

TIDEPOOL

"Baseline"

Episode 101

Written by

[First Draft]

COLD OPEN

EXT. CANNON BEACH, OREGON - ROCKY SHORE - DAWN

Black screen. The sound of the Pacific before we see it -- not crashing, but breathing. A slow, heavy inhale of water pulling back over stone.

FADE IN on rock. Wet, dark basalt, close enough to see the texture. Water recedes, revealing a shallow depression in the stone -- a tidepool, maybe eighteen inches across. The water inside is still while the ocean withdraws around it.

Inside the pool: a cluster of purple sea urchins. An ochre sea star, one arm draped over the pool's lip. A hermit crab picking its way across a mat of coralline algae. A universe in a divot.

LENA (V.O.)

A tidepool is a closed system on a schedule it didn't choose. Twice a day the ocean connects it to everything. Twice a day the water drops and it's on its own. Whatever's inside has to be enough.

A hand enters frame -- woman's hand, no rings, short nails, a small scar across the knuckle of the index finger. The hand places a white PVC quadrat frame around a section of the pool. Practiced. Efficient.

Wider now. DR. LENA YOON (41) crouches on the rocks in rubber boots and a faded Gore-Tex jacket. She photographs the quadrat with a waterproof camera, checks the image, adjusts, shoots again. She writes in a yellow Rite in the Rain field notebook. Her handwriting is small and precise.

She does not look up at the ocean. She does not look up at the sky, which is doing something extraordinary -- bands of pink and copper layered above Haystack Rock, the kind of sunrise that makes tourists pull over. Lena has her headlamp on. She's counting.

LENA (V.O.)

Site Seven. Ochre star density,  
upper quadrat: three individuals.  
Down from five, same period last  
year. Consistent with  
post-wasting recruitment lag.  
Urchin density holding. Chiton --  
one Mopalia, tucked under the  
overhang where it always is.

She moves to the next quadrat position, stepping carefully  
on the rocks. Her boots find the good footholds without  
her looking -- muscle memory from nine years of the same  
path at the same tide.

In the distance, a RUNNER passes along the wet sand with a  
golden retriever. Lena glances up, gives a single nod,  
goes back to work. The runner waves. Neither of them slows  
down.

EXT. ROCKY SHORE - LATER

The tide is coming in. Water laps at Lena's boots. She  
packs her quadrat frames, camera, and notebook into a dry  
bag with the efficiency of someone who has packed this bag  
a thousand times. She checks her watch. She has done this  
so many times she knows the tide to the minute.

She walks up the rocks toward the parking area. Her truck  
-- a salt-eaten Subaru Outback with a research station  
decal on the door -- sits alone. The parking lot is empty.  
It is 6:47 AM.

TITLE CARD: TIDEPOOL

END COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. LENA'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - MORNING

A rented cottage, clean to the point of austerity. Not  
decorated -- inhabited. The only signs of personality are  
functional: a tide chart pinned to the wall by the coffee  
maker, a row of field notebooks on a shelf above the table

(years stamped on the spines in Sharpie: 2016, 2017, 2018... through 2025), and a single framed photo on the fridge -- Lena and an OLDER WOMAN at what looks like a graduation. Mother, probably.

Lena enters, hangs her jacket on a hook by the door. She puts a kettle on. While it heats, she transfers numbers from her field notebook into a laptop -- a spreadsheet with hundreds of rows, color-coded. She does this standing at the counter, eating a granola bar she doesn't appear to taste.

Her phone buzzes. A text. She glances at it:

SCREEN: YUMI (sister): "Happy Tuesday! Kids say hi. Call me when you have a sec?"

Lena types: "In the middle of data entry. Will try later this week." She sends it. Goes back to the spreadsheet. The kettle boils. She makes tea, sits down, continues entering data. The tea steams, then stops steaming. She hasn't touched it.

LENA (V.O.)

Monitoring requires consistency.  
Same sites, same methods, same  
intervals. The value is in the  
repetition. One observation tells  
you nothing. A thousand tells you  
everything.

INT. COASTAL RESEARCH STATION - DAY

A low-slung building wedged between the coast highway and a state park. Part lab, part office, part storage for sampling equipment. The vibe is underfunded academic -- mismatched furniture, a whiteboard covered in fading schedules, an ancient coffee machine that everyone relies on and nobody cleans.

Lena enters the lab. Two other RESEARCHERS are working -- PATRICIA (50s, seabird ecology) and DOUG (60s, nearshore fish, close to retirement). The interactions are warm but practiced. These people have shared a workspace for years without becoming close.

PATRICIA

Low tide any good?

LENA

Stars are still down at Seven.  
Three in the upper quadrat.

PATRICIA

Hmm.

LENA

Urchins are fine, though. If  
anything they're up.

DOUG

(not looking up from his  
microscope)

Heard we're getting a grad  
student next week.

LENA

What?

DOUG

Summer field assistant. Rosen's  
lab at OSU. Some master's kid  
doing rocky intertidal.

LENA

Nobody told me about this.

DOUG

Linda sent an email last week.  
Check your inbox once in a while.

Lena pulls up her email on the lab computer. Scrolls.  
Finds it. Reads. Her expression doesn't change but she  
sits very still for a moment.

LENA

He's going to be at my sites?

DOUG

Shared sites, Lena. They were  
shared before you got here.

Lena reads the email again. Then she opens her spreadsheet  
and goes back to work. Patricia and Doug exchange a look

-- not unkind, but knowing. They've seen this before. Lena doesn't notice the look.

EXT. CANNON BEACH - TOWN - DAY

Establishing. Cannon Beach is beautiful in the way that tourist towns on the Oregon coast are beautiful -- galleries, taffy shops, expensive rain gear, Haystack Rock presiding over everything like a geological bouncer. It's shoulder season. Not empty, not packed.

Lena walks through town to the grocery store. She passes people. Some nod. She nods back. Nobody stops to talk. This is not unfriendliness. This is the social contract she has established over nine years: I see you. You see me. That's enough.

In the store, she buys the same things she always buys: instant oatmeal, apples, canned soup, coffee, peanut butter. The CASHIER (20s, part-time, been here two years) rings her up.

CASHIER

Find everything okay?

LENA

Yes, thank you.

That's the whole interaction. Lena carries her bag to her car. She does not linger.

EXT. ROCKY SHORE - SITE 4 - LATE AFTERNOON

Late-day light. The tide is dropping again -- Lena is back for her afternoon monitoring window. A different set of sites this time. She works methodically, photographing, counting, recording.

She reaches Site 4 -- a large, complex pool in a rock bench, full of life. She crouches and works for a long time. She's thorough. She's patient. She talks to herself as she counts, a murmured litany of Latin names.

LENA (V.O.)

The thing about long-term monitoring is that you have to believe in accumulation. That the

data you collect today means  
nothing by itself. It only  
matters in aggregate. You're not  
recording a moment. You're  
building a record. The record is  
what has value.

She finishes. Sits on a dry rock above the pools. Looks out at the water. For a moment she's not working. She's just sitting.

A couple walks along the beach below her -- young, holding hands, laughing about something. They stop to look at a tidepool. The woman crouches down, points at something. The man leans over her shoulder. They're delighted.

Lena watches them for a moment. Something crosses her face -- not sadness exactly. More like recognition of a frequency she's tuned out for so long she forgot it existed. Then it's gone. She picks up her dry bag and heads back up the rocks.

INT. LENA'S COTTAGE - EVENING

Lena at the kitchen table, laptop open, entering data. A bowl of canned soup, half-eaten, pushed to the side. Her phone on the table. Yumi's text still unanswered -- the "will try later this week" hanging there like a door held slightly open.

She finishes the data entry. Closes the laptop. Opens it again. Pulls up the email about the grad student.

His name is MARCO REYES. Second-year MS, Oregon State. Research interest: community recovery dynamics in rocky intertidal systems following pulse disturbance events. There's a small faculty photo -- young, dark hair, smiling wider than a headshot requires.

Lena reads his research summary. He wants to study recolonization patterns. She's been watching recolonization for nine years. She should be a perfect resource for him. The thought does not appear to comfort her.

She closes the laptop. Washes the soup bowl. Goes to bed. It is 9:15 PM.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. ROCKY SHORE - SITE 7 - DAWN (DAYS LATER)

Another low tide. Lena is at Site 7, working. The runner with the golden retriever passes. Same nod. Same wave.

A car pulls into the parking area. Not a local car -- rental plates, clean. MARCO REYES (26) gets out. He's wearing brand-new Xtratufs -- the rubber boots every coastal field biologist wears, but his are obviously just-bought, no salt stains, no scuffs. He carries a backpack and a clipboard. He looks out at the rocks with the expression of someone who has studied a place on Google Maps and is now confronting the actual terrain.

He spots Lena on the rocks. Picks his way down carefully, slipping once on wet seaweed, catching himself.

MARCO

Dr. Yoon?

Lena looks up. She knew he was coming today. She is nonetheless unprepared.

LENA

You're early. Low tide isn't for another forty minutes.

MARCO

Yeah, I know, I just -- I wanted to get oriented before we started. I'm Marco. Reyes. From Rosen's lab?

LENA

I know who you are. Watch the Fucus on that ledge, it's slippery.

Marco steps around the rockweed. He crouches near her, looking at the tidepool she's working on. His face lights up.

MARCO

Oh wow. Is that Pisaster? Three of them?

LENA

Down from five. Same period last year.

MARCO

Still, three is pretty good for post-SSWD, right? Rosen said most sites on the central coast are still at near-zero recruitment.

Lena looks at him. He's not wrong. She's slightly annoyed that he's not wrong.

LENA

These sites have been recovering faster than most. I've been tracking it.

MARCO

For how long?

LENA

Nine years.

MARCO

(genuine awe)

Nine years. That's -- I mean, that data set must be incredible.

Lena doesn't respond to the compliment. She hands him a spare quadrat frame.

LENA

Lower intertidal, twenty-meter intervals, start at the orange bolt. Photograph each quadrat. Count everything you can identify and mark what you can't. I'll check your IDs after.

MARCO

Got it. Should I --

LENA

Start at the orange bolt.  
Marco nods, takes the frame, heads down the rocks. He slips again. Lena watches. She does not offer advice on the footing.

EXT. ROCKY SHORE - LATER

Lena and Marco work in parallel. She's fast and silent. He's slower and mutters to himself as he works, narrating his own identifications. Occasionally he calls out a question.

MARCO

(from twenty meters away)

Dr. Yoon? This anemone --  
Anthopleura? I can't tell if it's  
elegantissima or sola.

LENA

(without looking up)

How big?

MARCO

Like... three centimeters?

LENA

Column color?

MARCO

Greenish brown.

LENA

Aggregated or solitary?

MARCO

There's about twelve of them all  
clustered together.

LENA

Elegantissima. If it's alone and  
bigger, sola.

MARCO

Right. Yeah. That makes sense.

He writes it down. Lena goes back to her count. A beat.  
Then:

MARCO

Have you always been out here?

Like, before the station?

Lena stops counting. The question is personal. Not invasive, just... personal. She has to recalibrate.

LENA

I came for a two-year postdoc.

That was nine years ago.

MARCO

What made you stay?

Long pause. Lena resumes counting.

LENA

The data set.

INT. COASTAL RESEARCH STATION - LAB - DAY

Lena reviews Marco's field sheets at her desk. She makes small corrections with a red pen -- a misidentified limpet, a density count that's off by one. She's thorough. She is also, the audience might notice, giving this more attention than it requires. She has nothing else to do today. This is something to do.

Marco is across the lab, chatting with Patricia. He's animated, asking about her seabird work, about Cannon Beach, about where to eat. Patricia is charmed -- she laughs at something he says. Lena can hear the conversation but doesn't join it.

MARCO

(to Patricia)

What about that Thai place up in Seaside? Any good?

PATRICIA

Bangkok Bay? It's great. I go probably once a week.

MARCO

Nice. Dr. Yoon, have you been?

The Thai place?

Lena looks up from his field sheets. She has to think about it.

LENA

I don't think so. No.

MARCO

You've been here nine years and  
you haven't been to the Thai  
place?

LENA

I cook at home mostly.  
She goes back to his field sheets. Marco looks at  
Patricia. Patricia gives a tiny shrug that says: that's  
Lena.

EXT. ROCKY SHORE - SITE 4 - MAGIC HOUR

Late afternoon monitoring. Lena is alone again -- Marco's  
schedule doesn't cover the afternoon window. She works her  
way through Site 4, the big complex pool.

LENA (V.O.)

Isolated populations develop  
their own internal dynamics. They  
don't need constant connection to  
the broader system to sustain  
themselves. They cycle through  
recruitment and mortality on  
their own schedule. They need  
enough volume to buffer against  
evaporation, enough crevice space  
for thermal refuge. If the  
architecture of the pool is  
right, a population can persist  
indefinitely in isolation.

She finishes her count. Sits on the rocks above Site 4.  
Takes out her phone. Opens Yumi's text from days ago.  
Starts to type a response. Stops. Deletes it. Puts the  
phone away.

The sun is getting low. Haystack Rock throws a long shadow  
across the sand. Lena sits there a moment longer than she  
needs to. Then she stands, picks up her gear, and walks  
back to the parking lot.

Her Subaru is the only car there again.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. LENA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Lena at the table. Laptop, data. Canned soup. The field notebooks on the shelf behind her -- ten spines, ten years almost. She enters numbers with the same careful rhythm she's used all day. Outside, rain starts. She doesn't look up.

She finishes. Closes the laptop. Sits in the quiet kitchen with the rain outside. Looks at the tide chart on the wall. Tomorrow's low is at 5:23 AM. She'll be up at 4:30.

She washes her bowl. Goes to the living room -- a couch, a lamp, a stack of scientific journals on the side table. No TV. She picks up a journal. Reads. Or tries to. Her eyes go to the window where the rain is coming down hard now.

She picks up her phone. Scrolls to Yumi's name. Her thumb hovers over the call button. The phone's clock reads 9:38 PM. San Jose is the same time zone. Yumi is probably putting the kids down.

Lena sets the phone on the side table. She goes back to the journal. After a moment, she gets up and makes tea. This time, she drinks it.

EXT. ROCKY SHORE - SITE 7 - DAWN

Next morning. Overcast, the light flat and gray. Lena at Site 7 in the pre-dawn. She's alone. The runner with the retriever hasn't appeared yet. The tide is out. The pools are exposed.

She crouches over the upper quadrat at Site 7. Begins her count. Stops. Looks again. Moves her headlamp closer.

In the pool, next to the three remaining ochre stars, tucked into a crevice: a tiny Pisaster, maybe two centimeters across. A juvenile. New recruitment. It wasn't there two days ago.

Lena photographs it. Then photographs it again. She measures it with calipers -- careful, gentle, the way you'd handle something rare. She writes in her notebook. Her handwriting, usually rigid, has the faintest tremor -- not emotion, just the cold. Maybe.

LENA (V.O.)

New recruit. *Pisaster ochraceus*.  
Approximately twenty millimeters.  
Site Seven, upper quadrat,  
northeast crevice. First juvenile  
recorded at this site in... three  
years.

She sits back on her heels. Looks at the tiny star in its crevice. It's nothing -- one animal, one pool, one morning. It means nothing by itself.

But she writes it down.

The runner appears in the distance with the golden retriever. Lena looks up. This time, instead of the nod, she raises her hand -- a full wave, small but deliberate. The runner waves back.

Lena turns back to her work. The tide is still out. She has time.

LENA (V.O.)

One observation tells you  
nothing. But you record it  
anyway. That's the job. You  
record it and you come back  
tomorrow and you see if it's  
still there.

Wide shot. Lena alone on the rocks, headlamp cutting a small circle of light in the gray dawn. The ocean behind her, pulling back, leaving the pools exposed. She works.

END OF EPISODE