

La mar

My sea hisses and sparkles – at least this is how colorful environmental posters, stuck on the walls all around the city say, reminding us we should all get involved in saving our herring. And I am sure we do have to save herring, and that the sea, its presence in our lives and its preservation is a base for our feeling of balance, belonging and home. This is a story about and for the sea – a big friend for people like me, who breathe salty air from the very beginning.

Our sea, for some, might not seem perfect – not only it hisses and sparkles, but it is also icy cold most of the time. This fact doesn't stop my family and me from swimming in its waters from April till late October – we realised once that it's not fair to our sea to wait till it gets warm – if you want the sea to be warm, there are warm seas out there, but you must accept your own sea as it is – with loud seagulls above the water and crows at the beach, who keep trying to sneak your treats, prepared for the picnic, with pine cones that somehow get in the sand and cause pain if stepped on, but also together with their pinetree mothers create this chilly spicy smell you always remember, even if far from home.

I know everyone's sea is different all around the world, I know it from many books about the sea on my bookshelf and from stories my grandmother used to tell me about mysterious undines and courageous pirates and poor fishermen, full of hope. I broke my leg a couple of autumns ago and had to stay at the hospital, and the girl I liked very much brought me her favourite book: “I've read it like seven times” she said, “you will also like it for sure” she said. It was Ernest Hemingway's “Old man and the sea” and I did like it, not just because I liked the girl. I remember how the fisherman was explaining why his fellow old fisherman friends refer to the sea as “la mar”, as if the sea was her, a woman: “*He always thought of the sea as 'la mar' which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her.*” I liked this idea, but I also knew it was a case for some other, warm and faraway sea – because I knew that mine – our sea, was obviously a boy: shaggy, edgy and unpredictable, but always very young.

I know what I'm saying: we live by the sea when it's summer, and don't want to miss a bit from it, so we find at least half an hour every day to visit an old – I mean *young* friend, no matter what the weather is like. Maybe, when you have to spend hours by car to get there, you won't be excited to go to the sea on a stormy day or in a foggy morning, let's say, at 6am. And if you only know the sea based on your summer vacation experience, then you can think of it too well, too. For the half of the year, when we live in a crumbling wooden house many kilometres away from the big city, I see sea every day: in the heat, when there are children

playing on the beach and bouncy inflatable balls fly back and forth, but the sand is covered with a mosaic of once colorful sunburned towels; right after the rain, when there is no one else at the coast, in a thunderstorm, when the water is black and looks angry, and in November, when it is prickly and starts to cover with ice.

And when the season is over and we go back to the city, I would sometimes have a dream about the sea, and then in the morning I would dress up warmly and go to the shore. It is easy to do: takes twenty minutes by trolleybus No. 22, I sit by the window and look how the old church, an abandoned shoemaker's workshop (they used to fix ladies' heels here and could sharpen some tools if you needed at times I haven't been born and didn't live in this city), dark grey parks, a school and a bakery move by. Then I get to the train station, which smells like tur and custard buns at the same time, pay about 1.20 euro for the ticket, now it is 20 more minutes by train – and there I am. It is not summer anymore, but it is still it, my sea, always there when needed.