



## **On Past the End**

**The fog rolled thick along the shore as Nessa hurried to class that morning.** “Not late! Not late!” she whispered as she walked.

She slipped through the school door and along with the faces of her classmates turned toward her came her teacher’s voice.

“Ms. Ó Loinsigh, what delayed ya today? We were all waiting.”

“I’m sorry.” She lowered her gaze as she found her way to her desk.

“It was the fog.” She took her seat.

“Ah,” Mr. Chipper said. “The fog. Always the fog.” His serious expression turned into a broad grin. “So, students, let’s continue yesterday’s discussion. Can anyone tell me the topic we left at the end of the day?”

“That some say there’s other lands to the west beyond ours.”

“That is correct, Mr. Hurley. And what do you think of that, well, theory?”

“What?”

“A theory, Mr. Ó Cinnéide. Something that may or may not be true.”

Nissa tried not to stare at the confused look on Kevin Ó Cinnéide's face.

"So, Mr. Chipper, you're saying some believe that..." Kathryn O'Herlihy chose her words carefully. "...that someone could sail out west on a boat and find other places to visit."

"Now that just can't be!"

"And why is that, Mr. O'Connor?" Mr. Chipper asked.

"Because it's written right there. On the gate. On the gate at the water's edge. 'World's End.'"

"Well, certainly that was what some believed when the gate was built."

Nissa looked around and saw about half of her classmates nodding, and the rest looking down as if they didn't want to say one way or the other.

"My mother will not let me go near the gate," Brenna Flynn told all the students around her.

"What do you believe, Mr. Chipper?" Agnes gave him her usual look of suspicion.

"That is a fair question, Ms. O'Brian. As a good citizen of this town that likes to keep things as they are, I would say that the horizon is the farthest spot to travel. As an open minded person, I, well, I would like to think there's something lying out beyond where we can see."

“There is!” Kevin shouted. “There are all sorts of monsters and hideous things waiting for us beyond, at the place where the world drops off.”

“But I’ve seen...” As usual, all eyes focused on Nissa as she spoke. After some thought, she corrected herself. “I’ve been told there are many things beyond that point. Monsters, yes, but not so big and scary. And beautiful fish and islands...”

In typical fashion a peal of laughter came from the loudest voices in the class.

“Scary monsters and a wondrous world beyond the horizon. Those are two theories as well.” Mr. Chipper returned to the blackboard. “Now, class, let’s start our spelling lesson.” Just as he turned, Nissa could have sworn he caught her eye and gave her just a little wink.

As she tried to concentrate on the lesson, Nissa felt relieved she had Mr. Chipper as her teacher. In any other class, her comments would have gotten her a trip to the headmistress’s office for punishment for spreading unsubstantiated rumors about things that were not to be discussed.

Late in the afternoon, the school bell rang. Nissa left the school before anyone and took off alone down the road. Well ahead of the other students, she traveled past the neat houses of the town on one side, the harbor on the other, and made her way through fields of cows and sheep to the place where the land again meets the shore. At that isolated spot where few visited, Nissa took in a lung full of air and slipped beneath the

waves into the churning waters, propelling herself further and further from shore.

As she swam, Nissa felt her flesh toughen and her long curls slip back under her dark brown skin. Her hands webbed, her fingernails became claws, her feet joined to form a flipper that propelled her forward.

“One world’s end,” a voice whispered from the deep. “Another begins.”

The dark waters around her erupted into blues and purples. Creatures of all sizes and colors—parrot fish, sea horses, multi-hued rays, and seals like Nissa—darted in and out of the ribbons of bright green like long fingers reaching up from the ocean floor.

Nissa rotated through the water, still moving forward, flying through an underwater sky that stretched beyond what she could see. She thought of her classmates, the ones without curiosity, afraid of the world beyond their own. “I wish I could show this to them,” she said to herself, but inside she knew that they would probably be too afraid to open their eyes.

The world she moved through at that moment belonged to her and all who lived there. Perhaps someday her friends with open minds would someday have courage enough to discover the spectacular world that lived beyond their line of sight.

