

Introductions

The man studied Ben carefully, eyeing his wavy brown hair (like his mother's), thin arms and legs, and soft brown eyes. Recently, Ben wished he had straight black hair like his dad, and those same sharp blue eyes with the thousand dark wrinkles around them from squinting in the sun. But the man at the table, looking at Ben, seemed to like what he saw.

Ben studied the man in turn. He was young and good-looking, sort of like Indiana Jones. He had on neat workman's pants and a blue denim shirt. Ben also noticed that his hands were not sliced up like a waterman's, or calloused from handling ropes.

"What's your name?" they both asked at the same moment, and laughed.

"Ben Warren."

"David Watchman. How do you do?"

"Well, what are you going to do today?"

"Collect plankton."

Ben was silent. Having spent his entire life on the Chesapeake, he thought he had learned about all the birds, all the fish, all the animals, even all the biting insects. But he had never heard of plankton.

"What?"

The man looked at him seriously. "You know my name? David Watchman. That's what I do, I watch the water. Not in the regular way. I take samples in different places. Then I take these to a lab and count the number of microscopic plants and animals in a droplet. This tells me a lot about the health of the water in a particular spot. Around the bay here, there's a team of people like me. We put all our information together, and then--"

"You mean you're a scientist?"

"Yes."

"My grandpa was named Marsh, Grandpa Marsh. And he lived on the marsh, all his life until he died.

"And Sally Ride was an astronaut."