Make Me Believe

“So there are two castles, okay? I get one and you get one. Mine’s blue. With sparkles.”

 Adelaide pointed to the house with green shutters as the wind blew off the ocean and against our backs. It bit at my neck above my windbreaker --- the last nips of winter. The sun shone on our faces as we sat crisscross-applesauce in the sandy grass --- it just brushed at my elbows but almost enveloped her shoulders.

 “Okay. Mine,” I paused dramatically. “…will be gray. With pink turrets.”

 I gestured at the second house. It was almost a mirror image of the first. They could be twins in an anti-smoking ad: one’s been lighting up since college and looks about 10 years older than the other. My house had been smoking a pack a day since the 70s while the other was taking aerobics classes.

 Adelaide gasped in excitement and shifted onto her knees so we were at eye level.

“And we’re both princesses.” She stared into my soul.

 I giggled at the intensity in her eyes. *Not a house. A castle. Right*.

 “We’re best friends, obviously. So the castles can face each other . . .”

 The front steps of houses lined up as if they were meant for exchanging cheerful hellos with the neighbor.

 “…and have a big moat that goes all around them so we don’t have to worry about *boys*.” Maybe she’d just had her first heartbreak. Some eight-year-old didn’t *like* *like* her back. His loss.

 “What will we do?” I asked.

 “We’ll throw balls! My castle will have a really big ballroom with gold floors and blue walls and tons of chandeliers. It’ll have a fountain, too!”

 I could hardly imagine all that in the little beach house before us, but Adelaide could see through the quaint weather-worn siding and gambrel roof --- in its heart of hearts, that house was just dying to be a castle. It would soar above the sea and open its grand and no doubt sparkly doors to a long procession of princesses in large, rustling gowns and princes who *like liked* the princesses.

 Outside of this fantasyland, a silhouette appeared on the horizon, straddling the line between land and sea. Adelaide peered at it.

 “Let’s lay down.” We stretched out on our stomachs and leaned on our elbows, chins in hand. Adelaide batted at the grass in front of her to get a better view of our little home-improvement project.

 “Do I get a ballroom too?” I asked; she was running the show. She squinted at my house.

 “You can use mine, if you want. You could have a library.”

 My house did seem the more serious type. It didn’t have time for ornamental green shutters or even a fresh coat of paint on the trim. The roof sagged a bit in the middle after who knows how many bad hurricane seasons. I could be happy in a majestic, weathered castle with all those books to keep me company. I’d sit in a turret and read, and every now and then I’d look up from my book and out the window to see silhouettes dancing in Adelaide’s ballroom.

 The figure on the beach was drawing nearer. I could hear him shouting something in a voice that I knew too well. The stiff sea breeze made it hard to make out what he was saying. Being caught up in Adelaide’s dream world made me less than inclined to try.

 I flipped over onto my back, brushing the sand off my jeans. I tilted my head back to look at the houses. From this topsy-turvy angle, I could squint and make myself see them as castles, turrets stretching into the sky below, standing together with the sun shining between.

 “I’m going to have a Pegasus,” Adelaide said. “So I can fly away on adventures.”

 “I’ll have a dragon. A friendly one,” I said. *So I can protect you.*

 I could see a dragon, long and gray, curling itself around the turrets of my castle, nostrils smoking gently. Its iron wings lay outstretched in the sun. Adelaide’s white Pegasus moseyed about in the grass.

 I couldn’t ignore the man on the beach anymore.

 “Adelaide!” He yelled.

His voice had a sharp edge to it that cut into our magical bubble. It made me shiver. She could hear it too. She curled up against me, head on my chest. I wrapped my arms around her and we stared up at the clouds. I wished her world was real --- that we could fly away on a winged horse or be sheltered under the belly of a fire-breathing beast.

 “Adelaide!” He was between us and the clouds now. “What on earth are you doing?”

 He grabbed her by the elbow and jerked her to her feet and out of my arms. I jumped up.

 “It’s stupid to run off alone!”

 “But I’m with Amie” said Adelaide, looking up at me. He followed her gaze but stared right through me at the pair of houses. A familiar storm brewed in his eyes.

 “Don’t lie!” He roared, shaking her. The brightness in her eyes dulled. The castles crumbled around us. I grabbed her hand.

 “It’s okay,” I said. “I’m not going anywhere.”