



Carina Christina Cantando leaned against a tree and dreamed of the sea. She dreamed of sunlight sparkling on water and dolphins sporting in the surf. She dreamed of building sandcastles and finding starfish. She wondered what seagulls sounded like.

Carina had never seen a seagull, much less heard one. She had never seen a dolphin. She hadn't even been close enough to the ocean to smell the salty wind. She could only dream of the sea because poor Carina was stuck on a mountain.

And it wasn't just any mountain. This mountain was so high, that trees stopped growing and the bald peak was covered with snow, year 'round. It was so high clouds formed around it, looking like a ballerina's tutu. The mountain was called Mount St. Agnes and it was so tall it blocked the sun almost all day—that is, if you lived on the north slope, as Carina did.

Carina was starved for sunshine. The log cabin where she lived sat snuggled in a hollow, surrounded by towering pines. The pines swayed and sighed day and night, as if wishing, like Carina did, that the sun would shine directly upon them.

Inside the log cabin was a great fireplace and on either side bookshelves rose to the ceiling. Of all the books lining the shelves, one held Carina's heart's desire. To the left of the fireplace, on the bottom shelf was a blue photo album. Only here, could Carina see her Mama.

Papa didn't like to talk about Mama, so Carina could only stare at the pictures and make up her own stories. They were mostly pictures of her Mama as a young girl: building sandcastles, sailing a boat, sitting by a fire on the beach, feeding the seagulls. The ocean was the only thing lovelier than her Mama; both shined with warmth.

Papa didn't like to talk about Mama but, if pressed would talk about the sea. Once, when Carina had been seven, he told her the place was called Sicily and remarked that it was Carina's Sicilian blood that made her seek the sun. He refused to speak of it again.

Every morning, Carina ran through the woods, over the meadow and across the mountain stream to stand in the gap. Mount St. Agnes was one high, jagged peak in a line of many. Routini's Gap looked like a missing tooth in the line of peaks. Carina knew if she arrived in time, she could stand and face the sun for at least thirty minutes.

Carina was twelve and tall and much too skinny. When she stood with her blond hair billowing around her in the mountain wind and her face turned to the sun, she looked like a tall sunflower. She felt like a sunflower too.

Every afternoon, Carina ran westward through the woods until she came to the cliff. There, part of the mountain had fallen away. The woods came to an abrupt end; and so would Carina, if she forgot to stop running! It was a very high cliff.

Carina would sit with her back against a tree and watch the sun soak up the day and disappear over the ridge. In the afternoon, the sun shone so fiercely through the thin mountain air that Carina could almost hear it hissing. When the sun began to slip behind the mountains, Carina had to return to the woods. The path home was very dark and very cold.

On this day particular day, as Carina sat dreaming of the sea, the sun seemed tired. It was not warming her face as much as usual and Carina thought it must be because the long summer days had tired it out. Carina could smell autumn on the wind and her heart felt heavy.

She knew very soon, the sun would be too tired to raise high enough to peak over Routini's Gap and would turn in early each night to rest. On the mountain, the winter nights were bitterly cold and seemingly endless. Carina shuddered and pushed the thought of winter from her mind. She squeezed her eyes closed even tighter and imagined walking through deep sand on a sun-warmed beach.

She was deep in her reverie when the hair on the back of her neck prickled, her pulse quickened and she felt—no, she *knew* she was being watched. Carina's eyes popped open. There was nothing before her but blue sky caught in the circle of mountains. She looked to her left and saw nothing but the trees leaning over the edge of the cliff. She turned to her right and there, not three feet away was...

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*Make a list! Think of every possible thing it could be: a kid, an adult, a fairy, an alien, a mouse, a phantom, a bear, a gnome, a butterfly? Walk away from your list for at least an hour; when you come back, pick the person or thing that for you, has the most energy. Tell me more about it/them! Why are they there? What will it/they say? What does it want? Physical descriptions are welcomed to. Have fun, and don't forget to post your suggestions on the blog by Friday!*

-Lee