

Three Hours Alone on Black Rock Beach

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1

My mother prefers the house to the tent and my father prefers the camper to both. Their subtle differences not so subtle anymore, they “drifted apart”. The man I wanted to marry hated the sea when I first met him, yet he followed me onto Atlantic Beach's threshold of white and eventually into the clouded ocean. Three weeks into our romance, the Atlantic's evening chill wrapped his arms around me. We whispered into each other's necks, the wind carrying our words miles out and meters deep. Three years it lasted. The day after I leave, I find myself at the beach we always wanted to visit together. We had driven to it one night against the darkness, arrived and, without a flashlight, decided to turn back.

2

Fallen trees, whitened by the grip of death, block my way to the shore of Black Rock. They force me to think strategically before each step. I am my own captain, steering through the hazardous path, under and over strong branches. Carefully, my soles seek stability. I navigate over sable rocks still slippery with the recent memory of the tide (water that once covered them and will cover them again, always and only to depart). Parenthetical thought overtakes strategy and, distracted, I stumble, grabbing hold of an offshoot that splinters into my writing hand. I let go, but I shouldn't

have; a deceiving dirt clod crumbles beneath my foot, and I crumble with it onto my ankle. I am a terrible captain. I am beached with only myself to blame.

3

His mother loves the beach and brought it into their house with homemade seashell lamps and thrift store manatee portraits. My step-mother loves the beach and brought it into our mobile home with shelved driftwood decorations and flea market fishing signs. Spring's breeze against this water could push my accidental family like turtles onto their backs. Why am I not helping them?

4

There's been a celebration on the closest stretch of shoreline. Balloons remain, their colorful ribbons coiling around weeds and in between rocks. They are dead. They are corpses tied to the ground. They should not be here but remarkable how the harsher breezes bring their limp bodies to life.

5

Black Rock Beach becomes the texture of Georgia clay after I turn the bend toward open water. Skinny gray river roaches scatter with my every step, retreating into the holes they've dug for themselves. Earth the color of rust cracks beneath my destructive soles. Jagged black rocks remain against the brighter dirt, snuggled into crevices and dents, making their place, this place where they shouldn't exist anymore but, despite logic, exist.

6

Last summer I didn't notice my hair, the shortest of my priorities. Now the wind whips its length against my cheeks. Another girl would pin it up, hold it tight. I close my eyes and let it go wild.

7

Pools form during low tide, stranding dozens of minnow. They are frantic movers, cramped and active, darting from their pond's corners into dead ends behind and ahead of them. Each corner excites new agitations within them, and it will continue this way until the river St. Johns returns for their exhausted bodies. Its currents will hold them motionless in travel, passing Mayport just ahead before giving its corners over to the Atlantic, where they'll face the unblinking anxiety of a suddenly sacred and still ocean.

8

The lulled waves cause perfect ripples in the sand. I feel them under each ambling step, minuscule mountains I conquer. For the first time I know the significance of my mass, my body, my weight—changing a landscape with each decided movement.

9

The offshore wind has blown the tops of the trees with their branches and their leaves to the left just as the imbalanced gravity of God has bent the bottom of my spine to the right. Twisting into or out of submission, I'm not sure, but twisted nonetheless. With destinies and endings similar to straighter trees yet with lives and bodies noticeable among the landscape, they are superior to the trees of the forest behind them; daily beaten this somehow makes them more alive. Every once in a while when the wind makes the seagulls tired, they land on the lowness of the trees' left branches. They thank them for the shade.

10

I don't notice the airplane's streak against the sky until I lay down and look up. I turn my head and, from the ground, it's possible to see a solitary seagull feather adrift inches above the sand. It dances in the breeze beside me. It may be lost but if so I am lost with it, beneath a sky that is larger than everything.