**The Gift of Gairloch.**

I remember the magical holiday in Gairloch. The slate grey skies loomed over the mountains, conquering the landscape like giant ogres. The mist was heavy and the wind was exhausting; blowing my scarf across my pale face. Our campsite on the hill looked like a miniature village, made-out of Lego. There was a river, rapidly dominating the campsite as if it had owned it; fish frolicked in-between the arctic splashes of water.

It was cold last night. Bitter. Freezing.

The tent blew around like a rag in the wind – I thought it was going to rip. But its morning now, and were on our way to the beach. I wish it was sunny, warm even. Instead, I could feel the callous air biting at my cheeks like a vicious piranha fish, turning them a roar salmon pink.

When we arrived at the beach it reminded me of home. The waves rumbled up and down the shingles, taking away anything in its path. I forgot how powerful the sea was. It sounded like a stampede of elephants charging towards me. As we made our way along the jagged shoreline, I foraged through the pebbles, searching for a certain shell – a mussel. The shell of a mussel is usually slimy and faded, infested with miniature barnacles. However, these shells can hold something very valuable and very stunning.

After looking for nearly an hour, the tide began to slowly swallow up the sand, creeping in on us. Dad found a large eel lurking in the seaweed, mum and I were astonished about how slippery it was! The water started to brush against the edge of the deep caves when suddenly I stumbled across a collection of small mussel shells. I grabbed one before the tide could rip it from my grasp. I caught my nail on the barnacles, it started to bleed, but all I could think about was this shell.

The shell was covered in lots of off-white, tiny barnacles almost protecting them from the outside world. It was a crescent shape, hard and cold from where it had laid at the foot of a humble rockpool. I felt sad for the shell. How long had it been hiding these beautiful secrets? I couldn’t wait any longer, this precious shell was mine. I grabbed each side of the shell and pulled. The shell was stronger than I had anticipated. I pulled and pulled, gripping until my fingertips turned a dark crimson pink. It finally opened! The shell was pure white inside, only scarred by the peach flesh which stretched over its contents. Gradually, I peeled back the skin and caught a glimpse of it.

Pearls!

I picked them out one by one, six to be exact. They glistened in the welcoming palm of my hand, I could see my reflection in them. Suddenly, the wind and rain didn’t bother me – Gairloch had given me a gift I would not, could not, forget!