

Missing Person

You join the crowd gathering near the front of the visitor center. The tour guide is talking, waving his hands wildly, but you cannot make out what he is saying because of the loud wind roaring on all sides of the group. You turn to the person standing next to you. It is the young couple on their honeymoon. You ask what is going on. They say someone from the tour group is missing. You nod your head in understanding. You think it is probably the older couple. They are always late, shuffling slowly to the bus minutes after the agreed-upon time everyone was supposed to be back on the bus. You find yourself always annoyed with them, not that you are in any particular rush. But you believe in rules, and adhering to those rules, and a mutual respect for everyone else on the tour bus. You find yourself constantly looking to the other tourists for similar reactions, eye rolls, loud sighs, any signs of annoyance really, only to realize you are the only one who is outwardly agitated, which only makes you more aggravated.

“This half will comb the cliffs to the right, the other half will look to the left,” the guide says.

His name is Mike. He is British. He strikes you as a very sad person. You are not sure how you arrived at this assumption. Perhaps it is the way he eats his muffins in the morning, crumbs nestling in the wrinkles of his button-down shirts over his potbelly. Or the way he waves to everyone once they are already off the bus and walking toward the bed and breakfast or the hotel for the night; it is as though he is terribly woeful to see everyone go. You think it is really because you have developed a new skill, a super power if you will, to detect sadnesses within other people ever since Evan, ever since what happened to Evan.

You are in the group that goes to the left. The Atlantic Ocean screams below you, its waves like the tops of whipped meringues. There are not many people at the Cliffs of Moher

today. The weather was supposed to be nicer, but the weather is always supposed to be nicer in Ireland. It is always so gray and grainy. Did you come here to match your gray and grainy insides to the outside weather? No, you couldn't have. You and Evan had planned this trip a long time ago, before everything happened.

You are in the same group as the honeymooning couple. This whole time you have tried not to look at them or to think about them, but now they are beside you and you have found yourself falling in step with them. No one knows what has happened to you, and yet you find that everyone looks at you in a pitying way. It is always the same look: watery, widened eyes, curled lips, a sort of softness, a gentleness to the way they speak to or touch you. The woman in the couple reaches an arm out and catches hold of yours.

“Careful,” she says. “That part is muddy.”

You look down and see that she is correct, there is a large patch of concave, wet, brown grass with a footprint to the side of it. You half-smile at her and say thanks. She nods. You continue walking. The Australian woman who tried to befriend you is also in your group. She was not successful in her attempts to befriend you. She does not acknowledge your presence now. She was in the bathroom when the tour guide was talking. She runs after your group and walks ahead of everyone. Two middle-aged Scottish men walk in the middle of the group along with a family of four from Idaho. You notice the little boy from the family has stepped in the patch of mud. No one else from his family has noticed yet.

A large gush of wind sweeps in and everyone stumbles. You cling to the side of the cliff so hard the dirt and mud wedge themselves underneath your fingernails. You wonder if Evan would have liked it here. You think he probably would have. You imagine him with his camera standing dangerously close to the edge of the cliff taking a shot of the water down below. You

think of tugging gently on his arm, leaning your head on his shoulder, pleading with him to stand further back from the edge. Thunder claps. You jump. You watch the family abandon the quest for the missing person and hike their way back to the tour bus.

The sharp sound of the thunder reminds you of a car backfiring, or gunfire. You think of Evan lying in the parking lot of the bar with three gunshot wounds in his torso. You think of him bleeding to death, alone, on the night of his bachelor party. Another stroke of thunder pierces the sky and this time you are not sure if it is your wails, the rush of the ocean, or the sky screaming. You thumb the edge of your yellow rain slicker, zipping it all the way up, and remember when you bought it.

“I look like a banana,” you said standing in front of the mirror in the store.

“A very cute banana,” Evan said, pulling you into him and kissing you on the cheek.

You imagine looking down on yourself from the sky. A bright yellow banana on the muddy Cliffs of Moher. What a sight to behold. You follow the search party until it is clear no missing person would have wandered off so far from the visitor center or the parking lot. Everyone turns around and heads back. Your group waits in the bus for the other group to return. The bus is hot and sticky; the windows are all fogged. The bus has a distinct smell of sulphur, of rotten eggs. You look across the aisle to see the elderly couple peeling hard boiled eggs and eating them. You wish you could open the window.

You cannot stand the smell, so you leave the bus again. You wait by the chain link fence near the visitor center. You kick pieces of a broken bottle around, which reminds you of how Evan used to compare your green eyes to sea glass. He used to tuck the hair behind your big ears, press his forehead against yours, and stare into your eyes. He used to kiss your ears, the ears you hate, the ears your mother tries to convince you to get surgically pinned back. He made you feel

beautiful, like you were enough, like your face was not too long and your gums were not too large, and you were perfect as you were.

You try to enter the little scrawl space you have carved out for yourself after Evan's death. You have worked hard to dig the tunnel inside yourself, even with the clay walls threatening to cave and bury you. You press your cuticles down with your fingernails until they start to bleed, then you stop. If Evan were here he would say, "It's okay. Everything is going to be okay." You can almost hear him as he says this. You wonder how you will cope with not being able to conjure his low voice someday, probably soon.

You see the other group from your tour approaching. You walk onto the bus at the same time as them. The tour guide stands at the front of the bus.

He says, "I'm at a loss. I don't know what to do. Did anyone see her?"

Everyone is silent on the bus. You tuck your knees into your chest and rest your chin on top of them. You wish the search was for Evan. That is what you pretended while you stalked the cliffs one last time. You wish he would come from around a corner, or from one of the taller parts of the cliff, and shout your name with his arms outstretched to the sides.

"There you are," he would say.

"But we've been looking for *you*," you would say.

"Ah, well, here I am," he would say smiling, his red hair damp and dripping into his eyes. "You found me."

You wonder how you are ever going to go on without him, yet every minute that goes by is another minute without him that you have somehow survived. When you looked over the cliffs into the angry water for the first time today, you hobbled very close to the edge. You thought about joining him wherever he is now. You did not mind if death was just blackness, like

slipping into a deep, permanent slumber. Anything was better than here, than being this far away from Evan. And falling into the salted, white-capped waves did not seem so bad a way to go. But self-preservation gripped you, wholly, and you backed away from the edge, falling onto the dirt, scaring a passing family.

“She was in a red sweater someone said before,” the tour guide says. “Dirty blond hair. American. By herself? No one saw her?”

The bus is silent again. The tour guide confers with the driver. It is unbearably hot on the bus. You take off your yellow rain slicker and bunch it up on top in the overhead compartment. You notice a small line of white flowers sprouting from one of the cracks in the asphalt of the parking lot. You watch the flowers bend crazily in the ensuing storm. Amidst the chaos in the aftermath of Evan’s death, everyone forgot about the honeymoon. You do not know if anyone knows you are here, on the trip you were supposed to take together.

At home you went for long runs in the morning and at night. Everyone offered to come with you, even your dad who is half-beer belly half-person. You declined their offers. You liked hearing the thud of your feet slapping against the concrete, the only real thing you knew anymore in this world. Your mom performed her usual disappearing act, but your sister and dad flanked your sides at all times. You spent hours watching reality tv on the couch, your prodigious sister studying for her medical exams beside you, your dad dozing off most of the time.

People kept handing you cups of tea, so you drank the tea. If you removed all the tea tags from their strings, you would have been able to stitch many blankets from all the thread. At night you dreamt of patchwork quilts, of flying high above the ground and looking down on perfectly siphoned squares of land below; you dreamt of the plaid blanket you had kept around your lap since being home, of time passing and watching the blanket crumple and disappear into dust.

You snuck into your sister's bedroom one night. You crawled into bed beside her. She turned over on her side to face you and cupped your cheek in her palm. You said you wished Evan was still here. You wished you could have knitted him into your life, kept a part of him always with you in your sweaters and chairs and lampshades and shoes. You said you wished you could have made his presence always stay with you in a physical sense.

Your sister said, "I'm sorry I wasn't very nice to you growing up. I wish I had been nicer." She let you cry; your tears ran hot and unceasing against her neck, pooling in the crevice of her collarbone. She did not say anything, just rubbed your back until you fell asleep beside her. You opened her door the morning you left to tell her you were leaving. But you did not want her to try to come with you or stop you from leaving. This was always meant to be your and Evan's trip.

The bus shakes, rocking from side to side. Everyone is talking softly to the person sitting beside them. You stare at the empty seat beside you.

"Wait," says the Australian. "Is it her we're looking for?"

She is standing up turned backward with one knee on the seat in front of her pointing to you. You can feel everyone staring at you before you realize she is speaking about you. Finally you look up.

"Is it you?" the tour guide asks you, walking down the aisle toward you.

"I don't know," you say, shrugging. You look down at your brown sweater. Your hair, too, is more brunette than blond.

"Someone said you were wearing a red sweater."

"I'm wearing a brown sweater," you say. "Maybe I wore a red one yesterday?" you say out of your need to always be helpful, to be pleasing.

“I think it’s her,” someone else says.

“Ah, well then. I’m relieved. Let’s do a count.”

There are twenty-three of you, which is actually one more than before. The tour guide shrugs and returns to his seat. The driver starts the bus. You look out the window. The rain has finally started to pour; you watch the rain drip like melting wax against the window. You press your face against the glass in search of coolness, but it is just as clammy and humid as the air. You sink back in your seat. The older couple has stopped eating their hard boiled eggs. The woman from the honeymooning couple leans over to you.

She asks, “Are you okay?” You nod your head and say, “Oh yeah, yes I am. Sure, I’m fine. Thanks,” with a smile plastered onto your face.