

Otter Underwater

By Arya Binnamangalam

Hi! I'm Mia. Let me tell you about my heroic summer adventure.

We were at the Conchshell hotel in Kushiro, a cozy boat-side town on the island of Hokkaido in Japan, hoping to *sea* otters (*Ha, get it?*)! However, there was no guarantee. Asian sea otters are endangered, with only a handful left on the Japanese coast.

"Mia darling! Lets go", mom called out. Okay, well, time to see the otters! Yay!

We jumped into a DiDi taxi, and I stared out the window, taking in the beautiful views of Hokkaido. "We are nearing the pier", our driver told us, not taking his eyes off the road.

I was practically bouncing as I got off. As we walked down the pier, I saw fish piled in heaps and boats docked by the water. Near the end, I saw a man waving a cardboard sign that said, "NAKAMURA family". I veered towards him, and he waved us aboard a motorboat with a shiny white coat of paint.

As we zoomed away, I squinted a teensy bit. Was that a furry face? Yes! It was! I could hardly believe it! "SEA OTTERS!" I yelled. Everyone whipped their heads around and stared. The sea otters swept around the hull of the boat. However, nobody but me seemed to notice that while 10 faces went under, only 9 came out...

Upon getting off the boat, we'd come to the nearby Clamshell Cafe to grab a coffee. While my parents enjoyed their caffeine, I soaked in the sea breeze and read on the porch swing outside, imagining brave knights rescuing beautiful princesses. Now, before you ask me, "Mia, why didn't you tell somebody about the missing otter?", just know that because nobody else mentioned it, I simply assumed I had imagined it.

As my dad walked out, he called, "Come on, you two, let's see the boardwalk!" Sufficiently recharged, Mom and I followed him there.

We had finished the boardwalk, and I had begged my parents to let us walk by the pier one last time. Suddenly, I saw the familiar twitch of a nose, an arm sticking out just above the water, wrapped around the hull of a white boat. I stared in horror. How had that cute little guy come *here*? Mom tugged at my sleeve. "What's wrong, sweetie?" "That!" She followed my gaze and gasped. "Mia, let's get the Animal Safety Rangers, now!"

Before we knew it, the Rangers had sprung into action. However, there was a problem.. no adult could fit under the small boat. As soon as I heard this, I jumped into the frigid waters without hesitation, wearing only a t-shirt and pants. My years of swimming practice did not fail me, and I emerged moments later with a sea otter in my arms, catching the attention of every local, and every tourist on the pier that evening.

Before dusk, I had become a local hero, and discovered the true meaning of the saying - '*Believe in yourself*'.