

LITTLE BLUE HEART

The sea is full of memories, calling me to sit and stare in tireless awe, across this endlessness, to the place of my own conception. The sea is full of exchange, distant lands caressed by the same blue water. The sea is full of meetings. Blue sky, blue ocean, meet like lovers.

The sea is full of exchange. For three nights in the restaurant of El Arbol, you have been watching me. Your hungry eyes await my arrival. We exchange glances across freshly-caught fish, and freshly-picked papaya, mango and pineapple. Your eyes are shadowed; they glint like sunlight through trees. Your glances distract the thickly-wooded trails of conversation I make with others. I must not lose my way. Break twigs to mark my steps, retrace findings.

I try to convince myself I am not interested in you, in light of your mocking grin. I say *No* to the severity of your shaven hair, high cheekbones, strong brow, long straight neck, all of which the tenderness in your smile now betrays. You catch me smiling back across the tables, while my listening remains serious. You laugh in the privacy of our prolonged silence, knowing I cannot ignore you forever.

Perched on the hillside, above the tiny fishing village of Puerto Angel, I have a room with a perfect view. I sit at my desk to write; watch small boats resting in a sheltered bay ringed by mountains and the rocky outcrops of Playa del Panteon. The shutters are flung wide open to draw in a cool breeze. Wafting

smells of fish, flowers, sea and freshness. My eyes stare, wide and motionless, beyond this cove, as if into the heart of the fire: blue centre of the planet's flame.

Your smiling face, framed by my window, startles me; draws me, suddenly, out of my world of words. Near-disaster has stunned your day on Zipolite. Your bared golden chest leans in, wooing me, as I listen to a hero, gasping, shaken and deserving, with shocking news in your few words of English. Your friend's near-drowning in an unforgiving sea spills out into my cupped hands. I am the receiver of his drowning face and your terror relived. We learn as many as a dozen drown here each year in unpredictable swells.

The sea is full of exchange. We meet on the beach at twilight. Scattered stars replace the sun. We exchange meaning in pieces of three languages, but more from the touch of our toes in the sand, and much more from the deep blue meeting of our eyes.

The sea is full of meetings. Our walk up the hillside steps is broken by an urgent desire to fuse the blueness of our eyes. We have moved from the water's lapping edge to where something we cannot leave unreached has arrived. Something infinite. Here on this step, our first unforgettable kiss, where only yesterday I paused and found a little blue heart. Some child's lost jewel.

Like children, we hurry back to the beach, knowing there are boundaries to be crossed this night, evocations etched into distant future memoir. Few of nature's encounters are more rousing of a poet's pen than where land and sea converge. Recollections rise and fall, enmesh, challenge and soothe the inner edge. We verge on the brink; vast ocean space in which to empty any other

sense of time or place. Fill me with only here and now. Join all that is known, with all that is unknowable.

It goes deep, you say, when we look so long into each others eyes we cease to belong to any other. Give me one more of your kisses, you say, and I do, not knowing any reason which could take me from your lips. I need you, you say, as I pause for breath on the fallen rocks, to watch the Yellowtail tuna fish catch the starlight. Listen to the rhythm of the waves, I say, needing to pull myself back from you. Listen to the rhythm of the sea; the way the waves rush in, out of control, and then recede, are gentle; they hide among the rocks. Hear them return, refilled, recharged. You are very lovely, very wild, you say, as we find again the hillside steps leading to our temporary bed, our Pacific view.

It's a hard life being a soldier, you tell me, regretful of the woman who would not wait for you. I am close to falling in love with a handsome young German soldier. At times we can't find the right words, in Espanol, in Deutsche, or in English, to tell the story. Even the dance of hands must end their charade. Sometimes we find the wrong words and laugh until we cry. Then there are those times when I don't even try, too afraid of rejection. While you do not know you are ten years younger than me, our age makes no difference. My silence, my refusal to be open, makes the real difference.

I imagine you falling through the sky. As a paratrooper, you have jumped many times. You tell me of when you landed in an unknown forest: you must find your own way. The packs you carry are heavy, laden with extra ammunition. You must lead your men, through artillery fire, through the deadly game, dark night, dark forest, dark enemy river. Your men are dropping into a river of blood. The defeated savour no glory. There is only one

final solution. I wanted to help, you say, knowing you could not be wrong to train, to play to win, to mend, heal, survive, full of pride, vanity and youth.

You get a drink; squirt water from your mouth onto my breasts. I am making peace with a pre-conceived adversary. You are judged cruel, your country condemned. Embracing your power, I surrender; blue water beneath blue sky. Our bodies, man and woman, warring in dance, reach for the chord never fully broken at birth. It burns to the explosive end. This thirst desires no descendants. This hunger no humiliation. We have no language to express our fear of such depths. Love listens to the child who has no words. No banner, no flag.

During the night you return to your bed. I feel an earth tremor and hear the sound of a train coming. This morning I wake in a panic and think you have gone. My view is wild, foaming, churning up the deepest blue depths. The passion is disquieting. Yesterday the sea was calm, gently teasing, mysterious as ever; today it is anger fully risen. It is the New Moon, the fishermen say, it is the spring equinox. Perhaps you are still sleeping.

The waves at Zipolite are ferocious, suicidal. Oh, my German soldier, this day. How can you know that inside me I am filled with the ocean we watch? To hunger for your kisses is like this wild white water pounding in, possessed with a furious force. And when I look at your strong, fine, tanned body, your hair tinted blonde with hot sun, inside I rise like these tidal waves to meet your youthful male energy, so contained, so kind and affectionate, then so distant. I wish to devour you, when I see you standing strong like the rocky shore: to move you. I rise and smile, kiss softly, boundaries controlled.

Waves roll in, one after another, bigger and bigger, louder and louder. Waves wash over the beach. Completely. Waves rush through huts. Fragile tree-limb shelters with rooves of palm fronds. All the sea can do is come crashing down; like the roll of battered storm clouds pounding rain against the earth. Charge of front line horses shot down: riddled with white fire, they stumble to their knees. Slaughter of our men on Gallipoli.

What is happening in the rest of the world? None of us know. It does not matter. How many in the rest of the world know what is happening here? Here is all that matters. An army helicopter flies low, surveying the shoreline. A confident water bird flies along the crest of a wave.

I now see fear behind a mask of bravery worn by every man I have loved. Timidity beneath the talk. I see them all lined up, backs against the wall. Cold murder at sunrise: blame kills. The silence buries us all. You're just like your father, my mother used to say. But I did not know she meant this. Was he equally capable of cowardice as other men? Or hatred? I could not tell. I have always been afraid to confront him. I thought I knew how he felt. To see him silent was to see him in pain.

I listen to the sounds of masculine voices around me. You are talking with your German friend. I do not know what you are saying, but I think I know how you are feeling. The tone itself becomes a tune. New sounds for my mouth to shape; new words to form new meaning. Your friend and I have only one language between us. We exchange music to share our beliefs, travel new roads, joke with lines of song.

I watch the hands and faces of the people you speak with. The Jewish woman is angry with you, with your fathers and your grandfathers, and fears

even more now the wall has come down. Her shoulders carry the centuries.
Her entire body is smouldering from a burning brand.

We must not forget. This must never happen again.

You defend yourself, knowing that people everywhere *do not* forget, *will never* forgive. Her lean fingers point to show the dripping, persecuting poison. She is pity wrung out and you watch her plight fall to the floor before you.

I am very quiet. My silence has become a weapon of self-destruction. A bugle call from the past rusted over in doubt. My feelings are full of raw sound waiting to take shape; to make meaning. Let the days and nights come: that I may love and learn. Soon they too will be gone. In the end, we will all stand on the same side: alone. Let us march in search of a song. Let us search for a voice to lift up our hearts in unity.

The sea has raged for two days now; highly-charged inspiration, demanding action. I love the way you look into my eyes whenever we kiss, the way our palms become sticky. Give me your hand, with human failings, descent of gods, fall of civilizations. Yes I am hungry. Relieve me of this torturous silence: kiss me. Keep looking into my eyes, not my face, my mouth perhaps. Can you tell my age from the lines on my face, my mouth? Yes I am hungry. A woman faces small death every month; a man does not have this opportunity. A man must ride wild horses and waves and women and make war to face his own life. It is the fall I am reliving, it is from dying that I rise. I hunger for more than your semen rubbed into my belly.

You take a risk, you say. It is a question and statement in one. Yes. The word echoes. Yes. This is my body, this is my risk. All words of love are temporary; all flowers, like words, disappear. You can take nothing more.

There is no use to ask for more than what we brought here to this beach, this bed. All that flows never returns. I imagine you falling through the sky. We cannot go back; this moment is irreplaceable, cradled and we are equal. It will never be the same. You can live with some unreasonable ideal worth fighting for, as I might, one day, embody a life worth dying for. Right now, I put my trust in barren splendour. Let the sensuous cries of the sea and our desperate sighs merge, as in a poem. The ache of love and death come together louder than any vows.

In the morning, local army infantry - carrying German weapons - march from their base on the beach. Pigs and chickens scatter. The donkeys are loathe to move. Fishermen, in perfect rhythm, strength and majesty, haul in their shark catch.

You have taught me the names of all the animals. Schmetterling, the butterfly, is my favourite. I still pronounce Esel wrong, when it calls in the middle of the night. You crawl in beneath my mosquito net and sing me a song about der cockl and das hahn. We laugh at the dry cockerel cry on the hot walk to Zipolite. He has been up all night too.

We pass by now familiar cottages of mud and timber and thatched rooves made of palm leaves. These simple things will remind us of our days. Women carry colourful hammocks on their heads. We struggle to balance our two bodies in one hammock. The man in a washed-out hut gives us shells for ear-plugs to quiet the ocean's roar. We watch the dogs cower and fight and wait their turn for the bitch on heat. We watch the dogs on Zipolite fucking like dogs.

I keep your coral sea-gift, plucked from the ocean's garden, as an icon of my hidden isolation. The little blue heart is an emblem of my truth. You

steal a crab from its sideways journey and the more you study it the more it hides from you. The domination is unfair. Now boys come in from the water and build around the crab a fortress of sand. I want to be a rescuer but I fail to believe in my right. Why is it always us and them? You and I? It is no different in Guatemala. Why do I fail to act in the hour of need? I am the crab. Fear has left me corroded in holes, to drown with only a memory.

The sea is full of memories, it is there for us to remember. Nothing can be held or fixed, conquered or controlled, for life to go on. The rocks we climb over, collecting shells, are wearing away. These shorelines we walk upon, hand in hand, will all one day disappear. You shall return to your homeland and I will continue to wander, along the edge of this endless blue meeting, where I leave traces of myself, pieces of a treasured past trailing behind.

Eagles fly in close on this strange morning. It is a long, empty day. Time itself has become the thing. I want to know what time it is. When are you leaving? The strangeness cannot be taken away by knowing. Nothing can take away the end. You wear your Mexican hat, and a yellow scarf tied around your neck against your tanned skin. A yellow singlet, blue jeans. Your bluest of eyes. I cannot forget. Only the words are gone.

You will remember me? you ask. Oh yes, I reply. I am dying in this moment and only you can speak the parting words. I won't forget you, you say, before the final kiss. As you walk down the steps, you turn to look back, from those same steps where we first kissed, where I found the little blue heart.

As each new traveller arrives in Puerto Angel, the first question they ask any traveller already here is 'How long have you been here?' Those asked pause long enough to turn towards the view of the sea, in search of an answer. What day is it today? How long have I been here? Two days? Two weeks? Two months? I am looking for help, for someone who might have kept a record. There is no timekeeper, no bank, and only one phone. To evaluate time seems absurd. One day drifts into the next so simply, so completely, so quickly.

I bathe in the memory of your loveliness. Black and yellow birds fill the trees like candles. Geckos prick the air with chatter. I run through our moments together like frames of a film, and add the final scenes.

Last night, we sat on the end of the pier. I watched the camaraderie between you and a young fisherman who'd done his time in service. I watched the knowing I would never know. You shared a joint while he sang the words of Bob Marley.

'I'm just a Buffalo soldier, in the heart of America. Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival...'

The waves rolled in, almost calm. I watched the backs of waves foaming, their fury almost spent. An army truck, filled with young soldiers, drove towards us. The truck's bright lights shone onto us, blinding. The truck paused a few feet from the edge of the pier, in front of us, and then it turned and was gone. The fisherman sang with a tainted smile.

'Get up, stand up. Stand up for your rights.

Get up, stand up. Don't give up the fight.'

I think of the big wild horse you drew in the sand, and the waves that came to take it back. The way waves reach out to the shore, trying to grasp something sure and in finding they cannot, retreat, only to return in eager

willingness over and over again. I am now free of my inner torment. It is time for me to leave. I leave the floral curtains and white-washed walls and red terracotta tiled roof and the blue swirling Van Gogh floor. Simple things. I leave the sounds of the breeze blowing in through holes in the wall. Number One on the wooden door. Bare trees silhouetted on the hillside, pink streaks of cloud. Dark pink dust. My strangled blue speech.

The cook from El Arbol, Maree, gives me a warm hug and kisses me on the cheek. 'Adios mi amiga!' she calls as I board the bus. I imagine you smiling, on the plane from Mexico City to Munich. Even from a distance, I cannot forget. This will never happen again.