

If only it could always be like this.

She lazily scissored her legs from the hip, and felt her body glide forward through the water.

In addition to the weight of her dive gear, she had a good ten pounds of lead strapped around her waist and shoved into the pockets of her buoyancy compensator. Here, though, the burden seemed meaningless.

Her every movement was effortless.

Mountains would remain her first love, but there she was always cognisant of the strain on her body – the way her quads started to quiver, the icy rawness in her throat echoing the sensation in her fingertips, and the realisation that no matter how deeply she inhaled, she wasn't getting the oxygen she craved. At some point her physical strength would be utterly depleted and she'd have to switch to mental reserves to complete the ascent.

By contrast, on the ocean bottom she felt free of her skin.

Free of everything.

She rolled onto her back and looked up at the water's surface. She wasn't actually that deep – swimming along at a depth of maybe 65 feet – but it seemed like she was contemplating the ceiling of a completely different world.

Down here she felt completely disconnected from Man's domain, and its myriad of problems.

It was liberating.

There was a reason that so many cultures described underwater utopias in their folk tales; why figures like Urashima Taro lived so happily with magical sea folk. It was supreme wish fulfilment for anyone hankering after escape from their terrestrial lives. Troubles, much like physical weight, were largely irrelevant in this setting.

Why wouldn't sailors leap in? You didn't even need a buxom mermaid to make it enticing.

Though that inclusion certainly wouldn't hurt.

Smiling around her mouthpiece, she flipped once more onto her stomach and focused on the seabed. She was supposed to be concentrating – scanning the algae-coated rocks and coral for jarring, man-made shapes – but it was so easy to let her mind wander. Easier than in the shower, or those evenings she set herself up, Merlot in hand, in Croft Manor's vast library.

She was aware of the danger down here. Even if you weren't drunk with nitrogen narcosis, it was possible to lose all sense of self-preservation in the blanket of blue.

Seductive. Suicidally hypnotic.

Pondering this point at least reminded her to check the dive computer strapped to her wrist. Conditions were ideal: no currents to battle; water so warm so she could get away with wearing only a shorty. Combined with other factors – her supreme relaxation for one – it meant that her air supply was lasting longer than expected. Without pushing it, she still had a good hour left to entertain her lotus-eating wants.

*To stay here forever...*

That would be nice.