

Bottled Hope – Joshua 9D1

The wind was absolutely freezing, but we didn't care. It was Wednesday, which meant we finally got to leave the foster home and go to the beach. Our house is ok, but it gets louder and crowded, so the ocean feels like the only place I can breathe.

Gracie was already ahead of us, trying to do a handstand in the sand, while Bethel was with a book pressed against her nose. Levi was basically digging a hole to the centre with a plastic shovel. We are family, even though we are not related by blood. We've all been through some stuff but when we're at the beach, none of that really matters.

I found my favourite rock near the gazebo and pulled out my notebook. I always feel like I have big thoughts stuck in my head and the only way to get it out is to write it down. Even though I don't write them for me, I write it for whoever is having a bad day.

I ripped out a page and wrote "The sun comes out every morning no matter how bad the night was, don't give up". I rolled the paper into a closed tube, shoved it into a glass bottle and tucked it into a little gap in the rocks where the tide would pick it up. I never really expected an answer, but it made me feel like I was doing something good.

What I didn't know was that a man was watching from the dock. He was a grown-up, but he was going through a really dark time. He'd lost his job, apartment and felt like he was invisible to the whole world. He'd started coming to the beach every Wednesday just to find my bottles. He told me they were his "lifelines". He would take it into his home and tape it to the mirror. Every time he felt he couldn't keep going he'd read my messy handwriting and remember that someone believed in him.

A few weeks later, our foster group went on a trip to the city. It was raining severely and our supervisor told us to go into a small café called "The Daily Grind" to take hot chocolate and dry off. The place smelt like cinnamon and burnt coffee.

I was standing at the corner waiting for our drinks when I noticed a man sitting by the window. He was staring at a sheet of paper that looked familiar. It was blue lined paper with a jagged edge where it had been ripped out of the book. My heart started beating rapidly. Without thinking, I walked over to his table.

"Hey", I said nervously; "I wrote that". The man looked up, and his eyes were in shock. He looked at me, then at the letter. "You're the girl from the beach?" he whispered. He'd looked like he'd just seen a miracle.

He told me his name was Josh. He also told me my words gave him the courage to go back to school and start over. He'd been looking for me every Wednesday just to say thank you, but he always missed me. I looked back at my friends. Gracie was laughing at something Levi said and Bethel was finally smiling. Standing there in that crowded

café, I realised that even though I don't have a "normal" house, I have enough light inside of me to guide people.

It was the most hopeful I've ever felt. Sometimes one small battle is enough to keep someone afloat, and maybe, just maybe, the universe really does listen when you shout into the void.