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I – DAWN

*But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

DAWN – SEPTEMBER 2ND 1979
ALDEBURGH BEACH

Under the fluid metal of a steel-blue sky, the body of a young woman strokes silently through the dawn waves. Her legs are extended, the icy water chilling her skin, her arms reaching for resolution in the graininess of the dawn. As she glides lazily through the current, she disturbs the balance of the channel, releasing a surge of rings, strong and certain. The greens and greys of the water's surface feel thick like sugar around her waist, her wash dragging a chain of fishing buoys from their jaded rest, allowing the wearied gulls no sleep. The project that she has pursued over the past months is near complete, but she is acutely conscious that her true search is as yet unfulfilled.

She reaches a platform around a hundred yards from the shore and looks back at the now familiar view. She scans the coast from the Martello Tower in the south, past the town buildings, towards the headlands at Thorpeness in the north, searching for a clue, any small clue, to the mystery that has yet eluded her. Frustrated, she dives again into the sea and vanishes. A minute, a minute and a half, two minutes go by, before her lean and lithe body breaches the surface of the frigid waters and she shouts into the sparkling air, panting with her desire for resolution. She repeats the cycle three times, each dive a little deeper and longer, each surface expulsion of breath more violent, before swimming back to the platform in a vigorous crawl. As deep as she dives, the depths of the sea hold their secrets still in private dignity.

She pulls herself partly up on to the decking; threading her fingers loosely through the strands of hemp, pulling the

rope taut so that the muscles tighten around her neck and her stomach coils and unwinds in rapturous imitation of life. The platform has been bleached by the action of sun and waves. Her exploration is intended only for her own knowledge, her exercise for the solitary pleasure of exertion; the deck ensures no possibility of observation, no attention from passing strangers. This is her dawn sanctuary, precious moments of independence composed before the world has awoken, determination formed in her spiritual intercourse with the sea.

Now fully aboard the platform, she lies for a while in the cold air, satisfied and breathless, her boyish body shimmering in the low rays of the early sun, young and defiant, surveying the peaceful shoreline, searching for some further sign or signal to proceed. Then, still dissatisfied by what she sees, she slips back silently into the deep waters, breaking the surf that dances in the amber light, letting the cool mouths wash the last taste of night from her skin; her lungs full, her body flowing with vital intensity, her legs kicking until they have been swallowed again by the green mist of the underwater, until there is no sign of her body in the churning.

There is no sea like the Aldeburgh Sea – it talks to me.

Edward FitzGerald, author of *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

As she surfaces for the last time, she hears the seaside air rent by the demented shrieking of herring gulls following the first boats back to the shore. The hour is early still and the beach all but deserted, clothed in its early morning sheen, the gentle chugging of a generator and the lapping of the waves the only other sounds to disturb its slumber. It is still too early for the shallowness of human pleasures to defile the shingle's quiet permanence.

On firm ground once more she relaxes, allows her

exhausted limbs to recover their energy. She feels her gulping lungs rise and fall in the faint sun, feels the delicious tease of endorphins throbbing through her body. The gulls are still laughing insanely around her head, laughing perhaps at the prodigy of her daring, copying the blushing smile that has begun to crease her face. She laughs herself, a deeper laugh this time that proceeds from the intensity of her soul. She knows she can survive, knows for sure she can secure her own future, craft her own destiny, realises all this, here on this beach, in the sharpness of the morning light. She laughs aloud with the gulls at her discovery, breaking the melancholy of their quiet introspection.

Surely there is a new brightness to her eyes that carves beauty into an otherwise plain face, surprising the faintness of her slim frame with the intensity of their strong glare, lighting up her cheeks, high and proud and distinct. She feels the wind rise to dry her skin, holds her head against the breeze, squinting at the day's new brightness, her cheeks glowing like shining berries in the early morning sun, the gusts threshing her short, dark hair into shimmering ribbons around her face. Vivid thoughts colour the shingle, her mind drunk on new-pressed freedom, drunk on freedom's possibilities, numbed a little by its unbounded dimensions, by the sea's redemption.

Later, Jade lies stretched out on a towel on the beach, studying the silver rings on her fingers, the sheen of drying moisture on her faintly tanned skin, the ripples of tone-shadow around her ribs. Thoughts pass through her mind like quicksilver, grains of new ideas bright as magnesium. She is brave shining fortune, newly crafted on this bitter shore; she feels torn between humility and delight. She is determined and her ambition plain for there is a knowing smile written across her face.

The wind drives the first clouds across the sun's pale disc and she feels the chill begin to penetrate her skin; pulls a

towel around her to stop shivering. She packs her costume tightly into her bag and pulls on canvas jeans, a scarf and a deep blue cardigan, threads the thick laces carefully back through her drill boots and hangs them over her shoulder. The pebbles are wet and new between her toes, the fresh breeze cool like the sea, carrying the tincture of seaweed and fish. The anonymity of her clothes distorting even more the smallness of her figure.

Externally, she has about her the purpose of one much older; the confidence of knowledge, a firmness of intent that signals much more to come. She is highly logical, allowing her to look past extraneous detail and perceive clearly that which others might overlook. She has a personal depth and dimension that few know intimately, but many admire. And she is her own worst critic, always wanting to do better, always striving towards the next thing, driven on by a desire to achieve for someone she has never known. For despite this outward bravado, Jade knows that inside her heart, she is still plagued by uncertainty. Her inner doubts nag her as always and she must shroud them jealously with her fiery independence, a contradiction and duality of character that belongs to one in love with hope for the future but held back by a depth of sadness, of past disappointment.

She has lived in Aldeburgh now for two months, researching and taking photographs. The idea for her project came from a chance encounter and then a deeper, but unconsummated relationship with a man, Martin, who has continued throughout to bemuse and confound her. His scars of boyhood had become hers by adoption and she had been increasingly intrigued by the contrast between the seasonal frivolity of this festival town and the grim reality of poverty and tragedy amongst the local fishing community with whom he had grown up.

As a foundling child herself, brought up by adoptive parents, her life so far had always been a struggle between

her own ambition and the emptiness that came from lack of knowledge of her natural family. Often in the past she had craved for the reassurance of a parent's guiding words, for the knowledge of unconditional love and support that comes from a mother and father. But now, at this moment of transition to womanhood, perhaps, this need for a reassuring arm had developed into the need to reach and touch the firmness of a lover's face for reassurance. Such rapid change in mind and body and clarity of intent is confusing and daunting.

The shredded scenery flapping around her dances in the rising wind, moving with the giddiness of an incomplete plot. She re-runs her earlier thoughts in her mind to confirm her own understanding of the next stages of her plan. Between hers and the profile of any child there is virtually nothing; but she is already attractive, desired, exciting. She brushes the silk of her scarf away from her eyes, takes her faithful camera from the denim bag lying by her side, lifts it and begins to work methodically again, as if physically stretching the pebble ridges of the beach like calico with her lens. In this way, she records for the last time the first moments of new life in the town, the prologue of the busying day.

Originally she found this primitive seascape lacking in inspiration, uninteresting, boring even, compared to the energy of the city, the buzz of college and friends. She had dismissed the indistinct colours of the shoreline that bleach to nothing under the influence of tides, the scorched and blasted heath, the watery marshland, the steady motion captured in stillness, rhythm in silence, preferring to record in the precision of black and white. But today even Technicolor photographs would be hardly sufficient to capture her newfound conceit, the mean scale of the seaside town no match for the exuberance of her soaring imagination.

She is aware of two figures approaching her from the north; early walkers, she can barely make out their outline against the surf and the morning sun. As they approach, one is revealed as a middle-aged man, the other a young girl, holding a pink-faced doll close to her chest, meandering loosely along the beach. She is in steady conversation; he walks silently, not returning her gentle chatter; related certainly, but walking distantly, she tripping through the sand in her own private game of hopscotch, he following more deliberately the gentle curvature of the shoreline, picking through the seaweed-stained stones as if he fears mines on a battlefield.

She recognises him of course. She has seen him before wandering the beach to the north of the town with his distinctive hat and old-fashioned jacket, sometimes walking his dogs. He even has a bit part in the story that she is weaving of this town's history in the 1950s. He is rarely seen in the town itself, living like a hermit in the great house up the coast. His family had owned and developed the Thorpeness holiday village but he was now the last survivor. Each time she had seen him before, he had always been alone and so she is intrigued by the sight of the young girl now skipping behind him. Maybe a niece, she wonders as she knows he is a bachelor. In the relative movement of these two figures, she sees two lives entwined, but somehow separated; two souls walking independent paths, playing with hidden language. She imagines their familial relation is saddened or broken by some unspoken history, but she is a little surprised by feelings of jealousy of the young girl's protector, something she herself lacks.

Their attention is caught by something amongst the driftwood. Jade watches as the little girl stoops to help a seabird that has become trapped in a patch of black pitch defiling the shoreline jetsam. For a while the girl struggles urgently to wash the oil-stained wings with brine trapped in

the pools by the water's edge. Her eyes are soon full of tears, but her guardian's eyes are already far off, drawn too readily by the glistening waves. From her vantage point, Jade calmly adjusts aperture and exposure to capture those two figures. Her actions are analytical and precise, measuring the light reflected on the surface of the water, the little girl's frustrated face and the tired shadows passing across that of her guardian. Although she is concentrating on technique, a verse is already in her mind, simple thoughts, like thrift in the wind. The poignancy of the moment captured in her lens. She feels a wave of sadness catch her by surprise, melancholy turning in the smoothness of the stones as they tease her toes underfoot.

*Eyes so red, eyes so red,
salt roses in an ash-limed bed.*

Jade finishes the first roll of film and reloads, then puts down her camera and continues to watch them, feeling a curious empathy with the girl's urgent administration to the seabird. She sees in her busy demeanour something of her own obstinacy and determination, elements of her own wilfulness. She feels even a little enraged at the way the man is ignoring the girl's efforts. She believes strongly in observation, working beyond visual expression or outward appearance. She won't interfere, but like an actress researching a character she will train her lens to reveal secrets, capturing the careful consideration of a face; a motion, unspoken thoughts and unwritten words. She had once heard a great actress describe her technique – how to speak the lines so that the words themselves reveal characterisation, rather than impose your own view on the subtlety of the author's lines. She had adopted this method in her own photography, but sometimes little things like this girl's tears can still break through the emotional detachment.

She wishes to go over and speak to the girl, but knows she should not if she wants to find the right moment to capture on film. From an early age she has nurtured this ability of detachment, unsentimental, clinical, playing games with the casual knowledge of personality. In this way she exaggerates the dichotomy between the man and his charge – the young girl desperate to save life, her tears mimicking the bird's distress, the man weary, detached from the tragedy, every so often stealing a glance at the emptiness of the sea. This is the nature of her idea of art – to breathe the exotic into the commonplace, make themes dance through light and tone, grain and exposure. To succeed she must cut forensically under the skin to uncover without artifice the raw emotions of pain and joy and love that lie beneath.

Now that he is closer she realises he is not so old as she first thought, probably only in his mid-forties, about the same age as her father would be, she thinks. She knows nothing at all of her father except that she had imagined him to be handsome like this man. He appears exhausted by the girl's concentration. She watches as he falters and seeks the convenient support of a lobster basket, almost breaking the slats with the unbalanced force of his fall, removing his hat to wipe his brow. She sees clear signs of the man's weariness all over his body – in his frown, in the weight of his shoulders, in the sombre colour of his corduroy jacket, his narrow tie and straight, greying hair. Her irritation turns to sympathy. The young girl does not notice his tiredness, and continues her futile resuscitation, oblivious to his heavy sighs, defiantly breathing her precious balm into the poor bird's darkened breast, unaware of the man's frown as he extends his legs in the morning stiffness. Has he almost given up, she asks herself; has he almost conceded defeat? Why, she wonders. What has caused this indolence?

The young girl is suddenly bored. She releases the gull in a flapping of wings and skips off lightly down the sand,

singing to herself a familiar rhyme of childlike repetition.

*Lavender's blue, dilly, dilly,
Lavender's green
When I am king, dilly, dilly,
You shall be queen.*

As she skips, the little girl continues to search the shoreline for new interest. Her face carries the unmarked innocence of childhood, hair wild and unbound in the wind. Her attention seems fickle and pretty, betraying the mercurial focus of the only child; her expensive floral pinafore dragging in the water as if it were cheap cloth, bright red sandals already caked in sand. Jade remembers how much like this she was once: she had owned a pair of red Clarks sandals like those, a long-gone image of her own remembered youth, a fragment of gauze stretched across her own brow. Fey, wilful, caring for all God's fallen creatures, a child inspired by nature, unlimited by the pretensions of adulthood, challenging every rule, every limitation on her own invention.

Even later, as a young girl, wandering the streets of her home town with the other children, dressed in simple cotton shorts and T-shirt like a poet's sprite, Jade would chase the demons of convention, smear paint and river-mud over her sun-baked arms, whoop along with the boys' boisterous war games, all feminine decoration exiled, bewitching them all, deferring to none. She was proud to be one of the boys but acting always as their superior.

Naturally, she had later succumbed to rebellion, descended into the darkness of teenage cynicism, swung violently from sprite to goblin, brooding, dark and rebellious. She had felt at that time consciously as if she had been entering a tunnel, watching helplessly as the economic recession gathered around them, almost remorseless in its

progress, tarnishing the bright ridges of her increasing academic achievements with the reality of their increasing lack of money. In response she had gone out of her way to earn her own living, create her own independence, taking part-time jobs, serving in teashops at the weekend, quickly throwing off the innocence of childhood. As she had created her own income, she increasingly rejected the urgings of her adoptive parents to settle down and find a nice young man. As her inexhaustible ambition had grown, she had wantonly destroyed and wasted much she had touched, like a malevolent Midas, breeding her own young woman in her angry thoughts, confounding the expectation of others.

She bore heavily the orphan's curse. She knew virtually nothing of her parents, having been adopted as a young baby, her story that of a foundling left on a doorstep with no history to her name. All she had was a locket with a tiny photo of her mother, standing next to another woman who held a baby in her arms, with the faceless shadow of a man to her side – her father perhaps and maybe an aunt or sister? She had been given it by her guardians on her sixteenth birthday; the only known link to her past. The photo was one of those posed shots taken by a seaside photographer against the painted background of Manning & Sons amusements – donkey rides, candy floss and on the back in tiny pencil it was inscribed simply, 'Me with Sam and Sarah at Felixstowe'. She had no idea even of her mother's name and there were no other clues as to who Sam and Sarah were, whether Sam was the child or the faceless man or whether she, Jade, was even the child. Often she had wondered if she could ever track them down, but there was so little to go on. She had shown the photograph around Felixstowe and asked the police, but nobody recognised them. It was just one of a million holiday snaps taken by the seaside photographers in the late 1950s. There was nothing unique, nothing to identify them by. This, then, was the

source of the sadness and disappointment that she still felt in her heart despite academic and increasing artistic success. She was bereft of a mother's arms, having to forge her own way in the world through her own mettle. Her adoptive parents, though well-meaning, had no vision for her beyond marriage into the local community, no basis on which to advise or appreciate the possibilities of her potential. But that sadness, that hole in her heart, had also hardened her so that her will took over her and steered her away from showing outward gloom to the world.

Of course in researching her project and Martin's fishing family, she had often gone back to this photograph and wondered if she could find out more about her own history. Her adoptive parents had both passed away in the last few years and although she had searched their possessions carefully, there was nothing else, not even a letter. So it seemed as they had always claimed, that they really knew nothing more about her origins, and if it was any different, they had certainly taken that truth to their graves.

Throughout her teenage years, she had watched them quickly grow old as the comfortable retirement they had planned after their former lives as domestic servants rapidly turned into increasing financial problems, as their savings and small pensions were eaten away by rising inflation. As they aged, each day they lost something of their vitality, a little less of life shining through their stern expressions, their spirit was haemorrhaging from their souls. Their skin became thin and waxen in the artificial light of the terraced cottage, where they spent most of their time in front of the TV screen – near-beauty hardened and faded by the metallic atmosphere and the sterile sun. She did not feel great affection for them, just thanks for giving her a home but this was always mixed with resentment – she knew this was an arrangement that in some way they now regretted. They had had no children themselves and were not

prepared for the tensions of living with a strong-minded adolescent. In retrospect, it was a wonder she had survived those desolate years, the rebellious arguments, without descending into drugs or worse. She constantly sought the strange, the new, and the taste of grim determination sometimes to shock but sometimes just to strengthen her own resolve to continue, her own hopeful idealism. Yes, she had played a little with fire, but never too close to burn herself.

Despite the lack of any physical link to her mother apart from the locket, each passing year strengthened her own mental conviction that she would one day discover more; each year she felt she understood in her heart, from her own experiences, more about the woman in the picture, more about the truth her adoptive parents had been unable or unwilling to reveal to her. She imagined for her mother a series of histories or tragedies that had led to her abandoning her child. With each personal success she had seen the sepia reflection of her likely mother mirrored in the darkness of her own doubts. She felt therefore that she knew who she was, even if she did not know her name. She had transplanted her own cares and worries on her mother's memory. This self-created knowledge had become courage, a memory of a nameless home, of the bitter cycle, of the names of others in her unknown family who had continued to shuffle towards that nameless inferno. Unknowing and unknown, without intervention they would be drawn, colourless, by unerring patterns of history, but history could be broken and fate could be created and she could discover those connections for herself.

*Ancient shores, future smiles,
Generations linked on one desolate stage.*

Despite all of this subtle insecurity, she was intent on

moving forward; she would not let melancholy consume her. On that she was fully determined. Now that, at last, she had begun to taste the sweetness of success, with every hard-won success she wanted more, determined to triumph partly for the memory of her mother and partly to prove something to all those who had no faith in her ability and talents, who dismissed her work as trivial and wished that she get a proper job.

She looks back at the couple on the beach. The lost expression on the man's face plays again on her mind; it holds some cautious anguish, a distance she cannot quite measure. He is handsome enough, maybe he was once brave also, she thinks, but now he seems so deep in another place that his former pride is divorced from common activity, abstracted from the daily struggle of life. His countenance is disquieting, like the face of someone who has lived too long away from the world's shallowness, someone unable to maintain a desire for life at this level, anticipating already a higher existence. She sees also in his face frail traces of beauty, the still-sharp darkness of his eyes, and the creased radiance of his paper-like skin, stretched sun-torn over high, bony cheeks; his hair quietly turning silver, framing the faded handsome features like a negative.

Yes, there was something grand and romantic about him, or at least that was how she imagined it. This was the imposed truth for which she now searched with the precision of her lens.

She rises and walks a little further along the beach, kicking its coarse reefs with her toes, feeling the wind caress her hair like a watchful lover. She feels alive and excited by such moments, the ability to orchestrate passion through her own artistry, to feel in her stomach the delicacy of her own creation. Was she recording or creating, probably a little of both, in the lyricism of her photographic storytelling?

As she comes closer to them, she sees that he holds a book close to his chest: a small, leather-bound volume. She watches him turn the stiff paper and write carefully in the margins of the closely printed pages, his shoulders arched over his work as if wishing no one to see. She wonders for a moment if it could be a diary, but cannot see in him the patience for mere personal history – too painful surely for a man who shuns outward lustre and dresses so shabbily.

She immediately feels an uncontrollable desire to read those words written with such secrecy, to know his innermost thoughts, his soul's voice. Maybe she could invent a candid religion just for him, a driven spirit; a man seeking his own god, defining his own doctrine, bringing his own conscience to peace in the face of adversity. As she watches his hands move across the pages she notices for the first time the ring on his third finger, almost the only embellishment about his person – heavy, dull silver, unpolished except for the wearing of his skin, a dark amber stone stained like blood in its centre. She feels herself drawn into his story, empathy melting her normal professional detachment.

*Strands of the same yarn;
Innocents to plead the case.*

The wind rises again, blowing objects around the beach, filling the lazy flags that line the coastguard shed with restlessness. The gulls wheel and clack and coo in their stations. Above them, the Crag Path is still empty, too early yet for any but the hardiest tourist and devoid even of morning joggers. But beyond its narrow barrier she hears the early morning noises of clinking bottles, of engines starting, of footsteps on the upper lanes, the quickening passage of time as the men and women of the town seek

their workplaces. One of the fishing boats is returning already, its bright red hull dragged up the shingle cliffs by a yellow land tug. It is exactly 7.23. She smiles.

Through the summer she has allowed herself to become a small part of this place. But like her the town has a split personality, which is the source of her project. She still feels uncomfortable with the contrast between the rich villas and smart hotels that line the shoreline and high street and the mean alleys and ugly, squat fishing cottages beyond; the contrast between summer gaiety and the spine-numbing bitterness of the east winds that blow day and night, seemingly without respite throughout the winter months. She has collected all these contrasting images in the collection of stills for her intended photographic exhibition. Perhaps at last in this man she has a fine and new hero for her imagination, for her portfolio of imagery.

From the bench where she now sits she can watch the man privately as his eyes finally close in on sleep, hidden by heavy lids, the hairs on his cheeks rising slowly with each tentative breath. He wears his loneliness openly, the dark and hollow clothes shouting solitude. She decides she will invent for him a place where maybe he can find peace and love, while he snoozes in the smallness of the morning sun. Despite his drab appearance, she does not condemn him. There are few things about him that she could dislike and a few that could demand affection. Even those that would tell his history are mostly anonymous, common things. Shoes, trousers, jacket, so little evidence of any former history about him, save for the book and that solitary jewel on his finger, and the fine lines around his eyes and brow.

While he naps, the little girl continues to play with her doll by the shoreline, finding delight in every shell and stone. She chases the waves in their lapping frequency; shrieking with delight as the water wets her feet.

Jade studies his hands further. They are delicate, not a worker's hands, with thin wrists and long fingers like a musician. The ring and its amber stone, so clearly a sign of emotion, perhaps even of loss. Someone once loved in youth maybe, darkening a lifetime. She sighs inwardly at this unknown story, feels an urge to reach over to him, put an arm around his shoulders, wipe his brow, blow a daughter's kiss across the small space that separates them, call him *father*, her warmth bringing her whole emotion into his body, projecting the passion of her own gender into his dreams. She feels a girl's affection for this man who was the same age as her father, who maybe had felt such loss so long, holding on to the final flames of passion without distraction. The remnants of two people completely in love with each other, like the words written in his book, drawn in long lines across his brow, thorough and deep. 'Don't walk away without a word. We have time, but you have to choose,' she whispers. Yes, she believes him to be a brave man, braver still for loving once maybe? Was he her mother's secret lover? Fanciful, she knows, but why not?

She looks again to the east towards the vast expanse of water that falls from the sky. Sometimes when she looks at the sea and sets her mind adrift in its indigo streams, times and places begin to twist together in the driftwood, fragments of amber sparkle in the sand, the reassurance of a distant light soothes and fine details, once forgotten, are freed again to roam the glistening shore.

Despite the town's small quaintness, there is something daring about this seascape, something unstructured but majestic, that has caught her, which has suited her art. The three bands of colour that form her images; the foreground, featureless, bleached, graded, like a stage where summer children sink their toes into clawing swamps and night lovers lie twisting in the moisture from the shingle. Next, in depth, is the glaucous cruelty of the sea, more powerful

than the other fields, more brutal than any man's power. Finally there is the sky of nothing – no moon, no stars, just grey violence; swirls of midnight blue, devoid of light, flame or passion. It all has a potency of its own that she has learned to capture expertly in her camera.

Her thoughts drift further into nonsense, into naive longing, uncontrolled meaning, allowing herself the luxury of momentary infatuation, so that her heart beats faster. She looks a last time at the man's face, still handsome, yet bruised. She wants to brush the rough stubble with her cheek and kiss him. Don't give up, she thinks; don't slip away from the day without a word. Stay while we have time, while we have our dark sides, our torment; let's wander this forsaken shore together. She shivers and shakes herself back to rationality, feels guilt at these silly musings, carried in the silence, in the intimacy of a shroud.

Maybe she has spent too many of her own recent hours unhealthily canded, awake through night's seven shadows, ripping through the fabric of long dreams, sensing the false dawn of the sun, without a lover to embrace. Maybe it's time she found someone to brave the future with. She had had hopes for Martin, but then again he was another mystery that remained for her untapped.

She realises these sentimental thoughts are distracting her from the serious purpose of the morning. The September wind has drilled through her clothes and she begins to shiver further in its dry smile, perhaps also sensing the coldness of her own thoughts. She steals his image one last time, thinks about asking him for permission to use the shots, and then thinks better of it – these should probably remain her private images. She turns around to the south and walks further down the beach, absently tracing her feet with the lens as she drags furrows through the wet-scented pebbles. She leaves the man and his ingénue, thinks no more thoughts of them and walks up the steps, across Crabbe

Street onto the unsteady pavement of the High Street. Each photograph she has taken is now locked in her camera like strangers together, illicit treasure, powerfully combined in her own imagination.

II – CALYPSO

*And she wrapped the hero in a cloud
of her hair, and she howled across the arid
waves where no one could hear:
'Not to be! Not to be! More than nothing
but less than dread, not ever to be again.*

Giovanni Pascoli, *Calypso*

LATE MORNING – SEPTEMBER 2ND 1979
THE CALYPSO CAFÉ

As usual at this time, she enters the fisherman's café. The sound of the early morning bales rudely from the counter – a DJ talking inanely over a Chris Rea song she happens to recognise and like.

She repeats the lyrics to herself, smiling at the thought. Although it is still early, she can smell the faint glad aroma of bacon and fried eggs and tea on the brew. She has not eaten and feels the hunger from her early start rising in her belly.

She takes her customary seat next to the window, from where she can observe the rough faces of the fishermen just back from sea falling through the door. She holds a cup of bland milky coffee in her hands, warming her chilled fingers, staring blankly through the window, listening to the men's fish-tainted boasts from the dark depths within, etching private smiley faces with her fingers into the condensation of the paint-flecked panes as she waits for her breakfast to be cooked. The radio bristles with electronic gaiety. The floor is wet and muddy from the fishermen's boots. The lazy curls of their tobacco remind her pleasantly of college, of stale pasties eaten in the earthiness of the student bar, of dark caverns of intimacy, spiced with musk and stale beer.

Here she is again amongst men, breathing the smells of men, as they stand sweating their labour through their brine-stained shirts, smearing fish-oil into their matted hair. She watches the milk dissolve in fatty droplets into the brown liquid, and then reappear to her as a picture in her mind.

Worn faces breathing faithless air, lungs filled with the black chlorophyll of diesel and shag. The forgotten margins of men reclaimed from this desolate coast. This is a man's world, but she knows she can hold her own, match them for rudeness and strength and loyalty.

Recently, she has spent many mornings amongst these unsung heroes, watching as they emerge from their night sea world, fascinated by their ravaged faces and the screams of the gulls fighting over overflowing fish bins. They are the rejected working products of the cold, cheerless side of this little town, the underclass that the tourists do not notice except when they want fresh fish for dinner, recognised but unheralded by the musical elite. She is interested by this perverse contrast, knows that the town's reputation, even its soul, has been built on their endeavours but at the same time the money from that success has pushed them to its margins. She had read in a newspaper that it was Mr Britten that made this place, but what good had it done them? She also now knows that what she wants personally in life is far from this place, far away from the vinegar stinging her eyes, from the promenade battered by east coast gales, from the rust-stained sea piled up in waves against the groynes. What she wants are days of clarity and delight, the perfection of her own achievement, but this place has its uses for now, and has suited her purpose well. Her first solo project brief is almost fulfilled and her mood begins to swing back towards euphoria.

Jade is distracted from these thoughts by the figure of a woman in her mid-thirties leaning her bike against the wall of the hotel opposite her. She studies the movement of the woman's hair in the wind, the reddish curls flapping loosely in the breeze. Her clothes are heavy and unfashionable, her cheeks flour-white, as if powdered by the salt air. She pulls her coat closely around her body and searches with her sea-green eyes, as if waiting for someone to return. Maybe the man and her child, muses Jade. Maybe she is waiting for him

to lean with her on the rail, put his arm around her shoulder, for love, for protection, for consolation. She is crying. Jade ponders whether there really is any connection between this woman's tears and the loneliness of the man on the beach and his young friend. Maybe she should introduce them, perhaps that is it, a poignant theme for the documentary she should create with her photographs: a reunion, a famous kiss. She catches fragments of their imagined conversation in the wind, listens to their voices. The woman repeats incessantly how good it is to see him again. His grunts of acknowledgement are without humour. They shelter together; huddled under a dark sky, rain the colour of bloaters. Her words to him seem silent but unshuttered, her dark green eyes pleading with a voice the shadow of silk. The distraction of the child tugs between them. The woman breathes hotly on his neck, a passion to which he does not respond. There is now no doubt in her mind that they must have slept together, or that he loves her as much as her open passion reveals.

Her thoughts drift to her own earliest experiences of love. Of course there were many who were part of that journey. She was passionate. Prolific but not promiscuous, using her feminine guile to manipulate the Felixstowe town boys to her advantage. Leading them on just so far, until she had them trapped, impossibly smitten, reeling in her surly wake. She would drive them on with the hint of her body, but was always careful to commit only so much flesh as was needed, as if measuring the promise. Despite her boyish body, nothing escaped her, no secret of womanhood, establishing her claim and then driving mercilessly to her own end. She pitied their mothers clinging to the hope that they would marry well, even during the darkest phases. First boys and then young working men, she consumed and rejected them, shattering maternal dreams of long engagements. She was a prize, clever but a strange one, and knew her own mind too strongly for most.

I believe in life and love and the right to dream.

Where are they all now, she wonders, now that she needs someone to hug, someone to lean on.

She looks back into the gloom of the café, into the stew of smoke and perspiration, searches for a likely candidate. There is an undoubted attraction to these rough men, straightforward, giving her the eye as if she is common property. They had become familiar but not too familiar friends – she had maintained professional distance despite plenty of grunted offers. Their gestures, their unsubtle stares would make most women uncomfortable, but she feels secure in their company. She knows that they would not push. In fact, she probably knows by now all their wives and daughters. She certainly knows their basic honesty. She is sure if she had felt the urge to go further, she would not disappoint or be disappointed. She continues to flirt with their eyes but that for now is all.

Earlier that summer she had cut her hair into a boyish bob to avoid any confusion over intent and it was a while since she had known any man in that way. She was in a period of self-imposed abstinence, not wishing any distraction from her immediate goal of completing her project in time for the planned exhibition as part of next year's festival.

After leaving school with a decent set of exam results she had spent a couple of years at college, studying art but unsure what she really wanted to do next. There, she had mixed mostly with the moneyed southern accents, a much more dangerous breed than the town boys of childhood, not respecting restraint or convention. She shared a flat with two other girlfriends, who both fawned on these strutting middle-class peacocks. Louise was stern and attractive although not classically pretty, with round, over-sized eyes like a doe in heat; pleasing short blonde hair and a broad,

winning smile. She was athletic, winning trophies in a host of sports, but tended to move with awkward gawkiness as if her body was uncomfortable in controlled motion. Always neat and well-groomed, she dressed habitually in home county dark green plaid and pearls, her vaguely upper-class speech always full of self-assured talk of boyfriends and dogs.

Sally, on the other hand, was the uncultured, yellowed northern pearl, natural brown locks dyed blonde and dragged into odd curls, still wearing her dressing gown at 11 in the morning, eyes girlish and blue; fearing pregnancy every month until her period came with dull monotony. Her speech was full of *hecks* and *reets* and delivered at breathless speed with a wicked sense of humour. She struggled with clothing and fashion, never seeming to get the right combinations, but they loved her for it and she was funny and full of touching vulnerability and warmth. Jade secretly felt they were happiest together as girls, the visiting boyfriends often an unwanted intrusion.

The digs they shared were so small they often collided in their morning haste – coffee, toast, cigarette smoke lingering in the living room, underwear dripping in the bathroom, a collection of trophies and gifts from their eager suitors stacked precariously in the hall. Whatever Jade wanted, these friends would oblige. From casual girl talk to strange animalistic rituals performed over incense in the darkness of night, three witches manicuring and preening. In long conversations, they would metaphorically grind their suitors' bones at midnight parties and into the early morning, long before the first pallid hopes of day, dancing near-naked in the rain-washed streets. It was all too cute. There was not much work done and they rapidly fell behind in their respective studies. It had lasted two terms before the college threatened to throw them all out.

She remembers that occasion vividly, the set face of her tutor, red and angry, frowning darkly at her across the desk.

'I think you know why you're here...' The words lost in more redness, anger rimming his collar, nervousness sending his fingers tapping, and the crack of gravity in his voice. Outside the room, before the interview, the tension of the moment had screamed at her in the intense static of fluorescent light and she had felt her stomach tighten with worry. But once inside, she relaxed, saw he was more nervous than she, saw past his unyielding eyes, avoiding contact, clanking voice, clawing fumes of masculinity... She heard the mild threats and feigned disinterest. She felt a will weaker than hers trying to force her where she would not go. Secretly she tore at his face, but openly she was polite and flirted. What else could she say or do? She smiled innocently as he rose and shook his head briefly before leaving to discuss her fate with his colleagues. What did she think of as she was waiting in that room; what she was going to have for tea, what to take on as her next project? And, of course, they relented; she had done enough to survive.

It woke her up a bit and she worked harder from then on, but she was, however, no changeling: she would not yield to their strictures, not to any man, not to any petty convention. Screw them all! Yes, maybe she would – one by one. Why not? They clearly all fancied her after all.

After graduation, she was still undecided what to do and needed money. She had tried for a while to be the responsible career woman. She got an administrative job with a city bank, but the loss of the freedom offered by college life hit her morale badly. She hated the daily obscenity of the rushing of Tube trains, the despairing whisper of the wind between the tall buildings, the mongrel trees stirring blindly in the fragile lanes. She had replaced the breadth of the coastal sky with forests carpeted with asphalt, greenery banished to tiny allotment squares and cracks between uneven pavements. However, she was well-paid and partying hard with her new friends. There were

lots like her too – pretty faces, sucked dry, bent into frowns by the paucity of language, children of odourless smiles. The girls brandishing Oxford Street names, the boys tattooed, sharp, huddled in tribal groups. Soap-scrubbed young faces with collars buttoned and fixed with gold. Thoughts lost to the world, suffocated by the pace of life, by the acquisition of the material. They were content with, and wanted more of this, but she wasn't and didn't. She saw only the fine line between a yawn and a scream, not a life for her. Not yet, anyway.

So she started to live out a separate life at night, adopted a stage name, joined a band as a singer and danced along to something Celtic and wild rather than the sad punk that filled so many pubs. She rebranded herself Calypso, the new shape of her name building to a peak, then diving deep into the valley. She loved the way it sounded on the back of her throat, she loved the boldness of the shape written on paper, soft and cursive. She was a poet, not a hyena. She knew of course she was in danger of wasting her life, she knew that she could do much better. It was a dangerous world full of dangerous men, who often did not know where the line was drawn. Fortunately, the next spring, before it was too late, she found a job as a pool photographer at a magazine edited by a friend of Louise's. She grabbed it and did not look back.

In the greasy café she gasps at the close passion of these memories as she watches the woman through the window. She is preparing to leave and suddenly their glances meet in the infinity of reflection. Jade turns away, embarrassed. Clearly the woman knows she has been watched and frowns. Jade self-consciously brushes her hair from her forehead, removes strands unblemished by sweat and hard labour. She feels again that empty, hungry feeling in her belly. She is on a journey with a destination, maybe a journey that would lead to the brink of the abyss, but a journey of her own. That earlier life in the bank had threatened to squeeze every

breath from her body. The scream was ever closer. She was lucky to get out alive and sane. Now she had the chance she was going to grab everything she could get. For her, this project in Virginia Woolf's 'miserable, dull sea-village' had been the perfect opportunity, the opening up of new opportunity.

She pays and leaves the café to low wolf-whistles. They know her well by now, that she can give as good as she gets. She shoots them a stare that freezes like only the coldest day; deliberately runs her hand provocatively through her hair, brushes her hands down her firm waist and hips, offering a glimpse but no hope of redemption. They are the salt of the earth, pitiful in their narrow bashfulness, but she leaves them now to squirm. If only they knew... If only there was a real man among them, she thinks, she wouldn't disappoint but she feels the source of their hesitation, the barrier of education. Outside the door she coughs the last breath of smoke from her lungs, and pulls out a yellow oilskin coat from her bag.

I saw a fisherman mending his nets one summery, autumn day, sitting quietly absorbed among the people of the resort. So poor – he seemed to have the riches of time. Children rushed about in flower-garden colours; people picnicked, paddled, dived, swam, played with dogs. He stood within and beyond it all, plying his patience.

Adrian Bell, *The Power of Patience*

The high street is still virtually deserted. With her coat close to her body, she walks past the steady face of Barclays Bank, past rows of chemists and grocers, past the tea and tourist shops, filled with unwanted summer junk, souvenirs that slowly gather dust on glass shelves – lurid pink rock candy, ugly dolls, and china dogs. She notices everything but does not pass judgement; the season almost over, some of the

shops already boarded up against winter storms. She passes the seedy penny arcade inhabited only by a gang of pale spotted youths, hears the electronic jingles and occasional chink of a coin but mostly the sullen bored voices, the practised pouts, watching her without watching.

She is beyond the main shops now and passes the travellers packing up the children's fairground on an open piece of ground. She is saddened by the finality of her summer season, the air no longer oily and electric, the smell of fish and chips absent, the grass spread only with rotting festoons of candy floss from the last bank holiday of summer, the lazy click of the little roller-coaster grating only against the steely sky. A few young kids chase sweet wrappers amongst the dripping rides. She pays to ride the Ferris wheel, the only customer. From the top she can see the whole of the coastline spread out before her, falling shadows caught in its great span, the clouds yellow like tar paper against the uncertain blue of the sky. She hears the boom of a flare somewhere out to sea, lifts her hand to her brow, straining to see against the glistening sun. In her mind she forms the next stages of her own plan.