

Hypnagogia*

by Penny Rogers

The cold water tugged her skirt; she dare not fall over, must keep searching, must find him. She took her skirt off and watched it float away. The gaudy orange, pink and blue fabric writhed on the sullen sea. She called, louder and louder, ignoring the jagged rocks lacerating her legs and feet, but there was no reply, only the slap of the unforgiving water against the shore.

Balanced between waking and sleep she was able to go back and keep searching. As she stumbled through the water the serrated mountains across the narrow channel softened as the evening sun settled down in the west. She could see the last glimpses of golden light on the forbidding ranges to the east, watch the grey limestone mellow into chocolate brown, dissolve into purple and finally hide in inky black.

All night she kept up her fruitless search, sensing it was all over when tangerine-coloured light penetrated the ashy dawn sky. As the sun rose over Butrint, lighting the Corfu channel and throwing fingers of gold onto the indented coastline, she picked a bunch of rosemary and tied it with a piece of string she found lodged in a rock. The ebbing tide took it away from her. Her boy was out there somewhere in the perfidious currents and shifting sands: riding on dolphins, dodging shearwaters, dancing along white-tipped waves, playing games with fishing boats.

Most nights she relived that search. Often, unable to carry on and unwilling to float into sleep, she forced herself awake. Then she blamed herself all over again for not trying hard enough, hoping against forlorn hope that one day she would find her lost son and carry him safely to the shore

Fully awake she consoled herself with memories and plans for her return to the beaches and headlands, to search at least once more. At first she'd returned at every opportunity; on his birthday, on the anniversary of the day that he went missing, and sometimes at random, always in the anticipation of finding him. But as the years passed the hallucinations became more vivid and the visits less frequent. What if, even after so long, a bunch of sea-wracked rosemary came in with the tide at Avlaki beach?

And then it wasn't a dream, it was for real. Waves crashed over the sea wall, threw themselves over the coast road, shaking the hire car and covering it with bits of seaweed, pebbles, marine invertebrates and salt. Amazed and terrified she looked into the waves; he was there, his little face smiling and laughing at her. She reached out to grab him, bring him back from the snarling sea. She woke up drenched in salt water.

A German photographer found the bag. He was hunting above the high water mark for rocks of a suitable size and shape to use in a composition. Having moved several from what looked like a cairn, he found a carefully hidden compostable plastic bag. It had already started to degrade when he discovered it; the strips of dissolving plastic fell apart to reveal neatly folded clothes. Inside the dry jeans, tee shirt and underwear the photographer found a passport, a phone, a surprisingly fresh sprig of rosemary and the image of a smiling child. The photograph was wet, curled and sea-stained.

**Hypnagogia – the transitional state of consciousness between wakefulness and sleep.*