

Happiness

by Melinda Giordano

I picked up my happiness like a shell I had found on the shore. I saw it, round and perfect, surrounded by the other fragments torn and crying in the sand. Their voices were muffled like those of the soldiers suffocating in the mud. I walked towards the jewel, thick with nacre and tidal thoughts, brave and stalwart amidst the grief and dismay. With a quiet urgency, then, I took it.

I held my treasure close to me, so I could feel its myriad shapes and feelings beating like a living tattoo against me. I wanted this happiness to be my secret – a tiny whirring toy that would purr against my chest. It was a prize to be kept far from voices, curiosities, disruptions: the various tumults that fell like crumbs from the sky, blinding and bestial, across the beach where I had been searching.

I began to run – I was so frightened that I would lose my perfect shell, my flawless, exquisite happiness. I outran the daylight, leaving it far behind me. I ran until I entered twilight, with horizons of indigo and sapphire and a golden dusk still writhing at its feet. And when I couldn't run any further, I had reached darkness. I fell to the ground, curling into a map of secrets and smelling the sweet earth, as an animal would. And when I fell asleep, I was holding my happiness close to me, bidding it to sleep too, so it would hide in the shadows and stay with me, taking part in the delicate panic of my sanctuary.

When I woke up, the daylight had caught up with me. I felt the heat tickling my skin and eyes. There was a ribbon of sweat bordering my hairline, as if it were a tide planted there by last night's moon, going about her evening's work. And my hands were empty. My happiness, my dearest one, my gentle pearl, that I had slept near to, that I had tried to protect, was gone. All that I had left was the voice of the ocean rebuking me from far away, scolding me for stealing one of her rarest, handsomest possessions. And inviting me to try again.

