

Angel Walker



Faith Richardson

“She’s headed down the stairs for the beach!”

Sylvie took a frenzied glance at her watch as Keauka danced impatiently, waiting for traffic to clear so that they could cross the street.

“Keauka! We’ve run out of time!” she said urgently.

“We can’t leave now—we’re so close. Come on!”

They dashed across the street and over to the stone wall. Down the steps to the bay they thundered. And came to a dead stop—Keauka grasping the banister for dear life to stop himself from tumbling into the ocean. For the tide was in—the beach was well under water and foaming waves slapped up the concrete stairs.

The two children simply stared—first at the restless waves advancing on them, and then at each other.

“We saw her go down the steps,” Keauka said forcibly. “She just disappeared.”



**Young Adult Fiction
by Faith Richardson**

Dark is a Color

Hoverlight

Angel Walker

The Peacock's Stone

Tree Root and River Rat

Christmas Pigeons



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by Faith Richardson

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For Sylvie, the Child Within

and with special thanks to Karen, John, & Katie Steensma and the members of the Trinity Western University 1989 Coral Reef Biology Class (and all S.H.R.I.M.P.E.R.S. everywhere) who join with me in praying for the preservation of the irreplaceable coral reefs of the world, and specifically for 'our own' reef at Camp Pecusa, Maui, Hawaii where the Trumpetfish Lady was first sighted . . .



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1



The Peculiar Woman

Her mother's face dissolved behind the rain-smeared car window and Sylvie watched, her throat aching, as the little yellow car pulled away from the curb and became submerged in the stream of traffic leaving the airport. Sylvie, the wet wind snatching at her hair and shooting chill blasts down the front of her jacket, turned resolutely away from the passenger drop-off area and re-entered the airport terminal.

So it was to be. After days of hoping and anguishing and wishing upon any and all stars, she was to be sent away from home for Christmas. Sylvie reached up and pushed the hood of her dripping jacket off the back of her head and shifted her tote bag from one shoulder to the other.

Fifteen minutes to boarding time. She walked back down the busy corridor, her hazel eyes solemn, a seasoned traveler dodging the happy hordes of Christmas revellers.

At thirteen years of age, Sylvie had logged an impressive amount of time in the air. She was used to flying from one side of the country to the other, for her mom was a journalist who lived in Vancouver, and her dad was a busy surgeon in Montreal. She had no brothers or sisters, so surviving alone had become a matter-of-fact way of life. As Sylvie approached the security desk, she ran her free hand through her short, straight hair; it was dampish and she knew that her fringe was plastered down on her forehead, making her fine-textured brown hair thinner and flatter than ever.

Sylvie watched her tote bag journey its way through the X-ray machine. She wanted to disown all its contents displayed there for all the world to see: her toothbrush looking huge and foolish among the folds of her ‘emergency’ underwear, pens and pencils crisscrossed, poking against the side, her books and clipboard, the hollow yawn of her mother’s diving mask, the long arc of the matching snorkel tube and frog-feet swim fins.

“Aloha.” The woman at the desk smiled at Sylvie and handed back her shameless tote bag.

“Aloha,” Sylvie barely mouthed back, stretching the tight muscles into an upward curve.

“Aloha!” the hearty-voiced young man at the check-in counter said as he held out her ticket with the seating assignment scrawled in black across it.

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“Aloha,” Sylvie softly managed, swallowing hard, fixing her eyes on the bold slash of numbers.

“Aloha!” chanted the flight attendants as she boarded the plane. Sylvie clenched shut her jaw, and willed her lips into a grimace of a smile, aching with the effort to stop her mouth from trembling.

Her friends at school had, at first, thought she was crazy. Who wouldn’t want to spend Christmas vacation in Maui, Hawaii?! But with a strange aunt? Sylvie had argued. A strange old great-aunt whom you’ve never met before? Christmas without her mom or dad? Without anyone she knew? They had been silent then, Sylvie remembered.

Her assigned seat was smack in the middle of the plane. To Sylvie’s left was a young couple with confetti in their hair. To her right was a bleary-eyed businessman who smelled of stale cigarette smoke. His paunch and briefcase conspired together to block from her view the person next to him.

The engines began screaming and the plane shuddered and creaked, beginning its accelerating motion down the runway. There was a *bong* noise and the seatbelt signs lit up and stayed on. Soon Sylvie felt the pull up, up . . . the plane seemed to strain with the effort. But then there they were cutting through the air, circling over the city of Vancouver.

The plane triumphantly broke through the clouds and Sylvie, stuck in the center aisle, far from the row of windows on each side of the plane, found that if she looked to the right with a certain twist of her neck she could see through a tiny

bit of round glass. The sun was bright and glinting off the carpet of cloud that the plane rode upon, but it still had the cool, pale yellow look of a winter sun.

In Hawaii, Sylvie's mom had told her, the sun would be hot on the white sand and she could swim in the ocean and walk on the beach in her swimsuit all day if she wanted. There would be palm trees with coconuts, and the warm wind would smell of the flowers that grew everywhere. Her mom had told her this frequently, and rather desperately, as if she were trying to convince herself, more than Sylvie, that her daughter would have a wonderful time in Hawaii. For Sylvie's mom had repeatedly informed Sylvie, not quite meeting her daughter's dry, anguished eyes, that she had no choice in the matter: her mom had to go to South America and research a story for the newspaper, and Sylvie's dad was going to remarry over Christmas. Neither Sylvie nor her mother was invited to the wedding.

So now, in spite of her wishing, and praying, and hoping, the actual day of her flight had arrived. In five days it would be Christmas, and Sylvie would find herself sitting opposite an unknown old aunt over Christmas dinner, saying "Merry Christmas" to her. Her mom couldn't even promise to phone, as she would be out on location in the Brazilian rain forest. And her dad would most likely be too busy—if he even knew where Sylvie would be.

Sylvie looked around the plane, desperately trying to fix her attention on something, anything, that would send her mind down different channels, out of the dark whirlpool of lonely homesickness. "Aloha!" the smiling, polished faces of

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the attendants seemed to say as they pushed the beverage cart down the aisle. Sylvie savagely felt that if she heard that word one more time she would leap to her feet and yell loud and long.

The girl shifted her gaze to her feet; her tote bag lay half-under the seat in front of her. Sylvie reached into its bulging depths and drew out the turquoise-edged diving mask and snorkel, leaving the matching swim fins in the bag. The snorkeling gear had been given to her mom long ago in Hawaii when she, then a young teenager, had visited the same strange, unknown aunt that Sylvie was going to visit.

Sylvie puzzled over the mask and gear, fingering the soft, resilient silicone, tracing the aqua-blue edging around the face plate. There were a few flecks of golden sand still wedged under the folded band that held the mask in place. *Why had she never heard of her mother's aunt before?* Sylvie suddenly wondered. *Why had her mom looked so lost and, and, lonely, when she gave the gear to her?*

Her mom had sat there, silently, on the edge of her bed, the large carton marked 'Sport Stuff' dusty and open at her feet. Then she had reached into the box and pulled out first the mask and snorkel, and then the fins, turning them over and over in her hands, gazing at the mask as though it held some secret that she had long forgotten. Sylvie had watched her mom, amazed, and a little frightened by her strange, intent search. Finally, her mother had shaken her head sadly, turned, and pushed the gear into Sylvie's hands. She had said something, half under her breath, that Sylvie didn't quite catch. But her mother had not repeated it.

For a brief moment Sylvie held the mask to her face and looked through it. Although the lens was crystal clear, everyone around her looked different. *Maybe it's like I'm seeing them through water*, Sylvie mused. But then, unaccountably, the people in the plane seemed to fade, and the thought of her mother grew so large and real that Sylvie seemed to be drawn back home and there—right *there*—was her mother, still sitting on the edge of her bed, looking sad and lost, again pressing the mask into Sylvie's hands, her green eyes wistful, darkly laced with that strange, sorrowful, 'I've forgotten something' look.

Sylvie put the mask down on her lap and stroked it as if it were a kitten. Hot tears prickled at her eyes, and with one hand she reached up and rubbed first one eye and then the other, hard. To distract herself, she leaned forward and to the right.

Out of the corner of the window she saw a hole in the swirl of clouds beneath them and blue sky below. But no, it wasn't sky . . . the plane had left the clouds behind and Sylvie saw that it was the sea! She had know that the plane would fly across the Pacific ocean, but how different this ocean was from the dark green–grey waves that licked at the pilings along Granville Island market where her mom shopped on Saturdays. This was the warm blue of the summer sky! Blue above them, blue below them, and blue all around them. It was as if nothing existed but sky.

But then Sylvie forgot the warm sea of sky. For Sylvie noticed the first peculiar thing. She clutched the mask on her lap harder, her almond-shaped eyes staring.

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Actually the peculiar thing was really a peculiar person. But the peculiar person soon did the first of many peculiar things.

She was an odd, piercing-looking person sitting in the right aisle one row up from Sylvie's center row. She had long brown hair with scale-grey glints pulled back in an untidy ponytail. Sylvie had never seen a woman this old with such long hair. Not just the ponytail part of it, either. In the wisps hanging off the woman's face, Sylvie saw that each hair was flat, like a blade of grass, not round like most people's hair. The woman's nose was astonishingly long and tilted up and out rather suddenly at the end. The very tip flickered up and down like a branch waving whenever the woman talked or ate. But even more peculiar than her hair and nose were the woman's eyes. They were round and flat and staring. They were blue—but not the normal eye-color blue a person sees everywhere. The woman's eyes were a light turquoise color as bright and even in tone as if they were painted. Sylvie had a tube of oil paint at home that exactly matched the color. It was those strange, flat eyes that gave the woman her most piercing, odd quality.

The woman suddenly fixed Sylvie with an unblinking eye and, startled, Sylvie jerked away. She wondered where she had seen eyes like that before. A picture came to her of the time, long ago, when Sylvie's dad had taken her salmon fishing with him. The weather had been miserable and Sylvie was damp and chilled through and through. Her dad was having no luck, and he turned the boat around for home, when they saw another fisherman pull a large, flashing salmon into

his boat. Right there, at the mouth of the Fraser River, where the salt water of the ocean mixes with the fresh water of the river, Sylvie's dad had put down his line. Within five minutes Sylvie heard the whine of the reel and the rod bent double.

Sylvie had forgotten the cold as her dad battled with the large fish hooked on his line. The fish would lie still and heavy, as if her dad had only snared a sunken log. He would carefully start to reel in the line and *zing!* Again the fish would twist and fight and try to snap the line. At times Sylvie didn't know who to root for: her dad or the fish. But finally Sylvie's dad had landed the big fish, and to his disgust, it wasn't a salmon at all. It was a long, white sturgeon with whiskers and flat, blue-green eyes that glared at Sylvie as if she were to blame for its state of affairs. Sylvie had sat mesmerized by the fish's glare until her dad removed the hook and dropped the ugly fish overboard. The sturgeon had floated for a second, tired out but still fixing its eye on Sylvie, and then, in the next instant, it slid under the water and disappeared.

Sylvie shivered. As she looked into the strange woman's eyes, she felt as though she were staring back into the hard, river-cold eyes of the no-good sturgeon.

But Sylvie couldn't resist looking back across the seats at the woman. And then the woman did the peculiar thing.

First she rolled her blue-green eyes like discs, as if to see if anyone was watching her; Sylvie quickly glanced away. Then, as Sylvie looked back, the woman took a small wooden chest from her old-fashioned woven bag, opened it, and nipped from it a pinch of white powder between two

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long, curving fingers and thumb. She sprinkled it into a glass of water that sat on the tray before her. *Salt?* Sylvie thought. But if it was salt, it was no ordinary salt, for as the woman sprinkled the white powder into the glass, the water began boiling and rolling and little waves formed. Sylvie saw the spray above the glass like just-opened soda water. Then Sylvie blinked and her mouth fell open. The water turned sea-blue and each little wave had a tiny topping of white foam. The strange woman greedily sucked the water down, and then held a tan finger over her brownish lips to stifle a little burp.

Sylvie shut her eyes and opened them again. She flexed her fingers, still clutching the soft rubber of the diving mask on her lap. She dug the nails of the other hand deep into her palm. Then she looked again. It hadn't been a dream; the woman was still there.

Sylvie saw the flight attendant tidily retrieve the woman's glass. He held it up for a moment, a startled expression knocking awry his smooth, professional demeanor. Glistening up from the bottom of the woman's glass was a thin layer of sparkling white sand. A thread of bright green—*could it be seaweed?!*—wound its way up the side of the glass.

The woman leaned back and closed her eyes.

Sylvie's mom can't deal with her divorce and Sylvie's dad's imminent wedding, so she sends 12-year-old Sylvie to stay with Great Aunt Honoura over the Christmas holidays . . . Sylvie is far from pleased—who wants to spend Christmas with some old aunt you've never even met??! (Even if it is in Hawaii!)

But, Sylvie very quickly has other things to worry about. Soon after boarding the airplane at the Vancouver airport, she sees a strange woman do something rather mysterious to an innocent glass of water. And now this weird lady keeps turning up wherever Sylvie and new friend, Keauka are—and then mysteriously disappears into the ocean . . .

(Hey—and why does Cane, the donkey, freak out when he smells the strange woman???)

And just what is Great Aunt Honoura up to?

(Wow, and is there anything more amazing than snorkeling the coral reef!!! Hmmm. Now why is a Canadian girl like Sylvie so at home in the tropical waters of Maui?)

Sylvie and Keauka enter the world of guardian angels who live as creatures, and meet one of the caretakers *who walks with them* . . .

Faith Richardson first published this novel under the title, The Sea, the Song, and the Trumpetfish, although the working title for the manuscript had been Angel Walker, the title preferred by Faith's mentor, Madeleine L'Engle. Upon re-publication of the novel, it seemed fitting to return it to its original title.

Very much like Keauka and Sylvie, Faith has a heart for animals, enjoys science and seeks out the mystery in life. When asked by a reader if Sylvie ever found out if Cane was an angel, Faith replied, "Sylvie decided this about Cane: that it didn't matter if Cane was truly an angel or 'just' a donkey—he was her and Keauka's friend. 'Regular animals have their missions just as angel animals do' was her answer, and I think she's right."

Faith grew up in British Columbia, Canada. She currently lives in California with her husband, artist Vincent James Richardson, who did the illustrations for this edition.

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