

The Grand Ocean by Alara Holland

People flash by me, colours blending together to make a sea of distorted shapes. If this is a sea, I'm struggling to swim. I'm going to drown.

The hot humid air flows into my mouth like waves of water with every hard-earned breath. Which are getting louder and raspier as the surrounding temperature increases. But these waves don't quench my thirst, they flood my lungs with dryness. Oh to have just one sip of *wet* water. I look around, a sense of loneliness hits me. No one else seems to find it challenging.

Each of my steps drag along the worn tiled floor longer than the last. My toes push up in my shoes. Moisture builds in my socks and the heat glazes my skin with a layer of sweat. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people have stepped in the exact spots I'm walking.

I feel small, I mean, it's hard not to when you're somewhere as grand as the Grand Bazaar. Arched corridor after arched corridor, bright colours and textures passing me by like schools of fish. It's clear to me that I'm not wanted here (and to be fair, I don't want to be here either). This building is trying to eject me.

Finally, the last archway greets me, the mouth of the cave, the surface of the ocean, the jaws of the whale. Peace awaits me.

The outdoor air kisses my face, cooling the sweat that built up in drops all over my skin. I gaze up into the clear blue sky, something I am newly grateful for.

As I peer back into the Bazaar I notice it seems somewhat relieved, the arches glance kindly at me, as if they want me to know that everything is okay. What if the Grand Bazaar was also stressed while I was inside? We're affected by our surroundings so maybe our surroundings are affected by us.

Now that I have the time to really see the building, I notice how beautiful it is. There are little glowing gems I've missed in this big dark cave. The shimmering blue jewels hanging from the necklaces attached to the ceiling, the carefully woven carpets laid over stools to be sold. The crafts, the pottery, the Turkish delight, the spices, the toys. Every shop tells its own story. And each story is different. Imperfections, perfections, it doesn't matter. Just like us humans.