

The Moon, the Sea, and the Theory of Existence

It is a strange feeling to gaze upon the ocean without the ability to see what is on the other side. Emily often thought there was a girl, just like her, across the sea. Maybe she was sitting on her roof outside her room. Maybe her hair was the prettiest of blondes, the kind that is almost white. Emily had always wanted blonde hair. Maybe she had radiant blue eyes unlike the dull brown of her own. Her name was something interesting like Juliana or Marcella. Not boring and common like Emily.

Often Emily would talk to this Juliana/Marcella. Marcella, she decided, was the better name. There was a Julia in her class who she didn't care for. She would tell Marcella about her school, her friends, her parents, her dreams, her fears. They were such good friends, Emily called her Marci and she liked to imagine Marci called her Em. As much as she talked, Marcella never answered. Sometimes Emily thought she heard something, the faintest of noises in the distance, but often it was the sound of Geo, her neighbor's dachshund, whining at the door or the distant sound of beach-goers enjoying the afternoon.

She'd lived close to the sea all her life. In her small town on the coast of Maine, she would crawl through her bedroom window and onto the steepest part of the roof to feel the cold ocean breeze. Yes, cold. It was Maine after all. But there was something about the air from the ocean that felt fresher, newer than the air that settled around everything else.

She'd first discovered this roof-top hideout when she was seven. Her mother and father had a relationship much like the relationship between the moon and the tide. It

ebbed and flowed and when the moon wasn't present at all, the tide still felt its pull. One evening, with the moon pulling and the tide pushing, Emily wished more than anything her parents would just get a divorce. It was a horrible thing to wish. She knew. But as she looked for an escape, she saw an opening -- a window to be precise -- and worked her way through. She'd never noticed the small indent where the fake upstairs window met the sloping roof. It looked like a perfect place to sit and wish her father away.

At nine, her mother proudly announced Emily was going to be a big sister. Emily cried. Her mother held her tightly and smiled. Even at nine Emily knew a baby was no way to fix her family. Nine months later, a tiny baby boy who shared Emily's fair complexion and fiery red hair screamed his way into the world. Emily smiled. She liked when Luke screamed, not because she wanted him to be upset, but because he was upset, and he was going to let the world know it.

Sometimes, when she stood on the steep incline above her room, she thought about screaming, yelling something, anything. Sending her words, her thoughts out to sea. Would Marci hear them? What was across the waters? Once, while she was sitting alone in the local public library waiting for her mother to finish with Luke's "Little Learners" class, she found an atlas. She found Maine and traced her finger across the Atlantic. Spain, she decided, was across the waters.

In junior high all students had to pick a language. All her friends were taking Latin because the Latin teacher was Mr. Hanson. He was a young, cute teacher perhaps with an affinity for young girls, this of course she wouldn't know until much later. Her best friend Lillian tried to convince her to take Latin by appealing to Emily's undying

love for the stacks of Greek and Roman mythology on her bookshelf. But she chose Spanish. After her first class, she climbed through the portal in her room and held out the notecard she had brought along. After a deep breath, she exclaimed “*Hola Marci! mi nombre es Emily!*” She wasn’t sure what she had expected, but the air was quiet and cold. Her message was lost in the sea.

The night of her eighth grade formal her father left. It wasn’t one of the many “business trips” he’d been taking lately. It was different but she didn’t know how and neither did Luke. Nevertheless he stood screaming at the door until her mother dragged him to bed. All this happened when she was upstairs slipping into her emerald dress, the one the store clerk told her went so perfectly with her eyes. The one she’d picked out months ago. The one she was wearing when her father picked her up and spun her around like he’d done so many times before when she was smaller. When she walked downstairs to do her rounds, she found a distressed toddler refusing to be wrangled by an even more distressed mother.

Hours after the incident, she sat looking up at the stars, thinking it was all her fault. She had wished her father away. She was glad, in a way, that he was gone. She’d spent too many nights with her Cinderella pillow pushed firmly over her ears. But as she looked up at the stars, focusing on the moon, she realized how selfish she was. How could the tide return each day without the moon drawing it back in? She had started to believe her mother wasn’t the tide at all. Maybe she was.

She heard it first that night. A small whisper in the evening breeze. *Emily*. It was probably Luke, or her mother, she thought. *Emily*. Or perhaps she was just hearing things.

It wouldn't be the first time. She had the innate ability to block out the important sounds around, like the sound of a semi-truck barreling down a residential street, her while hearing those that held no importance or simply didn't exist to begin with. *Emily*. It was louder this time, unmistakably loud. Her heart beat louder and faster in her chest as she climbed through the hole in her wall and thrust the window closed for the night.

At the end of her eight grade year, her spanish teacher gave her a map of Spain. She supposed it was because this was her third year in Spanish, but also because no one else in her class seemed to care. She pasted it on the ceiling above her bed so she could lay down and look up at it. She'd fall asleep, staring up into the darkness, still able to picture every tiny detail of the map. After some research, she'd circled the city *La Coruna* deciding it was the city where Marcella lived in a tall white house with a red roof and ivy growing up the sides. She had to confess, she had no idea what Spain looked like, but she imagined it was beautiful.

The dreams started her freshman year of high school. She was running on the beach. It was a familiar feeling, the sand packing between her toes. She wasn't running like the middle-aged women trying to be fit she'd too often seen run past her window. She was running *toward* the water. The water itself looked strange. It almost sparkled and shimmered, as if an oasis in the desert, not real, but beautiful nonetheless. She was tired, too tired, but she knew she had to make it to the water. With each step, the water pulled further from her feet. She felt suffocated, the intense heat of the sun scorching her exposed skin. She stumbled, falling deep into the sand, just before the water.

The impact always shook her awake. Sometimes, she was simply laying on her bedroom floor. Once, she woke to the hot trickle of fresh nose-blood running down her chin -- she's fractured her nose on the edge of her dresser when she jolted awake. She couldn't explain to her mother what had happened. She'd never been a sleepwalker when she was younger.

The same year her dreams began, she discovered the Spanish club. They had meetings every Wednesday afternoon. She was told they talked about Spanish culture, cuisine, and practiced speaking the language. She had heard that some summers, the club traveled to Spain. She wondered if they went to *La Coruna*. When she begged her mother, her mother matter-a-factly told her she had a responsibility to watch after Luke every afternoon, including Wednesday. She threw the paper in the trash.

It was her sophomore year of high school and she still hadn't had a boyfriend. It wasn't that boys weren't interested. Lewis, a measly kid with round glasses and a gap between his front teeth, was constantly making eyes at her. She could feel his gaze on the back of her head in World Geography. When he finally worked up the courage to ask her to homecoming, she turned him down. She hated dances. She couldn't have known that night Lewis would swallow an entire bottle of pills and end up in the hospital for a month.

When she heard the news, she was on her roof. She felt sick and heavy as if she'd just plunged ninety feet from the top of a rollercoaster, but the feeling wouldn't stop. She cried waterfalls of salt and guilt. She felt guilty because she'd turned him down. Guilty

because she didn't like boys. *Emily*. She hadn't heard the voice in two years. She'd almost forgotten. She didn't mean to, but she blurted out, "Marci?" *It's me, Em.*

That night, she had the dream again. She ran, and ran, and ran, and still the sea pulled away. She was tired, hungry, and so so thirsty. Just a drop of the Atlantic. It was all she needed. She ran, she tripped, she fell, she jolted awake. She sputtered sending a massive cloud of sand through the open air, suddenly aware of the sound of waves crashing beside her and the tickle of the beach breeze. She shook her head violently, cupping her face and giving her cheeks a light smack. She needed to wake up, but she was already awake. *Emily, are you there?* She stood up, dressed in only her flannel shorts and t-shirt and ran as quickly as she could to her bed.

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