

*Villa Magni, Lerici, Italy, 1822.*

The night when I stood on those wild, screaming beaches and searched for you, knees trembling, fists driven into my thighs, I roared your name with such passion that even the villagers stopped dancing, and for just that moment as yellow smoke from the bonfire tumbled silently into the black and malevolent sky, all eyes turned toward me. To them, I was the *inglese*, the poet's wife, and yet here I was, barefoot as they were barefoot, mad and half-feral, pleading with the sea to deliver you.

You were out there, adrift beneath a bending vault of stars, everywhere and nowhere at once, in darkness.

The fire threw spiky shadows above the eyes that beheld me and blacker shadows below, great staring pits. I hadn't words in any language to explain my anguish. There was the shopkeeper's daughter whose dusky bosom gleamed with sweat, the fisherman who sat bent over his mandolin, dirt-caked fingers poised above the strings, the man Fidelo with his faded red cap and mournful smiles.

They knew what we all knew: whoever I called for was already gone.

*È ubriaca*, someone said—she's drunk!—and the air was split with a raucous cry, and then the mandolin and the *zampogna* started up again, people swirling around the bonfire or stripping off their clothes and running into the sea, where the moon cast ghost diamonds on the water.

Oh, Shelley, I could feel my heart again. For the longest time, not all the reanimating currents of science could have brought it back, and now here it was, roused from death for fear of losing you. That love was never gone. It lay buried beneath a bank of snow. The heart, once frozen, burns fiercely when it thaws.

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