

2 Queers on a Seaside Bench Discussing the Ocean

by Joey Delgado

An impromptu anniversary weekend up the coast.

Our hotel was parallel with the highway, which was parallel with the aforementioned bench, which was parallel with a footpath, which was parallel with the shore, which was slowly eroded by the Pacific.

He was sitting on the bench, smoking. We still smoke; not in a tragic, death wish kind of way, but a glamorous throwback kind of way; we're childless and carefree. We can do whatever we want. Vanity will force us to quit before health scares do. That's what I tell myself, at least.

I lit a cigarette.

He said, I came out here last night to smoke. It was so dark. I couldn't see the ocean, but I heard it.

I said, So calming, right?

No, he said. Made me feel empty. A little sad. It's better now that I can see it.

So it was to be one of those weekends, where we don't talk like normal people, and where a single sentence can shatter us in a million pieces or gird us for eight more years. My mind flickered through all those nights when I turned on an oscillating fan, not for air circulation, but for white noise. It never occurred to me that white noise was anything but calming. For him: limbo, purgatory, Robert Frost, white lilies, whitecaps, white noise.

Meaning it: I think it's calming. Look how vast, though. It's hard to believe, thousands of years ago, people were fearless enough to see what's over there.

I pointed to the horizon.

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He nodded.

Also, I continued, this little swatch of ocean contains more life than the whole of dry land. It makes me feel small.

Hurriedly I said, But not in a bad way. In a content, knowing way.

Why did I always try to say something "profound" in front of an ocean?

He looked at me, accustomed to my need for people to know I was alright.

A seagull, the whisper of Golden Poppies in a California breeze, a lesbian couple walking their Bichon named Bingley—Where's Mr. Darcy, I asked. We *had* a Mr. Darcy, one responded.—a cup of coffee from the hotel lobby. Warm steam rose out of the biodegradable cup, thawing out my face. It's amazing how the simplicity of something like warmth transformed our seaside conversation from something ominous to something comforting to something familiar.

