

**Ours**

**Mackenzie Simms**

## **Ours**

Yours as much as it is mine; yes, you, reader. Do you remember your first time in the sea? Tasting salt on the tip of your tongue, hearing all of that energy come crashing onto the earth kissing your untouched skin. What did that feel like in the depths of your soul? As far as the eye can see. None of us have ever witnessed its start, gone to its very core and found the answers, yet it connects us. We touch the shore and we are holding hands with strangers, thousands of miles away. And we don't even know it. And maybe we never will.

## **The Beginning**

In the beginning, there was only water. Before the heavens were named, before earth had its shape, there were only the primordial beings, Apsu, the God of freshwater and Tiamat, Goddess of the sea. Apsu was deep and quiet, not out of coldness, but because to him, stillness was sacred. Tiamat was vast and mysterious, her touch feeling both cradling and crushing as the sounds of thunder rolled beneath her waves. Apsu and Tiamat's union gave life to the first generation of Gods. Tiamat birthed Gods from her waters, not out of duty but out of love for creation. Tiamat demanded respect from the young, energetic Gods who argued and played, filling the cosmos with vibrant sound and movement. All of the noise upset Apsu, who valued the natural rhythm of the universe. Apsu decided to destroy the younger gods, which horrified his love, Tiamat. Tiamat warned the eldest of the young gods, Enki, of Apsu's plan to destroy them all. Enki was clever and after learning of Apsu's plan, he cast a spell to put Apsu into a deep sleep. It was here that Enki killed Apsu, vanquishing him with the very waters where he once ruled. From Apsu's remains, Enki created a palace that would be his home. Tiamat was devastated. She mourned the loss of Apsu and became wrathful against the young gods. Tiamat summoned the forces of chaos where she sent eleven horrible monsters to destroy her children.

The young gods knew they were no match for Tiamat's power, so they sent Marduk, the youngest but most powerful of them all to battle her. Marduk killed Tiamat with an arrow, splitting her in two. With one half he created the sky, with the other he formed the earth. From her eyes, water flowed down and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were born. Marduk created humans from clay and the blood of his traitor, Kingu<sup>1</sup>. From Mesopotamia's offerings, human life truly began.

### **The Night we Dreamed**

The hot Florida sun sank below the trees lining the yard, we sat in the remainder of its glow around the metal table. The swimming pool was calm, uninhabited by our bodies for several hours now, floats and pool noodles scattered sloppily around the concrete exterior. Mine and Grace's skin was hot and red from the sun's wrath, my hair naturally curling up from the salty ocean. Mallory sat to my right, her hair french braided into two pigtails which laid messily on her shoulders after a day in the ocean. Abbey was usually on her iPad at this time of night, but she stayed with us knowing that it was our last night here. We were curled up in our chairs looking at the stars above us, untouched by light pollution. Crickets chirped somewhere close by as we dreamed about this being our forever.

When our parents left for the airport, we would remain, hiding in the small shack behind the rental house. The shack would be big enough, there's room to fit a couch and a few small mattresses, we'd sleep on the floor if we had to. Every day we would trek down to the beach, towels and sunscreen in our hands. We would spend our time taking turns, two relaxing, two working to find shark teeth and unique shells in the tide. After a day's work, we would take our loot to the local gift shops, they would weigh the teeth on their scale, giving us a few dollars for our service and collected items.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/225/enuma-elish---the-babylonian-epic-of-creation---fu/>

Eventually, we would collect seawater, extract the salt for table salt, keeping the fresh water for ourselves to drink and use in our house. We would sell the salt we collect to local restaurants and families like milkmen, two of us spending our days making deliveries while two stand at the beach collecting shark teeth. We would use our initial profits at Publix, where we would buy .99 cent frozen pizzas and peanut butter sandwiches, not budgeting enough to buy jelly. We would eat the fresh mangoes off the trees next to our home as a treat, whenever the trees would provide. Eventually, we would grow up and Mallory would be able to get her driver's license. After years of scrimping and scraping, we would be able to afford a boat, one with a bedroom inside, like my grandparents. We would transfer our belongings here, saying goodbye to our little yellow shack. We would now be able to fish for our dinners and potentially to sell to patrons. We would work hard day and night with our businesses, although we would take every Sunday off of work and play in the ocean together, building sand castles and eating our lunch on the shore. We would scout for dolphins far off in the distance, debating whether they were sharks. The sun would sink into the ocean, painting the sky an overwhelming orange and yellow before the stars came out. We would head back to our home, which was now a boat, and we would sleep in the small bedroom, the window on top illuminating the stars overhead. We would wake to seagulls screaming at us overhead, telling us it was morning and a whole ocean was waiting for us.

### **The Ghost Ship of the Atlantic**

On November 7, 1872, the Mary Celeste set sail from New York to Genova, Italy carrying cargo of 1,701 barrels of denatured alcohol. The weather was favorable for the journey, as the seven crew members, Captain Briggs, his wife Sarah Briggs and their two-year-old daughter boarded the ship. Captain Briggs wrote to his mother that the vessel was 'in beautiful

trim' and that they shall have a 'fine passage'. In Hoboken, New Jersey, David Morehouse set sail on the Dei Gratia, just eight days after the Mary Celeste, taking the same route to Genova. Morehouse and Briggs were said to be friends, even sharing a last meal together before Briggs set sail on the Mary Celeste. The crew was expected to see land near the Azores Islands, though according to Captain Brigg's logbook the crew had not seen land in weeks. This changed on November 25th, where Captain Briggs writes that the Mary Celeste was just six miles from the Santa Maria Island, the largest part of the Azores. This would be the last entry made in Captain Brigg's logbook.

Nine days later, on December 4th, Captain Morehouse's ship, Dei Gratia, would notice a ship floating with only three tattered sails set, drifting away from the Azores Islands. As his ship grew closer, Captain Morehouse had the daunting realization that this mysterious vessel was the Mary Celeste. He quickly sent his crew to check on the ship, wondering if his friend Captain Briggs and his crew were onboard. When Captain Morehouse's crew climbed aboard the Mary Celeste, they found the ship completely abandoned. The rigging was damaged, ropes dangling off the side. The ship's main lifeboat was missing from its place, the compass' glass cover shattered. The crew looked at the logbook, which was last dated 8:00 am on November 25th. Captain Briggs' personal papers were wet and scattered around the cabin, his navigational instruments missing. The Galley equipment was neatly stowed, plenty of food tucked neatly away. Captain Morehouse's crew realized that there was no sign of Captain Briggs, his family, or his crew. Sophia Briggs', the Captain's daughter had toys scrambled about, her bed lie neatly imprinted with her shape, no signs of distress. The Mary Celeste was still salvageable, Captain Morehouse split his crew between the two ships and set sail to Gibraltar. Both the Mary Celeste,

and Dei Gratia arrived at port on December 12, 1872<sup>2</sup>. The ten souls aboard the Mary Celeste vanished, their mystery coating its salty air of the Azores Islands. If a ship is found abandoned with no signs of a struggling Captain or crew, what story is begging to be uncovered beneath the Atlantic?

### **Taking a Leap**

We paid a man in a sunhat fourteen euros for an entire day rental of beach chairs and an umbrella. As we handed him the cash, he told us if we got thirsty he was selling beers and water from his cooler, much cheaper than any of the nearby shops. I smiled, telling him we'd keep that in mind, walking to the chairs closest to the tide. Slathering on sticky sunscreen I laughed at my free will right at that moment to buy cheap beer from a stranger on the beach. We swam in the sea together close to the shore, I made Charlie carry me in the waves as they crashed into us. The sun burned our pale skin as everyone back home began to wake up. There's some peace in knowing that the rest of your world is fast asleep as you are lying somewhere far away in the sunshine.

The water looked like blue Gatorade, electrically inviting us in for one more adventure before catching a red eye flight home. In we went, dipping our bodies into the warm ocean getting used to the temperature and the sharp rocks beneath our feet. Charlie took off swimming and I followed suit, knowing that I would be unable to touch until we reached the large platform, 50 yards from shore. We swam for what seemed like ages, taking small breaks to float on our backs and catch our breath every once in a while. The clear water below me made everything visible, large rocks the size of kitchen chairs sat at the bottom of the ocean and I wondered how long they'd been there, untouched by human life. Once reaching the platform, I became more

hesitant than I was back on land to jump off. Charlie climbed right up the algae-filled ladder, getting in line for the highest level. As much as I hate to say it, I contemplated for half of our time out on that platform. Knowing that we didn't have long until we'd have to head back to shore to drive to the airport, I got in line for the highest level. Twenty-six feet up in the air, the ocean glimmered in the sunlight, its glow feeling like an invitation. I took a deep breath, reminding myself that this was likely the only time I would be this young on this Greek island, high above the Mediterranean sea. And for about five seconds, I fell, floating in the wind and anticipating my hard crash into the sea.

I was alive there, my body smacking the water below falling deep down in slow motion. I bobbed back up, catching my breath, eyes stinging from the salt. We didn't have much time now, we had to swim all the way back to shore leaving behind this beautiful place. Our toes were bleeding by the time we escaped the salty water, broken skin from sharp rocks below us. Our cuts sizzling as we allowed salty water to dry inside them. Later that evening we walked out onto the tarmac of the Rhodes Airport. The sun was setting, a beautiful blend of blues, purples and oranges, falling quickly into the sea we once inhabited. We would land at Gatwick airport four hours later, able to see our warm breaths in the chilly night, hair still coated with the sea.

### **Stuck in Sea(ford)**

The English Channel was a dark blue, waves crashed onto the rocky beach right on the other side of the motorway. Cliffs lined the beaches, green grass overgrown on their tops, where sheep lay grazing in the summer wind. Sailboats were scattered about, reaching out as far as the sun did. We were shoved inside the Mini Coupe, Charlie's knees crammed up into the seat in front of him. We drove down the winding road, his mom pointing out his grandparent's house, his best friend Alfie's house, and the house of one of her caretaking patients. I remember the

stories he'd spent the past year telling me, him and his mates playing football and drinking cheap cider. Seeing this place in person was like reading your favorite book and finally seeing it come to life in the cinema. The beach below us held a piece of him I'd never get to know; young boys splashing in the summertime sea.

I can imagine it though; him and Alfie deciding that gray clouds overhead were an invitation to swim in the sea. They both only liked going when there would be waves, otherwise they'd just be sitting in the cold water. They walked down the rocky coast, as waves crashed loudly next to them. They both contemplated for a while, it was really wavy but not wavy enough for them to *not* get in. Eventually they do, they swim and splash, jumping as the large waves engulf their bodies. Under the water it's silent but they can hear the faded rhythm of waves on the shore. What he doesn't realize then, is that these large waves are dragging him back, his feet can no longer touch the pebble-filled ocean floor. Him and Alfie get tired of swimming and decide to head back in to dry off, only he quickly realizes how far out to sea they've drifted. He can feel his heart in his throat. Waves keep coming and the harder they paddle to get back to shore, it seems like the farther they're drug out. After fighting the waves for what seems like ages, Alfie makes it close enough to shore where his feet can touch and the waves aren't as strong. This leaves Charlie all by himself to figure out how to get back in. Alfie yells from the shore that he needs to duck under water and swim, he hears this faded coming in and out as his head bobs below the water. Eventually he swims with all his might under the water, past the huge waves crashing above him. His limp body trudges out of the sea, reuniting with Alfie. He hunch over to catch your breath for a moment before looking out at the angry sea that had him in its grasp.

### **Nooks and Crannies**

I picked out the bright green kayak, my other options being red and blue. I grabbed a paddle and life vest, dragging the small boat through the grass to meet my family at the water's edge. My dad delicately pushed my kayak into the water, placing it horizontally so that I could sit down gently. The sky was blue overhead, a few clouds scattered around like those cheap, fake spider webs we buy for parties around Halloween-time. Our paddles pushed us further and further out into the small channel where we headed to the swampy area to our left. We sat still for a minute, the ocean's bottom about two feet from ours above it. In the crystal clear water we could see life like never before, starfish lay sunbathing near little tufts of seagrasses. Shells housing tiny hermit crabs scattered around below, us observing their small movements. I wondered where they were off to in such a rush, their little bodies moving with purpose. We entered the grove of trees slowly, our faces immediately relieved with some shade. The trees twisted their roots out of the sand and up through the green leaves overhead, resembling a freshly picked celery root, right when it comes out of the earth. I couldn't follow one piece of the tree with my eyes from its bottom to top. Small waves crashed into the trunks, coating them with water. As water splashed, tiny crabs crawled up the trunks closer to the luscious part of the tree. The crabs were black and tiny, like little spiders as they quickly moved to avoid the waves as they came. We moved through the tunnels as the crabs moved through theirs, both of us solving the puzzle of nature's maze.

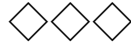
### **Hammerheads**

Spring break was about the one time a year when I would see the ocean as a child. Though I claimed that sharks were my favorite animal, as I still claim they are, it never made me any less afraid of their wrath. In kindergarten, I couldn't yet come to terms with the mixed emotions that surrounded the species; I was fascinated yet so deeply afraid I hoped to never

come across one in my lifetime. In science class, we did a writing project about an animal of our choosing, which consisted of finding a National Geographic book from the shelf, writing a fun fact about that animal, and drawing a cute picture. I, of course, chose my favorite animal, the shark. I drew the round belly of a great white with my gray crayon, detailing three curved lines for its gills. In orange, I created three or four smaller fish, potential prey for my imaginary creature. As I placed my paper on the front table, my teacher explained that she too loved sharks. She went as far as to tell me a story about when she lived in a houseboat on the coast of Florida. She went into great detail about the hammerhead sharks that would come close to the shore, right against her houseboat after dark, looking for food in the warmer waters. She told me they tended to swim near piers, where there was often food dropped into the ocean below. She told me I might be able to see one on the pier when I took my spring break trip the following week.

On the last night of our Florida trip, I had made it six whole days without a single shark encounter. My mother loves almost nothing more than a sunset on the beach, and in an effort to romanticize our lives, she decided we would walk through the sandy beach to Sharky's for dinner while catching a beautiful last sunset over the water. It was only a mile walk from our rental house and it seemed like the perfect idea. The sunset was gorgeous, vibrant oranges and reds with the bright yellow sun. We were making our way down the beach, the sand giving us all a run for our money, as we trudged onward. We approached a small outfall, which created a trickle of water in a river-like path between a large pipe and the ocean. My family crossed the tiny bit of water effortlessly continuing on the walk. At that moment, my teacher's words came flashing back to me. I couldn't move thinking that there might be hammerhead sharks in the tiny bit of water. I realized I couldn't cross, I might get bit. The sun was now down, all of us starving for dinner. My feet stayed planted in the sand as a ghost crab scurried across my little toes. I let out a

scream, my parents telling me from one side that there was not even enough room for a hammerhead to be in that little bit of water. It didn't help. I cried thinking about a hammerhead nibbling on my toes or taking a chomp out of my calf. My dad came back over the trickle of water, carrying me across safely on his back, my hands wrapped tightly around his neck.



When we step foot into the sea, we never know what could be lurking below us. What creature is waiting in the shadows to drag us by the ankle, deeper and deeper until we can't find home. We might come back disheveled and bruised from the rough tide, but is that enough to never experience the laughter in the waves? To never watch the sun sink into the beyond, wondering who is on the other side?