

No Beach is Like Another

On the horizon rested storm clouds that slowly turned from bright white, like fresh snow, to a misty gray. The ocean water began to shift to a dark blue. The rest of the water, closer to me, rested a soft blue. The closer the water got to shore, the clearer it became, waves flapped over each other and rolled to a stop at my feet.

It was oddly hot in Scotland. The sand was too hot to touch. The water grazed against my feet with each passing lap. My friends and I had come to North Berwick for just an afternoon. It was just another beach to them. To me, it was another chance to be at a beach.

I had left my friends in my wake as I walked. They were too slow and too loud for my taste. I kicked up water, and it misted in the air. Droplets came down again, coating my jeans and shirt. I thought about bringing my swimsuit, but I had an hour train ride back to Edinburgh and then an hour bus ride back to Dalkeith, where I was staying for an exchange program.

"Sophie!" one called. "Come look at this."

If the locals didn't pick us out as Americans before, they certainly had now. I walked back on the land from once I came to see what they saw. Chloe had bent down and started caressing a crab on the land. Rachel was beside her but looked out at the water.

"Isn't it pretty?" Rachel wondered.

"Except for Poop Island," I replied, pointing to where the puffins, or furry penguins, lived.

Rachel laughed and returned to Chloe, who asked, "Do you want to hold it?"

"No. Don't die," I warned.

"What fun would that be?" Chloe responded.

Walking away again, though I wasn't the oldest of us three, I was certainly the most relaxed out of the group. Both of them got very excited over things, and coming to the beach, it allowed them to run around with the dogs and play with small creatures along the way. I preferred to walk the beach of two miles, leaving them behind.

Mafic rocks ahead blocked the path, saying this was the end of the beach. Green hills began to climb upward, until the Highlands grew. On that horizon, there weren't any clouds, when it was expected that Scotland was always rainy. That didn't end up being the case. My skin burned here under the sun. I was happy to spend my summer in Scotland. If I had my choice, I would spend my summer just on a beach, watching the waves roll in.

Three years prior, I had encountered other mafic rocks, this time on a beach in England, just outside of London. I hid among the tall, green grass that blew in the wind. It had been rainy and cold, a typical British day, but the other girls in my group, not the nature type, had dared each other at every beach to run out, stick their feet in and run back. The girls I was with were similar to the girls I was with now, abundantly happy people that got excited over everything, just like Rachel and Chloe. Then, I was a young, inexperienced traveler, who followed others.

In the long, green grass, I sat on the white sand that over looked the gray water. London was the promised land that day, but a quick stop at the beach never hurt anyone. Coming from a landlocked state, the beach was a dream. It was always my dream, at least, because the water was never ending. In the ocean, I could swim anywhere. Though I had been excited for London, I ended up wanting to stay on the beach forever. It was different than California's, where there were always too many people.

At nineteen, on the beach in North Berwick, I turned my back to the mafic rocks and started on my way back. Rachel and Chloe ran beside me, both touching the rock, obviously racing.

"I won," Chloe said.

"That's only because I have a rock in my shoe," Rachel countered.

"When don't you?" I asked.

"Race you up," Chloe said, already climbing. Rachel, the oldest of us, followed quickly.

The dark boulders stood about thirty feet, covering the whole tan sand, making a wall. Easily, the two climbed up and up, reaching the top. Both smiled and waved. Rachel was almost knocked off balance with her excited waving, and I lost a year of my life in fear as she almost fell off.

"I'm good," she called down.

"How are you two not dead?" I asked. Through the whole trip, I questioned as they climbed on anything they could, even once on an unsteady walk over a five hundred foot drop of a cliff.

Neither of them knew and went back to climbing.

Not wanting to have a heart attack, I turned my back to them and walked back along the beach. I came to where they had once been, the small crab gone now, and I lied down in the sand. Yet damp under my body, the ocean waves only touched my bare feet, sometimes rolling up to my calves. It was cold, almost icy, and it left my legs tingling. Underneath me, I felt the sand shift. Something crawled under my arm, and I made myself freeze at the touch. I needed to tough out my fears of insects, and I let it crawl over my skin as I faced the sky. I tried to think of it as sunbathing.

The first time I remember sunbathing was when I was seven, on the beach of a lake in northern Minnesota on a vacation with my family. I didn't dare swim in the water as the sea weed grew upward, ready to wrap around my leg and pull me under. That was my fear back then, where if I wanted to swim, I chose the chlorine filled swimming pool in the resort.

Thankfully in oceans, seaweed isn't so close to the surface, so by the time the seaweed grew upward, I swam on the top and was never touched. With this warm day, I regretted not going to Portebello Beach, getting one last swim in there before returning home in a week. For the past two months in Scotland, every chance I had to be by the sea, I took it. Occasionally I swam, once going out so far that I touched a red buoy. I loved to swim, to almost be swallowed whole, to glide through, to dive down and look up to see all sunshine mixed waves. Different hues swirled as little sand shards floated on the top. Swimming back up, I floated usually, going up and down. The sun always burned the brightest here.

Mostly, I walked by the water, quietly and easily. My feet slid into the sand. Even the smallest waves threatened to knock me over and take me back. This was my favorite beach with the crystallized sand and clear waves. It was pure. No beach was like another, all beaches had their own personality. This beach, on the horizon, there was that island, but for the rest of the way out, it was never ending.

I imagined what it would be like to have someone walk with me, like some sort of romantic scene. I promised myself that I was going to kiss a Scottish boy when I came here. If he walked beside me, we would be like those cute couples everyone sees and hates. But then I would end up hating it, because he would start talking and annoy me. Walking alone was the best.

Mist blanketed me. The dark clouds had finally toppled the sun, turning the brilliant blue sky gray. In Scotland, I was prepared for the rain. It came down quickly. Families took off running for shore, some just popped up umbrellas and waited for it to stop. Rachel and Chloe bounded toward me, ready to head back to Edinburgh.

"I won," Chloe said, out of breath.

"I have another rock in my shoe!" Rachel exclaimed. "Sophie, you ready?"

"Yeah," I lied.