

# *Beneath the Watery Sun*

*By Anna Benedict*

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There are some days even the seagulls take shelter, and there is only me, alone in this microcosmic country. Staring out my window, out to the chimneys, out past the rain to the speckled clouds beyond.

There's a row of patches taped to my desk. Cinque Terre, Portovenere, Bayern, Roma, Budapest, Venezia. Trinity College Dublin, established 1592. I listen to soft music and run my fingers over the threads. A strange indoor re-traveling.

And the voice sings, *Would things be easier if there was a right way? Honey, there is no right way.*

I sit in my desk chair, feeling a strange kind of empty, falling inward, falling downward. Aching.

Honey, there is no right way to heal from this.

When the rain clears I wander this brick and glass city, maps guiding me – though really, there's a lot more crumbling than labeled ink-lines accounted for – and in a churchyard I strip a lavender stem of its blossoms. I press one with my tongue to the roof of my mouth. I hold my breath, let the musky bitter sweetness fill my head. Beneath the watery sun, I close my eyes.

In Venice, he told me to go to the bridge he'd once sat on for hours calling me. But now we and Venice are underwater and we cannot go back – the giant clocktower chimes just above the brine, and the water is still rising. One chime, two, three, this is not the future I wanted to follow, this is not when I thought we would end, not where I thought we – I – would be.

The echoes. The ricochets. A magpie beats its wings and I feel its wind on my face miles away, and I wonder if he can, too, beyond the sea.

I can't stop thinking of the unfolding of time, the infinite paths of possibility reduced. The layered-ness of the space around me, castoffs of consequence. Past crumbling into present. I can't stop thinking of the haunting quiet of the west, this layer just – emptied.

## Beneath the Watery Sun

On Grafton Street at dusk, the musician plucks her guitar, vibrations echoing – I close my eyes and feel my heartstrings harmonize, but my feet do not touch the ground, and I do not stop to listen.

I escape, enter a tourist shop and catch my own eyes in every mirror. This. This is me. This is who I am. I hold a potpourri satchel to my nose and breathe deeply, run my fingers over cable-knit sweaters. I am still here.

I speed past one face, another, and I pick out pieces of strange familiarity in the strangers who pass by – a shoulder width here, a certain gait there – but I'm the first to break contact when their eyes catch mine. Bundled, missing, yearning.

And the lights on the Liffey stop me, walking home in the dark. A swan slides by in the night glow, and for a moment I am still.

And now, and now, and now – this is the waving hour, the sweaty nighttime spent in a daze, feeling alone among camaraderie. I stare drunkenly at a sparkle on the ground and watch it catch the light. I look out at the faces of those who pass, and suddenly I'm thrown back into the chaos, my body convulsing. Because none of them are him, none of them are like him. I stumble. The flaring, flashing lights catch me from all sides and my reflection in the storefront windows haunts me strobe-speed. I'm hiding, startled, in the night.

Girl, get him out of your head, he's changed past who you remember. Focus on the blisters on the bottom of your feet, the pain you feel as you walk. Focus on the ground, the cobblestones beneath your toes. Breathe, for god's sake breathe.

I stand on the cliffs of Inishmore and the barrenness makes my lungs ache. Throw him to the wind, honey, he's not yours anymore. Look out to the sea. Gasp in, and in, and in. You are too vast for his down-looking eyes, your love too big for him to hold.

And girl, just remember –

That sometimes there's a joy that rocks you in your sleep, and you wake up laughing.

That sometimes, you lie on your bed and stare at the ceiling, and a friend's taped you lyrics up there on a sheet of scrap paper, a lopsided smiley face beneath, because he knows this is what you do. That there was a moment of one soul reaching to another on the steps of a nighttime piazza, as you both held empty gelato cups.

That goddamn, you're thankful for newfound friends, and old ones.

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Remember that once you walked with others past the twin smokestacks, past the grey tide-swell where the barges haul, to a lighthouse redder than spraycan graffiti. Remember the sun that shone on your face.

Remember the night you and three others lay tipsy-laughing on the soaked sidewalk in Ballyvaughan, and you watched a sky full of stars turn above. Remember the meteor, that sky-slice of celestial luck. Careening down, and down, and down, burning as it came.

Oh, fly me to the moon, I'm reeling, seething, screaming, alive. I feel a Vitruvian woman, arms wide, chest bared, stilled on a page mid-motion. Ready to embrace the whole damn world.

Because I am here. I am here.

I am here.