

CHRY'S ROMEO



ISLAND OF BLISS

Island of Bliss

by Chrys Romeo

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Just one day - sometimes, that's just about enough time to hold an eternity in it.

As the rays of sunlight seem to take off, in just one second, there is enough time to live and love for an entire eternity. In one moment there can be enough intensity to equal infinity itself... if you know how. If you can feel it.

Ramos was slightly aware of that, but his thoughts were light and airy as the ship was approaching the shores of the sunny island. He could feel the breeze, warm and soft, tickling him under his white shirt, ruffling strands of hair in his eyes, as he glanced toward the steep edge of hills surrounding the distant shore of the little island, soaked in the summer sun and carrying the scent of vineyards, orange trees and olive leaves. He wasn't thinking of time that day when he arrived on the island. His mind was a mixture of stranded thoughts about his ancient Greek roots, lost in an age of legends and myths, and the bright day ahead, awaiting with promising shores of vacation. He could remember from childhood vague family talks about some far away ancestor that originated from one of those little islands scattered along the Mediterranean Sea. Yet his mind was easily distracted by the view and the energy of the water. The air was filled with splashing drops of salty waves. He could feel some familiar welcoming sense of belonging, as the ship was getting closer to the land. As he was standing on the deck, in full sunlight, there was something in his appearance, perhaps the dark hair, the powerful shoulders and the glistening eyes that made him look like one of those ancient athletes painted on pots and vases. But more than that, there was something deep in his soul - a thirst for life, a fire burning to capture the moment, a need to enjoy each second to its full extent that made him feel he belonged there somehow. He deserved the magic of the island.

It felt as if it was there that life displayed to its full intensity the best of what it could offer; and he was ready to enjoy the moment, the unrepeatability of being exactly in that place, in that one place at that time. He almost didn't realize how much he was already enjoying the presence of the orange trees and vineyards, scattered on the dry heated land of the little island, the soft welcoming atmosphere of solitary bliss in a corner of the world where nature had complete freedom to become wild, unrestricted and charming at the same time. As the ship made contact with the shore, he didn't even wait for the sailors to throw the rope and stairs. He jumped directly on the edge of stones that appeared white and long washed by sun and waves.

"Wait a minute sir!" he heard an alarmed voice behind, and he smiled and looked around, enchanted by the view, as the sailor was bringing his bag across the ledge, eager and almost anxious to get rid of the luggage.

He wasn't attentive to the ship anymore. He was looking around the shore. Something was entirely familiar to him. A very peaceful and deep silence covered the hills basking in the midday sun. To the other side of the harbor, he could see a lighthouse, white as chalk and painted with blue stripes. It stood there, like a testimony of the unending tranquility of the island. He imagined the ships it would beacon at night, as he could see wooden little boats tied afloat in the long hours of dozing in the summer heat, just hearing the tide swishing back and forth, awakening tiny creatures. The warm gentle temperature seemed to make everything float around in undisturbed stillness. Even the white clouds above were slowing down to doze off, dissipating effortlessly, as if enjoying the hour.

"Hey, hey, what do you know!" someone exclaimed and he saw a bright figure coming down the hill, toward the shores.

It was a man, dark haired and wearing a moustache, speaking in a friendly manner, with fast gestures and quick restless eyes. His sharp profile cut through the air, as he skipped the stairs and hopped on the shore. He seemed mature enough to know his way around, but not old enough to keep his childlike sly attitude in check. His eyes were sparkling so intensely, as if he didn't miss anything.

"They told me we would have new visitors today, but I wasn't expecting such an adventure boy like yourself", he smiled, extending a hand to Ramos. "I'm Frankie, the island guide."

Ramos shook his hand. His powerful grasp made the other man stare at him with amused admiration.

"Are you working out a lot?" he grinned under his moustache.

Ramos noticed that the slender restless man was dressed extravagantly in a bright costume, made of white leather, adorned with sparkling pieces of metal and diamond-like ornaments. He was wearing a dazzling belt and his tight trousers were white too, similar to the color of the stones on the shore, as if the waves and the storms had washed him in time, along with everything else around. He looked like a ballet figure, yet there was something mysterious in his attitude, something he was keeping to himself. Ramos felt safe enough in his presence to have the conversation flowing.

"I'm from Arizona", he stated briefly and casually, "but my folks say I have some distant ancestor from around here. I've finally come to see where my roots spring from. Otherwise, I'm just a student on vacation. This looks like a fabulous place."

"The best there can be on earth, trust me!"

Frankie grabbed the voyage bag.

“Let me help you. I know the way, I’ll show you around. Don’t you worry about a thing!”

Ramos could do nothing more but go after the man who behaved like an island expert.

As they started to climb the hill in the heated sunlight, Frankie kept talking, while Ramos unbuttoned his shirt and paused every now and then to glance back at the blue shore expanding more and more in sight, as they were going up. The uneven cliffs that were immersed in the warm sea water offered the same peaceful stillness.

“Some days there’s me, some days there’s Mikalos to show you around and answer your questions. We take turns to watch the island. He is the other shift, a very nice fellow. You won’t find a better heart, more giving, more enthusiastic. Mikalos is my best friend. We hang out a lot. We’re in charge around here.”

He laughed and Ramos didn’t know if his words were meant as fun or they were the actual truth.

“You don’t believe me?” Frankie continued. “You just wait and see. This island is ours. It’s yours too now, even more, because you are the new guest. You are the prince. Name it and we bring it.”

Frankie laughed again, but Ramos was getting accustomed to his way of talking and he guessed that the guide could speak about serious matters in the most amused way, without diminishing the meaning of the words. And beyond that, there was something more he didn’t intend to reveal. Ramos wondered what it was. But he was soon distracted by the aroma of the orange trees and the approaching vineyards. Small houses with walls of white chalk appeared on the road, spreading in front of them.

“So you say you’re a student, huh? You’ve got stubble across your cheek, kid. Don’t they teach you to shave in your university?”

Ramos touched his own cheek and felt the slight roughness. He went along with Frankie’s game.

“I’m on vacation. Besides, I bet hair doesn’t grow so fast on this island. Everything seems at a slow pace around here.”

“Yes, you are right about that”.

Frankie became serious and stopped in front of a little house.

“Here we are. There’s enough room during this time of year. This is one of our guest houses. Mikalos comes to water the plants. Other than that, you’ll have complete peace. Mikalos won’t bother you - you won’t even know when he’s in the garden. He’s in charge of whatever grows on the island. Ask him and he’ll go on for hours about the orange trees and

the small goats and the little seagulls and the crabs on the shores... and whatever other living creature you can imagine that exists. Yeah, that's our Mikalos."

Frankie smiled, glancing to the sun that was imperceptibly shifting its place in the sky, still as bright and intense as the heated shores. Then he turned to the sea and pointed far away, in a triumphant gesture:

"Look! Your ship is leaving. You are one of us now!"

Ramos saw the ship that was indeed leaving the island. Its tiny figure was getting smaller, becoming more of a paper boat. He suddenly felt a bit anxious as he watched it get a distance, almost vanishing. He felt an unexplained worry, a hidden shadow passing by and clouding his vision for an instant. He shrugged it off quickly. He was enjoying the island too much to worry about the ship. He was looking forward to spending some wonderful days ahead. He smiled and let the warm afternoon air wrap around him, with the whispering orange trees and the yellow grass covering the cliffs. He breathed content and enchanted. The Mediterranean island was indeed a corner of paradise.

As they went inside the house, the air cooled off. The ceiling was not too high and the small windows had shaded curtains, beyond which the blue line of water could be seen in the distance. Across the bay, the silhouette of the chalky lighthouse was steaming off in the sun, like a pointed exclamation mark in the dense heat of the summer sky. The house was simply decorated, but it had the same peaceful, welcoming charm. Ramos glanced at his watch.

"Listen bro", he said to Frankie. "Is there a store where I can buy a watch on this island? This one seems to have stopped – it's probably the battery. Would it be too fancy to ask for a replacement?"

Frankie smiled absently.

"You don't need a watch around here, kid. Trust me. I'll tell you what time it is whenever you want to know. I'm an angel of time."

And Frankie laughed. Ramos thought he was teasing him again, so he just went along with the game. The other added:

"However, if you really need to know the time, there's a big clock tower in the square down the road, you can check the time there. And there's a calendar on the bedroom wall. One page for every day of the week."

"Thanks. I think I'll be fine with that".

Frankie stuck his hands inside his sparkling belt, thumbs sticking out.

"Sooo... I'll let you rest for a while now. Call me if you need anything. Either I will come, or Mikalos will. One of us will be around. "

“How do I find you?” Ramos inquired.

“You don’t. I’ll find you.”

Frankie winked at him, childishly again.

“We’re having this secret code, like in those detective movies. Get it? Don’t worry. I’ll be on the island.”

He extended his arms and his big white teeth sparkled under the spiky moustache.

“Where could I go anyway? I’m not going anywhere.”

Then he laughed; he turned around and left, whistling without a care.

Ramos glanced after him amused, then unpacked his bag and threw himself on the bed, wondering if an hour of sleep was what he needed. He didn’t feel sleepy, so he decided to just explore the island. He changed his shirt, grabbed a sandwich from his lunch pack and went outside.

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The island proved to be a bit larger than it had initially seemed to him.

First, he went to the square that Frankie had spoken about. The road was empty, the square was deserted too. It was as if everyone had disappeared, vanished into the stillness and the glowing heat of the afternoon. It seemed the air was radiating invisible waves. The pathways were paved with the same white washed stones and a few oleanders decorated the walls, swishing lazily in the breeze. The alleys were narrow and inevitably, invariably leading to the shores. No matter where he was, he could see some part of the blue line of the horizon from whichever angle of the pathways. Walking around and not meeting anyone seemed an unreal truth of the island. He finished his sandwich while walking, then stopped to sit on a bench on one of the white terraces built up on the cliff, opening the view to the immense Mediterranean sea, hanging just above the steep wall of rocks. He sat there for a while, letting the entire view sink in, somewhere in the depth of his consciousness, magically wrapped in the silent atmosphere. Nature was however speaking, whispering something. There were seagulls floating away toward the lighthouse and waves continually splashed down along the harbor. He closed his eyes, envisioning the distance to the rest of the world. It was as if nothing else but the island had remained under the sky: the eternal, immemorial stillness of the island. He felt he was a part of that truth, integrated in it, with each breath he peacefully inhaled, melting his existence in it, perfectly belonging there.

“Are you alone?” he heard someone ask.

Ramos opened his eyes. He smiled. A teenage girl was sitting on the other end of the bench, holding a closed book in her hands. She was glancing attentively and curiously at him. She was one of those subtly refined sculpted Greek girls, sharp nose and deep eyes, firm jaws and slender back, as if she had always been vertical, sustaining the sky. Her brown chocolate eyes inspected him with enthusiasm and a kind wisdom, unusual for her age. She seemed to have stepped down from a pedestal. Yet she was very real, waiting for an answer,

“Well, I’m sorta kinda by myself here”, he said and he ran a hand through his slick black hair, feeling somewhat awkward.

The teenager seemed to look right through his mind.

“What about you?” he said composing a more determined and confident tone.

“What about me?”

Teenagers, he thought. They are so direct.

“What’s your name? Where are your folks?”

“My name is Althea. I live over there, beyond the square, just behind the clock tower.”

“Ah, the clock tower. Yes, I’ve seen it”.

He looked back at the empty square.

“So where are they now?”

“Are you talking about my family?”

“Sure”.

“They’re taking my little sister to the continent; I’m supposed to join them in an hour down the bay. We’ll take a motor boat. We’ll be back before the weekend is over.”

“So why aren’t you with them now? Maybe you need to get ready for the visit.”

“Are you trying to get rid of me?” she laughed.

“No, I just wondered...”

He felt as if the girl kept going one step ahead and catching him off guard. Teenagers... She was too clever for that hour of the day. He looked at her a bit more interested.

“What are you reading?”

She handed him the book.

“It’s *Myths and Legends*”.

“Right. It fits the place completely.”

He browsed the pages.

“So you say you’ll be back before the weekend is over? Would that be on Sunday?” he asked her absently.

“Yes... I guess so.”

Ramos suddenly realized he didn't know anymore what day of the week it was.

He gave her back the book and looked at her a bit disoriented.

"What day is today? Saturday?"

"Nope. It's Friday."

"Right. I remember now, I got on the ship on Friday morning and arrived here at noon. It feels I've been here since forever already..."

He got up and they both looked down to the bay.

"Well, I gotta go", the girl told him. "They'll be waiting for me. It was nice to meet you. I'll see you around, then?"

"Yeah, sure. Take care."

She was still standing there.

"You didn't tell me your name".

Teenagers, he thought.

"Ramos. My name is Ramos. I'm from Arizona, if it means anything to you."

"It does. It was nice to meet you, Ramos".

He smiled.

"You're a clever girl, Althea. Keep reading."

She hurried off and he lost sight of her beyond the oleanders.

The place was silent again. He looked around. In the distance, the white chalk lighthouse was waiting, as if patiently painted against the clear blue sky.

He decided to go that way and explore the other part of the island.

As he was getting closer to the bay, he noticed another terrace, right near the water. The chairs were mostly empty and had been turned upside down. But at one table, he saw someone - a woman. She was sipping lemonade and the Mediterranean breeze was softly moving her long blond hair, along with the rhythm of the splashing waves on the shore, which was fascinating and captivating to see. She had a straw hat that was hiding her eyes. Yet underneath the hat, he could notice her chin and the hands holding a tall glass. The glass was covered with steam from the cold lemonade, most probably. She was wearing a yellow dress and the vanilla nuance of the folds above her knees stood out in the complete white of the terrace. It was a contrast that harmonized with the light blue, nevertheless. Something about her entire being made him stare.

Ramos realized he was lost in thoughts, watching the woman and it surprised him to become so acutely aware of it. She looked like a tourist herself. She looked a bit out of place.

“I can’t just go to her and introduce myself”, he thought. “It would be rude. And there’s no one else around.”

He pondered for a second. The intensity of the sun was blinding his eyes. What if he turned away and never went to speak to that woman? What if he never had the chance to meet her ever again? They would never know each other, he thought. Things would remain like that. Unknown, unresolved. Suspended, unaccomplished, undeveloped... As if life would meet a blocked road. The idea of an unexplored opportunity seemed like a lost chance. But then, there was a risk. What if he went to her and it made him look like a fool? Or worse, like a jerk?... He hesitated.

However he evaluated the situation, he couldn’t let the moment pass him by. He finally acted on the intensity of the impulse and chose to walk to her. What was the worst that could happen anyway?...

He realized that somehow he always did that. He liked to experience things in their most intense aspects, to enjoy the best of life’s offerings. He would prefer to choose to go to the end of it. To do the best that could be done. To be the best he could become. To see how far it could go. To not let things be wasted. Maybe that was a risky choice: a lot could be lost instead, but he knew he would regret it more if he didn’t do anything. Who had taught him to think like that? It was an inherent instinct, a daring impulse, an endless courage that pushed him forward. Maybe he really had an ancestor from that island. Maybe it was the ancient spirit of a knowledge long gone that life must be taken to its most, that infinity was waiting to rise from underneath the slow hours of a simple day and turn it into eternal splendor. The instinct was undeniably there, like a part of the island. Seize the day. Seize the moment. Live your life. Make it shine. Be the best. Get out of mediocrity and safe middle ways. Go out and be.

He came to her table and stood there in the sun.

“Is this seat taken?” he asked casually, but he felt his voice a bit unstable.

As afraid as he was of being rejected, he was even more frightened of losing the opportunity of getting closer to that person in the sun, who was so attractive.

She raised her eyes and looked at him. The glimmer of her eyes was subtle and warm.

“You may sit if you like”, she answered politely.

He sighed of relief and sat next to her.

“I think I’ll have one of those too”, he said pointing to her glass of lemonade.

And he smiled, trying to be friendly. She said nothing. The strands of her hair, unevenly spreading under the straw hat, were irresistibly drawing his eyes to her shoulders and the vanilla dress. He controlled his stare and looked away to the lighthouse in the distance.

“Have you been there yet?” he asked.

It was worth a try asking. He knew it was always worth a try. Not always with results, though.

“Not yet”, she answered in the same tone.

She was absently ignoring him somehow.

“I’m Ramos”, he said. “I’ve just arrived on this island today. Isn’t it wonderful?”

He paused to look around. And then he looked back at her. It was obvious he was trying to start a conversation, yet she wasn’t helping very much. He stared in her eyes helplessly. And then, she smiled. A miracle has happened, he thought. He felt a load lifting off his shoulders and he relaxed.

“I arrived two days ago”, she told him. “I’m Lisa.”

“Lisa...”

“Yes. I’m from London.”

He was listening to her and enjoying the sound of her voice. It had a certain resonance that seemed absolutely enchanting to his ears.

“Are you staying longer?” he asked her.

She looked at him again, and the eyes under the hat made him shiver unexpectedly.

“Maybe”, she answered after a while, still looking at him.

At that moment, he heard someone shout his name from the pier. He turned to look at the tall figure running and waving his arms at him. He didn’t know the guy. It was a pale silhouette, with locks of pitch black hair flowing in the sea air like the mane of a horse.

“Ramos!”

He got up from the chair.

“It seems I’ve got to go”, he said to Lisa. “I hope we’ll meet again”...

The running young man was barefoot, approaching in a hurry along the bay. He had deep large eyes and marble-like skin, which seemed unusual, as if he had never spent time in the sun, not in the least tanned, a very odd appearance on those shores. He was wearing dusty trousers and a shirt floating like a ship flag.

“You’re Ramos, right?” he gasped, pausing to catch his breath.

Ramos watched him puzzled.

“That’s me. What’s happened?”

“You’ve got to come with me.”

And he grabbed his arm. Ramos didn’t move, still looking at the other in disbelief, reluctantly drawing his arm back.

“Why? And who are you? I was just having a conversation with someone at that table...”

He turned to look at the blond yellow dressed Lisa, yet the table was empty and she was gone. Ramos bit his lip and frowned a little. His eyes clouded. He didn’t understand. Where did she go?...

The other kept talking.

“I am Mikalos. Frankie must have told you about me. You must come now. The island is going down tonight.”

Ramos became more attentive.

“What do you mean it’s going down?”

“There’s been an earthquake and by the time it gets dark everything you see will be under water.”

Mikalos was very serious. Ramos just realized, in a second, that the young man probably spent most of his nights watering the plants and most of the days hiding from the sun. That explained his pale complexion.

“What earthquake?” he asked in disbelief, starting to walk beside Mikalos along the bay.

“Didn’t you feel it? It was just half an hour ago. They announced it on the news. We should evacuate the island.”

“Wait... if this is true, we must warn Lisa too.”

“Who is this Lisa person?”

Mikalos seemed naïve for his age and his innocent eyes stared at Ramos with sincere interest.

“It’s someone I’ve just met on that terrace...”

“The problem is that even if we warn her, there is nothing she can do. The boats at the lighthouse have been set loose by the last tide, or someone untied them on purpose, I don’t know. The last motor boat left ten minutes ago, with a family. There is nothing we can do but swim. We must get on higher ground before it sinks.”

Ramos was staring into space. His mind seemed to not fully comprehend the meaning of the words. Mikalos was making large gestures and his white shirt looked like big wings across the bay. The sky was getting darker; clouds were coming from the horizon. The waves had

changed their slow splashing pace and were becoming higher, more aggressive, throwing heaps of water over the edge. A rumbling sound started to shake the ground.

“See? I told you! Let’s go!”

Mikalos grabbed his sleeve and started to run up the hill. Ramos was jumping over the rocks and bushes, scratching his feet. They arrived at the top just as the cliff was beginning to crack and fall apart. The noise was deafening and the dark was spreading fast. Night was coming too soon, Ramos thought.

“Where’s Frankie?” he shouted at Mikalos.

“Frankie’s already taken off. He’s gone”

“What do you mean taken off?” Ramos shouted, but the storm swallowed his words.

The next thing he knew, he was falling deeply and water was engulfing everything.

He got covered by it, and then everything went dark.

He didn’t know if he was breathing anymore. He didn’t know where he was. He didn’t even wonder if he was anymore.

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He woke up in a bed.

It was morning.

The rays of the sun were flowing around him. He looked up. He was in the little house, with small windows that showed the blue line of the horizon beyond and away.

He stood there, not knowing what to believe at first. It was, obviously, morning. Things seemed still and peacefully sinking in that tranquility he had encountered the day before, when he had arrived on the island. And yet, the other night, the island had been immersed in water, destroyed... or had it been a dream?

‘Maybe it was just a nightmare’, he thought. ‘Maybe I came back here in the afternoon and I fell asleep. Then, I dreamt that I went for a walk and I met those people.’

He stood up. And yet, it was morning. The sun was rising, but the heat was not so strong. It was definitely morning. He looked at the pots of plants on the window pane. Someone had watered them at night. Mikalos, he thought.

He wanted to check his watch, but he didn’t have a watch anymore around his wrist. He remembered the clock tower in the square. ‘I must go there’, he thought.

He had to get out of the house. Before he went out, he looked at the calendar. It was Friday. He tore the page away and opened the door.

He went outside. To his surprise, there were people in the streets. Some were going to the market, with baskets around their arms. Some were walking to coffee shops, some were just talking casually. He passed them by. 'I need some breakfast', he thought and he stopped in front of the clock tower. It was nine. He looked around. He noticed a coffee shop and went to sit at a table. By the time he was having his coffee and toast with orange jam, someone sat down next to him.

"Hi Frankie", he said and continued his breakfast, undisturbed.

Frankie smiled.

"I see you remember me. I'm glad".

"Of course I remember you. Who could ever not. You're one of a kind".

Ramos smiled, but there was a trace of anger and frustration in his voice. He didn't remember why he had slept so long the day before.

The tasty breakfast was somehow erasing his bewildered thoughts. A sense of comfort and ease covered his mind, infusing his mood with better impressions. He glanced around. It was a kind of happiness to sit there in the morning sun, listen to the oleanders in the salty sea air, feel the aroma of the orange trees and the burned yellow grass, and watch the animated little island come to life. It was an overwhelming feeling of comfort and certainty. It was a beautiful summer morning. Everything was just right. It was just perfectly fine. Life was good. Life was miraculous. Ramos thought about his ancestor and Althea's book of myths. Maybe they had felt that for centuries, those people living there: the essence of bliss, the best of life. The sky was a clear blue, sharp and cloudless. Had Althea been part of the dream? And Lisa?... He doubted they had been real. He was asleep anyway by the time he had met them. 'I must have invented them', he concluded. His mind had invented everything for sure.

He stared at his remaining coffee.

"Hey Frankie, he said, I think I'll take a walk down to the bay. It's almost ten o'clock and I haven't taken advantage of this sunny day yet."

"Have fun", Frankie replied, leaning casually on the seat. "And if you need anything, just call me."

Ramos got up. He had already paid for the breakfast. He started to walk toward the shore.

"Next time I'll buy you coffee", Frankie shouted after him. "Or you'll buy one for me".

Ramos approached the shores with thoughts running irreversibly through his mind. He was still turning the events in his head, wondering about what to do for the rest of the day, when he noticed a tourist ship that was cruising the waters around the island. He was just

getting to the pier when the ship passed closely nearby, so close that he could see the passengers on the deck. He stared absently at the tourists. They were just passengers. They were not going to visit the island. They were probably a larger group from the continent. Suddenly, he blinked in the morning sun. The sting hurt his eyes and he felt his breathing stop for a second. He stared painfully at the deck that was overflowing with sunlight. He thought he had seen a flash of vanilla yellow dress. He started to run along the shore, as the ship was getting distance. Could it have been her? Could it? How could it, actually? Deja-vu, he thought. I'm experiencing a deja-vu. I've dreamed about it and here she is.

He grabbed the metal bar of the shore barrier and leaned beyond it, trying to squint and distinguish the yellow dress among the passengers. The ship docked, to his surprise, and people started getting off. His heart hurried, beating faster. He walked up to them, pretending to just pass by. 'I'm stalking her', he thought. 'I shouldn't'. But the temptation was too strong. And his face lit up when he saw her stepping on the shore, elegantly holding her straw hat by the ribbon. It was her. It was really her. He couldn't understand. Had it not been a dream? Why was she really there? Was it a premonition? A deja-vu moment? Had he seen her before somewhere else?...

He chased away the rush of thoughts that was flooding his mind and just enjoyed the vision of her walking past him. It was just one thought, one enchantment - happiness. He was happy to see her. He followed her to the terrace where he watched her sit at the table. He hesitated only for a second; then, he went straight to her, with a big smile on his face.

"Can I sit here?" he asked her.

She raised the rim of her hat a little, to glance at him attentively.

"I don't know", she replied. "Can you?"

There was irony in her voice, but she remained distant.

"I mean, would you mind very much if I sit here?" he added, not in the least intimidated by her cold answer.

Being there with her, having found her so unexpectedly, so suddenly, in such an unexplained miraculous way, meant so much more to him. It meant so much happiness, it made him so enthusiastic, that it didn't matter what she said. Ramos took the chair and adjusted in the seat, relaxed and content, still smiling at her.

"So... let me guess... you're going to have some lemonade?"

She watched him carefully.

"Do I know you?" she asked.

"No, I don't think so. I'm Ramos. I just arrived yesterday."

“Well, I came two days ago...”

“From London, right?”

He was amused at her bewilderment.

“How did you know?”

He shrugged, mysteriously.

“I just guessed. It must be your accent.”

“Okay...”

She started to smile a little. ‘Victory!’ he thought. ‘She’s smiling!’ Things seemed to be going great. And yet, the cruise ship rang its siren.

“I must be going”, she said and stood up.

“Why must you return to the ship right now?”

“The ride is two hours long. We’re going around the island. There are secret vaults on the other side. They say there are lots of interesting things to see.”

“Yes”, he agreed, “Most probably.”

And as he saw her go, he still had something more to ask.

“Tell me your name.... please?”...

She replied without turning her head, as if it didn’t matter:

“Lisa.”

Why did I ask? he thought. I knew that!

He remained alone on the terrace. The ride would take two hours. A thought was haunting him, disturbing him somehow: had he spotted her earlier, he could’ve been on that cruise ship too. He could’ve gotten up earlier and caught the ride to spend more time with her. If only he had known that. If only.

He watched the ship fade into the distance. The sun and the heat were getting stronger. He stared dreamily after the ship that was taking her away... he could have been there. And yet, he wasn’t.

Eventually, after the ship disappeared and the silence covered the terrace, he realized he was alone. He got up and started walking up the hill, on the path, breathing the scent of yellow grass and orange trees. He finally arrived on top of the hill and found a bench. He sat down.

“Hi”, he heard a voice.

A teenage girl was standing in front of him, holding a book. She was wearing sandals, a t-shirt and shorts, and her vertical shadow was cutting the bench in two. Her sculpted presence took him by surprise.

“Hi”, he replied, hardly finding his voice.

“Are you waiting for something?”

He shook his head.

“No. I’m just... watching the view”.

She sat next to him, so confident, as if her shoulders were sustaining the sky by her mere presence.

“Have you read the *Legend of Atlantis*?” she asked him so unexpectedly, that he was startled.

He stared at her.

“There are many legends about the island of Atlantis”, he said slowly. “Which one do you refer to?”

“The one in this book.”

She showed him the cover. *Myths and Legends*.

He stared at the horizon, in silence.

“My name is Althea, by the way”, she added.

Why am I not surprised, he thought.

“I’ve been thinking about the truth of it”, she continued.

“What truth?”

He glanced at her. Teenagers. Whoever knows what goes on in their minds?

“The truth about Atlantis, of course. I think it wasn’t just an island.”

She seemed so sure of herself. He smiled.

“What was it, then?”

“It was a dream, a way of life. It was a piece of eternity.”

“You are very clever”, he noticed.

She smiled.

“Thank you.”

She stood up. “It was nice to meet you...”

“Ramos.”

“It was nice to meet you, Ramos. I’ll be leaving the island later this afternoon, but if we meet again before the weekend is over, I’ll be glad to talk some more about myths and legends with you.”

Why would a teenager find it interesting to talk to me, Ramos wondered. And yet he just waved at her.

“As you wish. Take care, Althea.”

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