



# SEA OF TRANQUILITY

A NOVEL

EMILY ST. JOHN  
MANDEL

Best-selling author of *THE GLASS HOTEL*  
and *STATION ELEVEN*



ALSO BY EMILY ST. JOHN MANDEL

*The Glass Hotel*

*Station Eleven*

*The Lola Quartet*

*The Singer's Gun*

*Last Night in Montreal*

S E A  
*of*  
T R A N Q U I L I T Y

Emily St. John Mandel



ALFRED A. KNOPF • NEW YORK • 2022

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK  
PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF

Copyright © 2022 by Emily St. John Mandel

All rights reserved. Published in the United States by Alfred A. Knopf, a  
division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

[www.aaknopf.com](http://www.aaknopf.com)

Knopf, Borzoi Books, and the colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin  
Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mandel, Emily St. John, [date] author.

Title: Sea of Tranquility : a novel / Emily St. John Mandel.

Description: First edition. | New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2022. | “This is a  
Borzoi book.”

Identifiers: LCCN 2021022674 (print) | LCCN 2021022675 (ebook) | ISBN  
9780593321447 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780593321454 (ebook) | ISBN  
9781524712174 (open market)

Subjects: GSAFD: Epic fiction. | Science fiction.

Classification: LCC PR9199.4.M3347 s43 2022 (print) | LCC PR9199.4.M3347  
(ebook) | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021022674>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021022675>

Ebook ISBN 9780593321454

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the  
product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to  
actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

A few sentences in this book appeared, in different form, in a short story  
published in the anthology *Imaginary Oklahoma* in 2013, an article published  
in *The New Republic* in 2014, and an essay published in *Humanities* in 2016.

Cover photograph by Stephen Coll / Millennium Images U.K.

Cover design by Abby Weintraub

ep\_prh\_6.0\_139683237\_c0\_r0

*For Cassia and Kevin*

# Contents

[Remittance / 1912](#)

[Mirella and Vincent / 2020](#)

[Last Book Tour on Earth / 2203](#)

[Bad Chickens / 2401](#)

[Last Book Tour on Earth / 2203](#)

[Mirella and Vincent / file corruption](#)

[Remittance / 1918, 1990, 2008](#)

[Anomaly.](#)

1

Remittance /

1912

Edwin St. John St. Andrew, eighteen years old, hauling the weight of his double-sainted name across the Atlantic by steamship, eyes narrowed against the wind on the upper deck: he holds the railing with gloved hands, impatient for a glimpse of the unknown, trying to discern something—anything!—beyond sea and sky, but all he sees are shades of endless gray. He's on his way to a different world. He's more or less at the halfway point between England and Canada. *I have been sent into exile*, he tells himself, and he knows he's being melodramatic, but nonetheless there's a ring of truth to it.

---

Edwin's ancestors include William the Conqueror. When Edwin's grandfather dies, his father will become an earl, and Edwin went to two of the best schools in the country. But there was never much of a future for him back in England. There are very few professions that a gentleman can take up, and none of them are of interest to Edwin. The family estate is destined to go to his oldest brother, Gilbert, so he stands to inherit nothing. (The middle brother, Niall, is in Australia already.) Edwin might have clung to England a little longer, but he holds secretly radical views which emerged unexpectedly at a dinner party, thus speeding up his fate.

---



In a flash of wild optimism, Edwin has his occupation recorded as “farmer” on the ship’s manifest. It occurs to him later, in a contemplative moment out on deck, that he’s never so much as touched a spade.

In Halifax he finds lodging by the port, a boardinghouse where he's able to secure a corner room on the second floor, overlooking the harbor. He wakes that first morning to a wonderfully lively scene outside his window. A large merchant ship has arrived, and he's close enough to hear the jovial curses of the men unloading barrels and sacks and crates. He spends much of that first day gazing out the window, like a cat. He planned to go west immediately, but it's so easy to linger in Halifax, where he falls prey to a personal weakness he's been aware of all his life: Edwin is capable of action but prone to inertia. He likes sitting by his window. There's a constant movement of people and ships. He doesn't want to leave, so he stays.

---

"Oh, just trying to puzzle out my next move, I suppose," he says to the proprietor, when she makes gentle inquiries. Her name is Mrs. Donnelly. She's from Newfoundland. Her accent confounds him. She sounds like she's from Bristol and also from Ireland, simultaneously, but then sometimes he hears Scotland. The rooms are clean and she's an excellent cook.

---

Sailors pass by his window in jostling waves. They rarely look up. He enjoys watching them but dares not make any movement toward them. Besides, they have each other. When drunk they put their arms around one another's shoulders and he feels a piercing envy.

---

(Could he go to sea? Of course not. He discards the idea as soon as it arises. He once heard of a remittance man who reinvented himself as a sailor, but Edwin's a man of leisure through and through.)

---

He loves watching the boats come in, steamships pulling into the harbor with an aura of Europe still clinging to their decks.

---

He takes walks in the mornings and again in the afternoons. Down to the harbor, out to quiet residential areas, in and out of little shops under the striped awnings on Barrington Street. He likes to ride the electric streetcar to the end of the line, and then come back, watching the shift from small houses to larger houses to the commercial buildings downtown. He likes buying things that he doesn't especially need: a loaf of bread, a postcard or two, a bouquet of flowers. This could be a life, he finds himself thinking. It could be as simple as this. No family, no job, just a few simple pleasures and clean sheets to fall into at the end of the day, a regular allowance from home. A life of solitude could be a very pleasant thing.

---

He begins buying flowers every few days, which he places on his dresser in a cheap vase. He spends a long time gazing at them. He wishes he were an artist, to draw them and in so doing to see them more clearly.



---

Could he learn to draw? He has time and money. It's as good an idea as any. He makes inquiries with Mrs. Donnelly, who makes inquiries with a friend, and a short time later Edwin is in the parlor of a woman who trained as a painter. He spends quiet hours sketching flowers and vases, learning the fundamentals of shading and proportion. The woman's name is Laetitia Russell. She wears a wedding ring, but the location of her husband is unclear. She lives in a tidy wooden house with three children and a widowed sister, an unobtrusive chaperone who knits endless scarves in a corner of the room, so that for the rest of his life Edwin associates drawing with the clicking of knitting needles.

---

He's been living at the boardinghouse for six months when Reginald arrives. Reginald, he can tell at once, is not prone to inertia. Reginald has immediate plans to go west. He's two years older than Edwin, a fellow old Etonian, third son of a viscount, and his eyes are beautiful, a deep grayish blue. Like Edwin, his plans involve establishing himself as a gentleman farmer, but unlike Edwin, he's actually taken steps to achieve this and has been corresponding with a man who wishes to sell a farm in Saskatchewan.

"Six months," Reginald repeats at breakfast, not quite believing it. He stops spreading jam on his toast for a moment, seemingly unsure if he heard correctly. "Six *months*? Six months *here*."

"Yes," Edwin says lightly. "Six very agreeable months, I might add." He tries to catch Mrs. Donnelly's eye, but she's focusing intently on pouring tea. She thinks he's a little touched, he can tell.

"Interesting." Reginald spreads jam on his toast. "I don't suppose we're hoping to be called home, are we? Clinging to the edge of the Atlantic, staying as close as we can to king and country?"

---

This stings a little, so when Reginald lights out for the west the following week, Edwin accepts an invitation to join him. There's pleasure in action, he decides, as the train leaves the city. They've booked first-class passage on a delightful train that features an onboard post office and barbershop, where Edwin writes a postcard to Gilbert and enjoys a hot shave and a haircut while watching the forests and lakes and small towns slip past the windows. When the train stops at Ottawa he doesn't disembark, just stays on board, sketching the lines of the station.

---

The forests and lakes and small towns subside into plains. The prairies are initially interesting, then tedious, then unsettling. There's too much of them, that's the problem. The scale is wrong. The train crawls like a millipede through endless grass. He can see from horizon to horizon. He feels terribly overexposed.

---

"This is the life," Reginald says, when at last they arrive, standing in the doorway of his new farmhouse. The farm is a few miles outside Prince Albert. It is a sea of mud. Reginald purchased it, sight unseen, from a disconsolate Englishman in his late twenties—another remittance man, Edwin can't help but suspect—who's thoroughly failed to make a go of it here and is headed back east to take a desk job in Ottawa. Reginald is very carefully not thinking about this man, Edwin can see that.

---

Can a house be haunted by failure? When Edwin steps through the door of the farmhouse, he feels immediately ill at ease, so he lingers out on the front porch. It's a well-built house—the previous owner was well-funded once—but the place is unhappy in a way that Edwin can't entirely explain.

---

“There’s...a lot of sky here, isn’t there?” Edwin ventures. And a lot of mud. Really an astonishing amount of mud. It glitters under the sun as far as he can see.

“Just wide-open spaces and fresh air,” Reginald says, gazing out at the horrifically featureless horizon. Edwin can see another farmhouse, far away, hazy with distance. The sky is aggressively blue. That night they dine on buttered eggs—the only thing Reginald knows how to cook—and salt pork. Reginald seems subdued.

“I suppose it’s quite hard work, farming?” he says, after a while. “Physically taxing.”

“I suppose so.” When Edwin imagined himself in the new world, he always saw himself in his own farm—a verdant landscape of, well, of some unspecified crop, tidy but also vast—but in truth he never thought much about what the work of farming might actually entail. Taking care of horses, he supposes. Doing a bit of gardening. Digging up fields. But then what? What do you actually do with the fields, once you’ve dug them up? What are you digging for?

He feels himself teetering on the edge of an abyss. “Reginald, my old friend,” he says, “what does a fellow have to do to get a drink around here?”

---

“You *reap*,” Edwin says to himself, on his third glass. “That’s the word for it. You dig up the fields, you sow things in the fields, then you reap.” He sips his drink.

“You reap what?” Reginald has a pleasant way about him when he’s drunk, as if nothing could possibly offend him. He’s been leaning back in his chair, smiling into the empty air.

“Well, that’s just it, isn’t it,” Edwin says, and pours himself another glass.