

## Over the Edge of the World

Her feet crunched against frozen snow, melted and refrozen in the slow-approaching spring weather. Winter had kept its grip tight the past few months, but the sun had finally chased the gray skies away, giving birth to the annual tradition of her people.

She crossed the line of stones carefully. Only those of age crossed this line, and only once. She was the first this season, and she could feel the eyes of those waiting for their chance behind her.

Taking in a deep breath of the cool mountain air, she shut her eyes. Even with them closed, she could still see the sunlight filtering in through her eyelids.

Something soft met her hand, and her eyes opened, gaze falling to a white dog that had settled at her side. It blinked up at her, eager but patient, the first fact evident in the way its tail wagged back and forth across the snow, sending little ice chips off in various directions. A thunderous crash came from below, the sound of waves colliding with the cliffside, far enough that the snow melted into dew long before it reached the bottom.

She watched the waves far below, each one topped with white foam before it broke against the land. Massive birds flew below, seemingly tiny from this height.

The leap was always a risk. There was always a chance the birds would dismiss the diver, leaving the unfortunate soul to sink into the depths. But that chance was low, a rare occurrence in her people's history.

Someone behind her called her name, and she turned. The rest of her people stood back, behind the line of stones. It was strictly forbidden for anyone besides those of age to cross the line, and only one at a time, ordained long ago by the first people who had found these lands.

Animals could not be told where and where not to wander, and she was grateful for that at the moment. Her fingers barely brushed the dog's soft head as she met the eyes of her people.

Her family, her cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and dear friends.

Her best friend winked at her in absolute disrespect to ancient tradition, but it melted some of her fear, and she smiled at him.

Turning her face back to the sea, she saw the riders from years before far off, flying amongst the sea stacks and dipping into the waves far beyond the place where she stood.

The world was on the verge of being so much more significant. She could travel so far on the wings of her future mount, the bird that would become her closest companion and be by her side for the rest of her days.

But it all started with the leap. She took in the sights one more time. The bay was framed by tall mountains, still capped in snow, like the one she was on. Rams wandered across even on the steepest slopes, heedless of the near-impossible feat they had accomplished mindlessly.

Trees rose across the mountainside, ancient pine that had seen many winter storms worse than the last, and young spruce yet to have dealt with the hot mountain summers.

She took in another deep breath, tasting salt and feeling sunshine, before she blew it out, the warm air puffing into white clouds as it left her lips.

The people behind her went silent, sensing a change. The dog's tail stilled, its dark eyes fixed on the girl.

She took two steps to the edge, feeling the wind blasting up the cliff face with tremendous strength. It tossed the fur she wore around her shoulders and ruffled her short-cut hair.

Another breath. Another look.

Then she leapt.