

## H.D. IN PRISMATIC ECSTASY

Only a year, dear Bryher, one year since you appeared like Nike, swift, one wing for me, one wing for my child – your child, our child, this daughter, this flesh between us spirit of us. You lifted us across the distance, took us to the isles where you take your namesake – Bryher, Bryher in Scilly, I in Scilly, the child. Was it coincidence, there off the coast of Cornwall I wrote my notes on thought and vision, a July one year after our first encounter, tea in a summer cottage? You, aspiring you, your letter of solidarity to *H.D., Imagiste*.

There were twos and twos and twos in my life, there were two of everybody, except myself – sure, there was Ezra, Richard, my brothers, D.H. and Cecil – but no two like us, “two women alone,” no two like me and Perdita, mother and child, daughter. Not like that first child, a boy child, taken from me.

So many men taken from me. Or did I will them away? My father dead of shock or heartbreak at my brother’s death in France. My husband after the discovery that the child was not his as if it was his right alone to twist the wrists of this or that mistress. And lovers two men split – one whose body produced this child one whose mind and spirit produced this slip, slippage into one who threw herself from a cliff to rid the heart of a passion grown acrid, sick, not unlike the sickness I suffered last spring, body listless, doctors predicting death of mother and daughter.

Until you came.

You, Bryher, with your promise and pledge, your lips mint of my breath, antistrophe to my strophe, chin fixed on the ridge of my hip the way this ship sits within the wave – above and below, mist spritzed up as we split from the continent, headed for Corfu.

And though we travel and though this island rises  
to greet us unscathed, and though one child survives  
while the other dies, and though uniforms still drift  
down streets, in furrowed fields, the way flags rift  
the sky, wind indifferent – one day all hiss as it rips  
through cloth and rope, rips rope from pole; the next  
day silent beyond a whisper, stripes, stars, sickles  
listless – and though all this and through all this, I find  
a thought projected on the swish of air and salt, as if  
on a wall, outlined in light, print scripted in a foreign  
hand the way fishermen clean fish – gutted, nipped  
an oily pink strip, flint riddling a language of sever.

What did I see? A ladder, a tripod, a goblet? A soldier?

Through the veil of the jellyfish upon my head I saw  
crisp irises glitter as if Isis snaked through the mist  
the S-curve a lintel of sorts.

Go on, you say.

I go through, I cross the bitter threshold, enter the S  
and there you are, you but not you in a nimbus of fire  
a disk like a cistern's opening, the angle of incidence  
astringent to the angle of reflection, pitch tipped  
as if to drip, as if the waters beyond the disk mixed  
like vines in privets, aglow like the citron's little globes  
my vision, my body adrift in this inviolate gold tint  
as bit by bit I enter the pit, witness to this ritual. I am  
witness. I witness, Perdita. I witness, Bryher. I go on.

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