parsimony** the quality of being careful with money or resources; thrift
- Partake** to take part in or experience something along with others
- Patent** a writing securing to an inventor for a term of years the exclusive right to make, use, or sell an invention
- Patently** readily visible or intelligible; obvious
- Patrons** customers
- Pedantic** a style of teaching characterized by formality and undue attention to minutiae
- Penchant** a strong and continued inclination; liking
- Penitence** sorrow for sins or faults
- Pensive** musingly or dreamily thoughtful
- Penurious** marked by a cramping and oppressive lack of resources (as in money)
- Perception** capable of or exhibiting keen perception; observant
- Perceptiveness** ability to notice and see; discernment, sharpness
- Perfidious** disloyal or faithless
- Perfunctory** characterized by routine or superficiality
- Perilous** full of or involving peril (risk)
- Periodically** occurring or recurring at regular intervals

- Periphery** the external boundary or surface of a body
- Permeate** to spread or diffuse through
- Perpetually** continuing forever
- Perpetuate** to make perpetual or to cause to last indefinitely
- Perplexed** filled with uncertainty; puzzled
- Persevere** to persist in a state, enterprise, or undertaking in spite of counter influences, opposition, or influences
- Perspective** point of view
- Perspicacity** acute mental vision or discernment; keen
- Pertinent** having a clear decisive relevance to the matter in hand
- Peruse** to examine or consider with attention and in detail; study
- Pervasive** something that pervades (to become diffused throughout every part of) or tends to pervade
- Pessimistic** negative, gloomy
- Phenomenon** an observable fact or event
- Philanthropic** of, relating to, or characterized by philanthropy (active effort to promote human welfare)
- Phlegmatic** having or showing a slow and stolid temperament; apathetic
- Pigeonhole** a neat category which usually fails to reflect actual complexities
- Pinioned** to disable or restrain; to bind fast
- Pique** to excite or arouse by a provocation, challenge, or rebuff
- Placating** to soothe or mollify, especially by concessions; appease
- Plaintive** expressive of suffering or woe; mournful
- Pliable** yielding readily to others
- Poignant** deeply affecting; touching
- Polarize** to break up into opposing factions or groupings
- Pompous** having or exhibiting self-importance; arrogant

- Ponder** to think or consider especially quietly, soberly, and deeply
- Ponderous** of very great weight; heavy
- Portal** a door or entrance, especially a grand or imposing one
- Portentously** something that foreshadows a coming event
- Practical** of, relating to, or manifested in practice or action; not theoretical or ideal
- Pragmatist** a person who takes a practical approach to problems and affairs
- Preamble** an introductory statement
- Precarious** characterized by a lack of security or stability that threatens with danger
- Precepts** a command or principle intended as a general rule of action
- Precipitate** to bring about, especially abruptly; to cause to separate from solution or suspension
- Precipitous** very steep, perpendicular, or overhanging in rise or fall (a *precipitous* slope)
- Preclude** to make impossible by necessary consequence, rule out in advance
- Precocious** exhibiting mature qualities at an unusually early age
- Preconceived** to form (as an opinion) prior to actual knowledge or experience
- Preconceptions** opinions that are formed prior to actual knowledge or experience
- Predatory** living by predation (a mode of life in which food is primarily obtained by the killing and consuming of animals)
- Predetermined** to determine beforehand
- Preempted** to take the place of
- Preoccupied** engrossed, busy, or occupied with thought
- Preponderance** a superiority in weight, power, importance, or strength
- Presiding** occupying a place of authority; acting as president, chairman, or moderator

Presumptuous overstepping due bounds (as of propriety or courtesy); taking liberties

Pretense false show

Pretentious making usually unjustified or excessive claims (as of value or standing); showy, ostentatious

Pretext a purpose or motive alleged or an appearance assumed in order to cloak the real intention or state of affairs

Procrastinating putting off until later

Procure to get possession of; obtain by particular care and effort

Profoundly characterized by intensity of feeling or quality

Profundity the quality or state of being profound (having intellectual depth or insight)

Profusion great quantity; lavish display or supply

Proliferate to grow by rapid production of new parts, cells, buds, or offspring; reproduce, multiply

Prolific abundant growth, generation, or reproduction

Prominent widely and popularly known

Prompt to move to action; incite

Promulgate to put (a law) into action or force

Pronouncement a usually formal declaration of opinion

Propelled to drive forward or onward by or as if by means of a force that imparts motion; pushed

Propensity an often intense natural inclination or preference

Prophetic foretelling events; predictive

Proponent one who argues in favor of something; advocate

Proprietor one who has the legal right or exclusive title to something

Prosaic dull, unimaginative

Proselytize to recruit someone to join one's party, institution, or cause

Protégé one who is protected or trained or whose career is furthered by a person of experience, prominence, or influence

- Protocol** the plan of a scientific experiment
- Prototype** a standard or typical example
- Protract** to prolong in time or space
- Proverbial** something that has become a proverb or byword; commonly spoken of
- Provocative** serving or tending to provoke, excite, or stimulate
- Prowess** extraordinary ability
- Proximity** nearness, closeness
- Prudent** shrewd in the management of practical affairs; sensible
- Punctuate** to break into or interrupt at intervals
- Pundits** one who gives opinions in an authoritative manner; critic
- Purportedly** ostensibly, allegedly
- Purposefully** with intent; having a purpose
- Quandary** a state of perplexity or doubt
- Quell** quiet, pacify
- Querulous** argumentative
- Quest** a person or group of persons who search or make inquiry; mission, expedition
- Quintessential** the most typical example or representative
- Radical** tending or disposed to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions
- Raging** violent, wild
- Rambled** to talk or write in a long-winded, wandering fashion
- Ramification** consequence, outcome
- Ramshackle** appearing ready to collapse
- Rancorously** characterized by bitter, deep-seated ill will
- Rapport** relation marked by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity
- Rational** relating to, based on, or agreeable to reason; lucid

- Raucous** boisterously, disorderly
- Reactionary** ultraconservative in politics
- Recommenced** to start again
- Reconciliation** a restoration of friendship or harmony
- Recrimination** to make a retaliating charge against an accuser
- Rectify** to set right; remedy, correct
- Redeeming** to release from blame or debt
- Refined** free from what is coarse, vulgar, or uncouth
- Refractive** distortion of an image by viewing through a medium
- Refurbish** to brighten or freshen up; renovate
- Reiterate** to state or do over again or repeatedly, sometimes with wearying effect
- Relish** a strong liking
- Remiss** showing neglect or inattention
- Remote** isolated, secluded, far from activity
- Remuneration** an act or fact of remunerating (to pay an equivalent to for a service, loss, or expense); recompense
- Renovation** to restore to a former better state (as by cleaning, repairing, or rebuilding)
- Renunciation** the act of refusing to follow, obey, or recognize any further
- Repast** the act or time of taking food
- Repentance** to feel regret or contrition
- Repercussion** a widespread, indirect, or unforeseen effect of an act, action, or event
- Replete** fully or abundantly provided or filled
- Repose** to lie at rest
- Reprehensible** deserving criticism
- Repudiate** to reject or renounce; to refuse to have anything to do with
- Requisite** essential, necessary

- Resentment** a feeling of indignant displeasure or persistent ill will at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury
- Resolute** marked by firm determination; resolved
- Resolve** to deal with successfully, to clear up
- Resonate** to produce or exhibit resonance (a quality of evoking response)
- Resounding** emphatic, unequivocal
- Respite** an interval of rest or relief
- Resplendent** shining brilliantly; characterized by a glowing splendor
- Restate** to state again or in another way
- Restorative** something that serves to restore to consciousness, vigor, or health
- Restrained** reserved, controlled; to limit, restrict, or keep under control
- Reticent** restrained in expression, presentation, or appearance
- Retribution** something given or exacted in recompense, esp. punishment
- Revelation** the act of revealing an enlightening or divine truth
- Revelatory** serving to reveal something
- Reverberate** to continue in or as if in a series of echoes; resound
- Reverence** honor or respect felt or shown; deference; especially profound or adoring awed respect
- Revoke** to annul by recalling or taking back; rescind
- Revulsion** a sense of utter distaste or repugnance
- Rhapsody** a highly emotional utterance (can also refer to a highly emotional literary work, etc.)
- Rhetoric** a type or mode of language or speech; also insincere or lofty language
- Righteous** arising from an outraged sense of justice or morality
- Rigor** a condition that makes life difficult, challenging, or uncomfortable; severity

- Rousing** giving rise to excitement; stirring
- Rudiment** a basic principle, element, or fundamental skill
- Rueful** mournful, regretful
- Ruminate** to go over in the mind repeatedly and often casually or slowly
- Sagacity** keen in sense of perception and judgment, discerning
- Salvage** the act of saving or rescuing property in danger (as from fire)
- Salvation** deliverance from danger or difficulty
- Sanctimonious** affecting piousness, hypocritically devout
- Sarcastically** having the character of sarcasm (a mode of satirical wit depending for its effect on bitter, caustic, and often ironic language that is usually directed against an individual)
- Satire** wit, irony, or sarcasm used to expose and discredit vice or folly
- Scapegoat** one that bears the blame for others
- Scathing** to assail with withering denunciation
- Scheme** a plan or program of action, especially a crafty or secret one
- Scoffed** to treat or address with derision; mocked, ridiculed
- Scorn** open dislike and disrespect or derision often mixed with indignation
- Scrupulous** punctiliously exact; painstaking
- Scrutinize** to examine closely and minutely
- Scurried** scampered; to move in or as if in a brisk rapidly alternating step
- Self-aggrandizement** to make oneself appear greater; to praise oneself
- Sensationalize** to present in a sensational (arousing or tending to arouse [as by lurid details] a quick, intense, and usually superficial interest, curiosity, or emotional reaction) manner
- Sensibilities** sensitivities; awareness of and responsiveness to something
- Sentient** finely sensitive in perception or feeling; aware
- Sentiment** an attitude, thought, or judgment prompted by feeling

Serendipitously obtained by serendipity (the faculty of finding valuable or agreeable things accidentally)

Serene marked by or suggestive of utter calm and unruffled repose or quietude; peaceful

Sermonize to preach to or on at length

Servile of or befitting a slave or a menial person

Shroud something that covers, screens, or guards

Shun to avoid deliberately and especially habitually

Skirt to avoid, especially because of difficulty or fear of controversy

Sleuth detective

Slot to place in or assign to a slot (a narrow opening or groove)

Solicitous manifesting or expressing solicitude (attentive care and protectiveness)

Solidarity unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on community of interests, objectives, and standards

Soluble able to dissolve in a liquid

Sparsely of few and scattered elements, especially not thickly grown or settled

Specter something that haunts or perturbs the mind

Speculate to review something idly or casually and often inconclusively

Spurious outwardly similar or corresponding to something without having its genuine qualities; false

Squander to spend extravagantly or foolishly

Squelch to completely suppress

Stagnating remaining stale (usually from lack of circulation or flow)

Statute a law enacted by the legislative branch of a government

Staunch steadfast in loyalty or principle

Stealthy intended to escape observation; secret

Stifling to withhold from circulation or expression; repressing

- Stimulus** something that rouses or incites to activity
- Stoic** not showing passion or feeling
- Strife** an act of contention; fight, struggle
- Stylistic** of or relating especially to literary or artistic style
- Subject** to cause or force to undergo or endure
- Subjective** modified or affected by personal views, experience, or background (a *subjective* account of the incident)
- Submissive** to yield oneself to the authority or will of another
- Subsequently** following in time, order, or place
- Subsidize** to furnish with a subsidy (a grant or gift of money)
- Subsist** to have or acquire the necessities of life (such as food and clothing)
- Substantiate** to establish by proof or competent evidence; verify
- Subversive** a cause of overthrow or destruction, esp. a systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government by persons working secretly within
- Suffused** to spread over or through in the manner of fluid or light
- Sully** to make soiled or tarnished
- Superficial** presenting only an appearance without substance or significance
- Supplant** to supersede (another), especially by force or treachery
- Supple** readily adaptable or responsive to new situations
- Supplement** something that completes or makes an addition
- Suppress** to keep secret or to stop or prohibit the publication or revelation of
- Surfeit** an overabundant supply; excess
- Surmise** a thought or idea based on scanty evidence
- Surmountable** able to prevail over; able to overcome
- Surreal** having the intense irrational reality of a dream

- Surreptitiously** done, made, or acquired by stealth; secretly, slyly
- Susceptible** open to some stimulus, influence, or agency
- Sycophant** a servile, self-serving flatterer
- Symptomatic** characteristic, indicative
- Synchronous** happening, existing, or arising at precisely the same time
- Synonymous** having the same connotations, implications, or reference
- Synthesize** to combine or produce by synthesis (the composition or combination of parts or elements so as to form a whole)
- Synthetic** something resulting from synthesis rather than occurring naturally, esp. a product (as a drug or plastic) of chemical synthesis
- Tabled** to remove from consideration indefinitely
- Tacit** expressed or carried on without words or speech
- Tactics** a device for accomplishing an end
- Talisman** an object held as a charm to avert evil and bring good fortune
- Taunting** to reproach or challenge in a mocking or insulting manner;
jeer at
- Temerity** nerve, boldness
- Temperate** marked by moderation, not extreme or excessive; mild
- Tenacious** persistent in maintaining or adhering to something valued
or habitual
- Tenacity** the quality or state of being tenacious (persistent in main-
taining or adhering to something)
- Tentatively** hesitantly
- Tenuous** having little substance or strength
- Theoretically** according to an ideal or assumed set of facts or princi-
ples, in theory
- Theorized** to form a theory about; speculate
- Therapeutic** providing or assisting in a cure
- Throng** a multitude of assembled persons

- Thwarted** to oppose successfully, to defeat the hopes or aspirations of
- Toady** one who flatters in hope of gaining favors
- Tonic** one who invigorates, restores, refreshes, or stimulates
- Torpid** lacking in energy or vigor
- Tractable** easily handled, managed, or wrought
- Tranquility** the quality or state of being tranquil (free from disturbance or turmoil)
- Transformation** the act, process, or instance of transforming (to change in composition or structure)
- Transient** passing through or by a place with only a brief stay or sojourn
- Translucent** clear, transparent
- Transparent** fine or sheer enough to be seen through
- Travesty** a debased, distorted, or grossly inferior imitation
- Treacherous** marked by hidden dangers, hazards, or perils
- Tremulous** characterized by or affected with trembling or tremors
- Trepidation** apprehension, fear
- Trivialize** to make trivial (of little worth or importance)
- Trove** a valuable collection; treasure
- Truculent** feeling or displaying ferocity; cruel, savage
- Trump** a card of a suit any of whose cards will win over a card that is not of this suit
- Ubiquitous** existing or being everywhere at the same time
- Unalterable** not capable of being altered or changed
- Unambiguously** without ambiguity or uncertainty; clearly, precisely
- Uncanny** being beyond what is normal or expected, suggesting superhuman or supernatural powers
- Uncensored** not examined for the purpose of deleting objectionable or sensitive information; unedited
- Undermine** to weaken or ruin by degrees

- Underscore** give emphasis to, highlight
- Understate** to state or present with restraint, especially for effect
- Unduly** in an undue manner; excessively
- Unearthed** brought to light, discovered
- Unfetter** emancipate, liberate
- Unfounded** lacking a sound basis; groundless, unsupported
- Unintelligible** incomprehensible, making no sense
- Universal** worldwide, general, common
- Unmitigated** not lessened; unrelieved
- Unprecedented** having no precedent (previous example); novel
- Unprepossessing** not attractive or tending to create a favorable impression
- Unrelenting** not softening or yielding in determination
- Unruffled** poised and serene, esp. in the face of setbacks or confusion
- Unscrupulous** not scrupulous (having moral integrity); unprincipled
- Unswerving** not swerving or turning aside; steady
- Untenable** not able to be defended or occupied
- Unutterable** being beyond the powers of description
- Unyielding** not yielding (to surrender or relinquish to the control of another)
- Uplifting** improving the spiritual, social, or intellectual condition of; inspiring, enriching
- Upstart** unknown, insignificant person; low on the totem pole
- Usurp** to take the place of by or as if by force; supplant
- Utilitarian** no-frills, practical, and functional as opposed to decorative
- Utopia** a place of ideal perfection
- Utopian** of, relating to, or having the characteristics of a utopia, especially having impossibly ideal conditions, especially of social organization

- Vacillating** to waver in mind, will, or feeling; hesitate in choice of opinions or courses
- Vanity** inflated pride in oneself or one's appearance
- Vanquish** to defeat in a conflict or contest
- Variegated** having discreet markings of different colors
- Vast** very great in size, amount, degree, or intensity, especially in extent or range
- Vehemently** marked by forceful energy
- Veil** to cover, provide, obscure, or conceal with or as if with a veil
- Veneer** a thin sheet of a material, finish, or coating
- Venerable** calling forth respect through age, character, and attainments
- Venerate** to regard with reverential respect or with admiring deference
- Vengeance** punishment inflicted in retaliation for an injury or offense
- Venture** an undertaking involving chance, risk, or danger
- Verdant** green with growing plants
- Verifiable** capable of being verified (to establish the truth, accuracy, or reality of)
- Verity** the quality or state of being true or real; esp. a fundamental and inevitably true value (such eternal verities as honor, love, and patriotism)
- Vestige** a trace, mark, or visible sign left by something (as an ancient city or a condition or practice) vanished or lost; relic
- Vexed** to bring trouble, stress, or agitation to
- Vicarious** experienced or realized through imaginative or sympathetic participation in the experience of another
- Vigilant** watchful, alert, and attentive
- Vindictive** disposed to seek revenge
- Vindictive** disposed to seek revenge; spiteful
- Virtuoso** expert, incredibly skillful and masterful
- Visceral** dealing with crude or elemental emotions; instinctive

- Viscous** having or characterized by viscosity (the property of resistance to flow in a fluid or semifluid); a thick liquid
- Vital** concerned with or necessary to the maintenance of life
- Vitiate** to make faulty or defective, often by the addition of something that impairs
- Vivacity** the quality or state of being vivacious (lively in temper, conduct, or spirit); enthusiasm
- Vivid** producing a strong or clear impression on the senses; sharp, intense
- Vocation** the work in which a person is regularly employed; career, occupation, profession
- Vociferous** marked by or given to vehement insistent outcry
- Volition** an act of making a choice or decision
- Volubly** ready and rapid speech
- Voluminous** having or marked by great volume or bulk
- Warranted** sanctioned, authorized
- Wary** marked by keen caution
- Wavered** to weave or sway unsteadily to and fro
- Whimsical** resulting from or characterized by whim or caprice; lightly fanciful
- Wields** to exert one's authority by means of (*wield* influence)
- Wily** full of wiles (a trick or a stratagem intended to ensnare or deceive); crafty
- Wrath** strong vengeful anger or indignation
- Yearning** to long persistently, wistfully, or sadly
- Zealous** filled with or characterized by zeal (eagerness and ardent interest in pursuit of something)