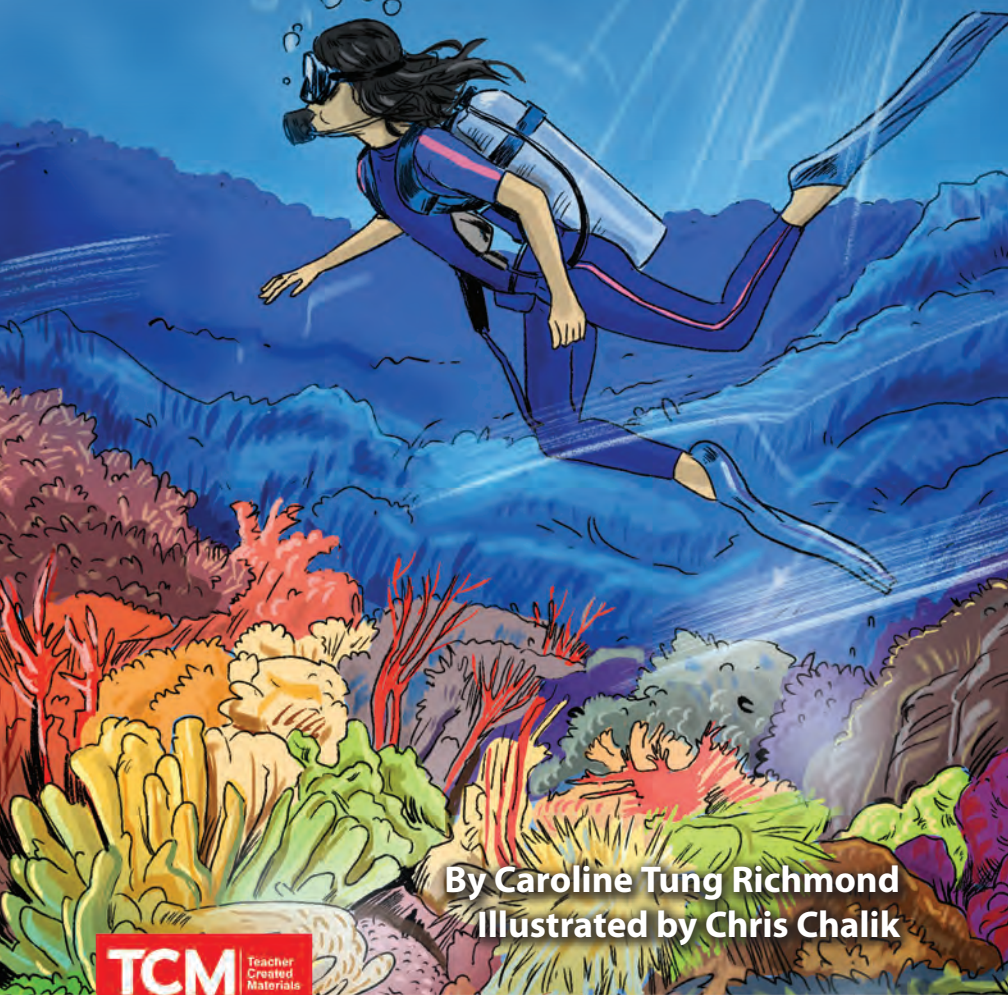


ADVENTURE AT THE REEF



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For Review Only



CHAPTER ONE



Suiting Up for an Adventure

It's not even 7:00 a.m., and I'm already slathered in sunscreen and wearing my scuba gear. Dad says we should leave early to spot Juanita on the reef. Juanita is a fish—an Atlantic goliath grouper to be exact. Grouper

can grow over eight feet long, so they should be easy to find, but Juanita likes to hide.

Dad starts the boat while a pelican paddles by. “All set, Puffer Fish?”

“Aye aye, captain.” My name is Lilah, but my dad has called me ‘Puffer Fish’ for longer than I can remember. He says it’s because I had the world’s chubbiest cheeks when I was a baby.

“Better buckle up!”

“We don’t have seat belts on the boat,” I say, grinning.

“Just teasing. It has been awhile since you’ve used your sea legs.”

My smile fades. We used to go diving every month, but after my parents’ divorce last year, my mom and I moved to Philadelphia. I like my new neighborhood, but I miss my dad a lot. That’s why I came to Key West for winter vacation this year. It’s just the two of us this week—and hopefully Juanita.

Dad guides the boat through the marina and into deeper waters. As we speed up, I fish my waterproof camera from my backpack. It was an early Christmas present from my mom, who wanted me to take pictures of my adventures in Florida.

Click! I snap a photo of the calm waters and fluffy clouds to show Mom.

Click! I take another of Dad wearing his silly boating hat.

I put down the camera because suddenly my heart feels heavy and I'm holding back tears. I wish that the three of us could spend the holidays together, and I *really* wish that my parents hadn't gotten divorced in the first place because it still hurts a lot.

The engine slows down, and Dad points ahead. "There's Juanita's Reef!"

I stop thinking about the divorce. I'm too busy blinking at the magical world below us. The turquoise water is clear as a bath, which lets me peek

underwater at the spiky corals and the schools of yellow fish, but there's someone missing.

"Where's Juanita?" I ask.

"Maybe she's snoozing, but let's hope she comes out to say hello."

My dad helps me into my scuba gear, including the oxygen tank that provides air to breathe and the flippers that help me swim underwater. I'm positively itching to dive in, but he tells me to wait.

"First, let's go over the rules," says Dad.

"We did that already during breakfast!" I say, staring at the water longingly.

"Remember to check your oxygen levels often and stay close together, but if we get separated—"

"Stay calm, take deep breaths, and swim back to the boat." I frown because he's treating me like I'm a kindergartener again, but I've grown up a lot since the divorce. Back in



Philadelphia, I take the city bus to the library all by myself.

Dad gives my shoulder a gentle tap. “These rules will keep you safe, Puffer Fish. Oh, remember to watch out for moon jellies, too, because they wander into the reef sometimes.”

I shudder because moon jellyfish have painful stings, even though they aren’t poisonous. “Hopefully, we won’t run into any today,” I say.

“I’ll keep a lookout for them. Ready?”

My smile stretches so wide that it hurts. “Ready, captain!”