

THE SEA... THE SEA...

*for whatever we lose (like a you or a me),
it's always our self we find in the sea.
~ e.e. cummings*

Perhaps if I'd taken the other road — the one *most* taken — when circumstances presented me with two roads converging, I might have been led to Paris or Bangkok, or God forbid! Las Vegas — somewhere with bright lights and laughter, and maybe...just maybe...I could have made the change. But it's unlikely. On the few occasions I've tried to leave, to find a different landscape, some ancient melancholy urge as primal as instinct, always... always drew me back, back to the sea. And now, after a brief time away, I've returned to the small Cornish town where I've always lived, I can see that “moving on”, as my well-meaning friends advised me to do, did not necessitate moving away.

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When *he* went away — well, *left* me... after twenty-eight years — my friends said: you have to move on, make a new start... because all I could do then was sit on the breakwater every day and watch the fishing boats come and go in the harbour, as if he might come sailing in on the morning tide, back to me. The fisherman's cottage that is my home, overlooking an estuary and open to the advances of wind and water, had grown grey and fatigued from more than a hundred years of resisting the elements and the oldness had begun to creep into my bones, making me old too. Even the sunlight that fell through fathoms of pale sky touched the earth with a worn-out glow — aloneness shows you things you don't otherwise notice — and I felt as cold and grey as the sky that stretched and changed in solidarity with the slow swashing sea.

At night the sea was relentless. It rose and fell beneath the baton of the indomitable moon, beating its rhythm like a percussion band on the shore. I lay cold and straight as an effigy on a medieval tomb, listening to its dreadful dark demands, until I finally realized that if I didn't make some changes —*move on*— I would be overwhelmed and would give in.

So, to the dismay of my friends and family, I left my home and circumnavigated the world, spending a month here, a few weeks there, longer somewhere else— always within sight and sound of the sea— until finally I found myself living beside a bright, antipodean ocean I thought would be kinder, more quiescent and consistent than the strange dark Celtic sea I belong to. I thought that in that place of primary colours, where bush birds dart like bright arrowheads and gulls are the colour of silver in the sunlight, the dread and uncertainty of growing old alone might be assuaged by the bloom...the glow... the comparative newness of it all. Sometimes, the way the ocean splashed in on the golden sand there, all blue and gleaming and smiling under the sun, sing-songing into crevices and rock-pools, you could

be fooled into thinking it was friendly and beneficent, the sea-side that “*we do like to be beside...*” but really, it’s the same wide stretching wayward sea flowing from the northern crags of my Cornish home, down to sanguine sunshine-y provinces and spreading out east and west in a never-ending encroachment upon the land. It wasn’t long before I realized that no matter where I went, there is *always only* one sea. The intricate instalments of the past assembled on the glittering ocean there in the same disturbing way they did on the pewter-coloured waters of the harbour here at home: “*...they change their climate, not their soul...who rush across the sea...*” The one thing I saw clearly in that extraordinary pristine light was that the soul, no matter where it is, is always subject to the tidal wash of dreams and consciousness; I saw that there are never new beginnings, only continuations. I suppose under the water’s surface anywhere, here or over there, there might be places of quiet... restful places where shells, like indolent thoughts, roll gently; where strange creatures amble unperturbed through weed and sea-grass; perhaps it’s even true that mermaids sing in watery caverns somewhere deeper than even imagination can intrude... that milder ocean on the other side of the world suggested it...but you can never be sure.

Perhaps I should have *stayed* there longer, tried harder to fit into that cheerful landscape of blue and yellow, but I couldn’t *live* there, it was not “*...my own/my native land...*”.

So! Here I am, sitting on the breakwater again — just for a while, before I meet my friends at the fish café on the quay— watching the tide come in and thinking about the sea...the sea... There’d been a change in the current and I was thrown off course. I drifted for a time, colliding with islands of doubt and recrimination but now I’ve come back to where I’m recognized and acknowledged by the landscape. Here the odd, anomalous perspectives on life

cast by disquieting winds, and the weird shifting of the ageless northern light speak to me in dialects I understand. It's been a soul-journey of Odysseyan proportions and, really, it was never about going away, it was always about coming home. Even if I hadn't left Cornwall it would still have been about coming home.

The fishing boats rock irritably on the increasingly demanding swell. The heavy colours of sunset frown on the grey canvas of the sky, wind-driven clouds trouble the white moon ... there might be bad weather tomorrow. The day will carry on an argument with itself: wind seconded by rain, angry clouds unleashing a barrage of thunderous disapproval, sunshine interjecting...all contradictions and uncertainty... but that's all right...

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Approx 960 words