

The Living of a Life

4 Short Stories

&

4 Poems

K. J. Tesar

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To my dear friend
Craig Duffy
Thanks for the encouragement,
and gentle nudge
in the right direction.

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This State of Being

There is nothing I love more than staring out of my window, and watching the changing effects of the seasons, on the beautiful garden below. Without a doubt, it is one of the most precious pleasures life has gifted me. I have positioned my work station right in front of a large window, here on the second floor, and the view is nothing short of fantastic. Every time I look out, I see something incredibly breathtaking. In the foreground, there are pathways weaving through the well manicured gardens, and across the back is a line of tall trees, ringing the entire garden area. Behind those trees, putting them almost in a picture frame, are Auckland's Waitakere Ranges. The overall picture is one of sheer beauty. A beauty my eyes never tire from. On the one hand, it could almost be called a distraction, to be constantly looking up from my work, and watching the garden below. Really though, it is the peace, and serenity, that the view gives me, that enables me to work so well. I find that when I am relaxed, I do my best work. The garden breathes life into me, and through me, into my work. The choice to work from home was such a life changer. Since my accident, I have made a lot of changes in my life. My new life barely even resembles that of my old one. When we travel through our lives, not aware of what the gift of life really means, it is so easy to get sidetracked by feeling the need, the pressure, to have all the latest gadgets, all the best clothes, and a home worthy of the best of afternoon television. All our decisions are influenced by what others think is best for us. The actual living of that life, gets lost somewhere. In our constant chase for all the things we are led to believe that we need, we forget about what would actually be good for us. The things in life, quite often free, which are the things that make life worth living. The essence of life itself. Far be it for me to judge. I myself was one of the worst, at not recognising these things. I was a go-getter from the start. I studied hard, and then, when I entered the workforce, I worked hard, climbing up the corporate ladder. I judged my progress by the amount of money I earned, by the quality of the goods I owned, but never even considered if any of it made me happy. I suppose it had been a result of the competitive nature of the school, and university, I had attended. At no time, in my learning years, did any teacher ever broach the subject of living a life you enjoyed. It was all focused on success. I suppose, in an abstract sort of way, it was just assumed that, with success, happiness would follow. I, myself, never even considered it. I was driven, along with my contemporaries, to attain the maximum. We all studied hard, worked hard, and tried for the best results possible. Sometimes I think back on those years, and wonder if people actually liked me. Through it all, was I a nice person? Were we even friends? Quite probably, I was so focused on succeeding, that little details, like friendship, were

put aside. They were people to compete with, people to try and beat, by attaining better results. How could that be the basis of friendship? In my drive for results, things like friendship, and nature's beauty, were never considered. Life had been all around me, but I hadn't noticed it. I had been so distracted by the living of my life, that I never really noticed life, itself. The beauty of life, the beauty of people, were things that I had never dwelt on. I feel a sadness when I think of that, of all those wasted years. Being constantly encircled by the beauty of life, and the beauty of people, but without even being aware of it's presence. Strangely, it took a bad accident to open my eyes to what had always been there, but which, I had never seen.

'It's such a lovely place here, Kevin. It's so peaceful.'

My mother's face always lit up when she looked over the garden below. Like me, now, she appreciated it's great serenity.

'Thanks, mum, I like it too. I've designed my work station around the fantastic view from the window. To be honest, it can be a bit distracting, but actually, it gives me the energy to get through all my projects.'

'I always look forward to coming here to see you, so much.'

I looked at my mother's face. For her age, approaching 60, she was still very beautiful, although she had a strange look of sadness. Dad's death, years ago, had hit her hard, and now with my accident on top of that, she seemed to have become permanently sad. I really worried about her. She had life's usual worry lines across her brow. No doubt they had increased drastically through the period of my accident, and rehabilitation.

'Mother, your visits always bring me a lot of pleasure.'

Really, mother's visits distracted me, a lot, from my work. However, the new person that I had become, didn't place work above all else. Now, finally, I valued life itself. People, the view from my window, and the actual living of life, were the things that I now valued, above all else. My mother was the most important person in my new life, especially after all she had done for me after my accident. I would never begrudge her any time she wanted.

'It wrenches out my heart, when I think of the accident you had. I was sure I had lost you, forever.'

Mum looked to be on the verge of crying, something she did a lot lately.

'Come on, mum, enough of that. Don't think about that anymore. Here we are, in a lovely place, together. What more could we ask for? Listen, if Mrs. Drummond is still around, I will get her to make us a cup of tea. Hopefully there will be some biscuits around, as well. What do you say?'

Mrs. Drummond came in a few hours a day, to do my cleaning, and prepare my meals for me. She was such a marvelous help, I don't know what I would do without her. Luckily, she was still on hand, and made us a cup of tea. I watched my mother as she drank her tea, and delicately chewed on a biscuit. I was so incredibly lucky, to have her in my life. The old me, the corporate, results driven me, had really taken her for granted.

We had never spoken about life, or gardens, things of that nature. Sure, I had kept her up to date with all my results, my promotions, and the money I was earning. I doubt that we had ever had a real conversation, about life, the beauty of life, or how to really live life, and appreciate the little things, like sitting here, and having a cup of tea together.

'In some ways, I'm glad your father wasn't still alive, when you had your accident. He just doted on you. Of course, he also loved your sister, don't get me wrong, but he really loved seeing how you excelled at everything. It would have just destroyed him.'

The sadness just seemed to consume her.

'Oh, come on, mum. You can't keep dwelling on the accident. If anything, I am happier now. Out of it all, I have discovered the true meaning of life. Instead of just appreciating money, position, and things like that, I now appreciate the little things in life. I feel that I am finally living the life I was meant to live.'

Of course, I could understand her. She had lived through what is probably the most traumatic event a mother could ever experience. In fact, she, no doubt, had experienced it more than me. Initially, I had been in a coma for a few days, barely clinging to life. Obviously, that had left a deep scar on her, and she had a difficult time forgetting it. I knew that I had to have a lot of patience with her, and give her all the support that I could. If anyone deserved that, it was mum. After all she had been through, that was the least I could do.

I don't remember the actual details of my accident, but, without a doubt, the wet, slippery road, and the dark of night, had all contributed to it. I don't remember anything until waking up in hospital, a few days later. Apparently, I had been trapped in the car for hours, and had to be cut free, with the so-called jaws of life. What followed for me, was months of hospital, and rehabilitation. All the drama that you could expect in a situation like that. My mother, my dearest mother, the woman who I have really only come to know so well since my accident, never left my side. Through all those months of hospital, she was my rock. It was only through her dedication, and constant love, that I managed to come through it all. Of that, I am sure. Even when I was still too damaged to talk, she would tell me all about what was going on, and what everyone was up to. When she held my hand in hers, I felt so connected to love, to life. Her voice was so soothing, and so peaceful. She always had a calming effect on me, and I knew that with her help, I could get through anything. She was my guardian angel, my pillar of strength. It was in those months, with the example of my mother's love, that I decided that my life needed to change, completely. I was never going back to living just as an automaton, living a life dictated by society. I wanted to live a real life. Listening to my mother describing simple things, such as how the sky looked, on a particular day, or how well the flowers were growing in her garden, woke up my urge to finally experience life itself. It was time for me to start my life, anew.

'Here's your lunch, now, Kevin. Come on, let's get you away from that window and get some food into you.'

I smiled, in reply. She was right, of course. Instead of working I had been gazing out of my window. Mrs. Drummond is such a help. She really fusses over me, and worries about whether I am eating enough. It is very sweet, really. Most people, in the modern age, don't care about others. It was so refreshing to have found someone with such old-school principles. She cleared away a spot on my work table, and placed my lunch there. To be honest, I hadn't really been able to get much work done that morning. Autumn had arrived in Auckland, and the colours in the garden below were just breathtaking. The new me, the person that I had become, now appreciated the power, and the beauty, of nature. I had spent most of the morning reflecting on the changes of the seasons. It was nature's way of renewing life. Without those changes, new growth couldn't come in the spring. It had occurred to me, that that is also true of the changes people need to go through. If we never change, we will never experience new things. If we are stuck in our ways, either out of convenience, or, perhaps habit, we will never experience different aspects of life. Our eyes will never be opened to new perspectives, new ways of looking at the same things. If you don't change the position you view things from, they will always appear the same. Everybody understands what it means for the seasons to change, but how many of us actually experience that change? Knowledge seems to be all about memorising things, rather than seeing them, or feeling them. We talk about things, without understanding their impact. We don't grasp the power of the things we talk about, because we don't actually live them. We tend to glide through life, and we forget to take notice of the really important things, things that don't enrich us economically, but which can enrich our souls. The things in life that can make our lives better, because, by experiencing them, we become better people.

Dr. McGuire looked up and saw Kevin's mother standing in the doorway of his office.

'Hello, Mrs. Wilson, what can I do for you?'

'Good morning doctor. If you don't mind, I was wondering if we could have a chat about Kevin's progress.'

'Certainly! Have a seat, please. From a medical point of view, nothing has really changed. I know our medical terminology can be difficult to understand, but, in Kevin's situation, as a result of the head trauma he suffered in his accident, we would say he is in a catatonic state, with minimal brain activity. That would...'

'Yes, thank you, I understand that. What I really wanted to know is, if he can hear me when I speak to him. Can he understand me?'

'From a purely medical point of view, that is extremely difficult to know. It differs from one case to another, but we really have no way of evaluating just how much a patient, in his condition, can comprehend. Listen, let me call in nurse Drummond, she has the most contact with Kevin. I'm sure she will be able to answer your questions, on a human level, better than me.'

Dr. McGuire picked up the phone, and spoke with his secretary. After a short wait,

nurse Drummond entered his office.

'Oh, hello there, Mrs. Wilson. I saw you visiting Kevin earlier. I'm sorry I didn't have time to get you a cup of tea today. It's been flat stick. Just one of those days!'

'Listen, Alice, Mrs. Wilson has some questions about Kevin's ability to comprehend his surroundings. Not from a medical point of view, but more from a mother's point of view. Do you have some time to have a talk with her?'

'Most certainly! Come on, let's head down to the cafeteria. We can have a cup of tea, and a bit of a chat.'

Mrs. Wilson followed nurse Drummond to the hospital's cafeteria. The two of them, after buying their teas, took a table by the window. The cafeteria was on the first floor of the institution, overlooking the garden. Mrs. Wilson looked at nurse Drummond anxiously.

'Do you think it helps, when I talk to Kevin? Do you think he can understand me? Does he even know it's me? Oh, sorry, I shouldn't bombard you with my questions. Anyway, I'm sure you know what I mean.'

'Yes, of course. It's more guesswork, than science, to know just how much patients, in Kevin's state, can understand. The fact that he seems so much more tranquil, when he is in front of his window, makes me believe that he does have some awareness of his surroundings. Other patients don't change at all, no matter where they are placed. However Kevin, when he is seated in front of his window overlooking the garden, is definitely much more relaxed. I believe, in myself, that he is aware, to a certain extent, of things around him.'

Mrs. Wilson felt great relief. She hated to think that Kevin was totally absent. Her constant sadness abated slightly.

'What about when I talk to him? Do you think he understands what I am saying?'

'Many studies have shown that talking to patients in a catatonic state is helpful. Moreover, in Kevin's state, being aware, as I am sure he is, of his surroundings, I believe it would be very helpful for him. Just chat away, tell him all the family news.'

'Do you think he knows that I am his mother?'

Nurse Drummond took Mrs. Wilson's hand in hers, and looked kindly, in her eyes.

'You just have to believe, that that is the case. The only proof you will find of that, is in your heart.'

Kevin's mother had tears streaming down her cheeks. Tears of a sad elation. She half wiped them away, and smiled at the nurse.

'I think he does! In fact, I'm sure of it! Oh, thank you! Thank you so much. I'm so happy to have Kevin here, where you look after him so well.'

'I'm sorry, Mrs. Wilson, but I really must be getting on now.'

'Of course. Goodbye, and thank you.'

As nurse Drummond left, Mrs. Wilson looked out on the garden, Kevin's garden, and cried quietly to herself. It was so hard seeing Kevin in that state. He had been so full of

life, so full of promise. He had achieved so much. To have that all taken away from him was devastating. She finished her tea, and headed out towards the carpark. She always took the long way to the carpark, passing along one of the pathways through the garden. As usual, she stopped to look up at Kevin's room. There he was, sitting impassively, and immobile, at his window. Expectantly, she waved up at him, but, as ever, he didn't move. Putting her handkerchief to her eyes, to dry the last of her tears, she headed to the carpark. She took a last look at the beautiful garden. This peaceful place, that brought her such sadness. A place of great beauty, that always wrenched out her heart.

Mother visited again today. It's always such a great pleasure for me when she drops by. Since my accident, we have really become so close. I am more than happy to set aside my projects, and devote my time to her. My work now, is no more than a means to an end. The old me was tied down, by my mindset, to a lifestyle which can only be described as being totally self indulgent. Now, I spend more time pondering life, and people. It is really the people in our lives, that bring us the happiness we desire, the joy our hearts yearn for. We will only find fulfillment through our relationships with those closest to us. Sometimes the most important things in our lives are right there, but we don't see them. Now, after having made it through such a life changing event, my eyes have been opened. I have finally understood what life is really about. Life is about people. Life is about appreciating nature's beauty. I am thankful for having had my accident. I know that seems like a strange thing to say, but my real life has only just begun, since my accident. It took the effects of such a traumatic event, to wake me from my self-serving stupor. I now feel like I am experiencing life, for the first time. Out of my window I see my mother, the love of my life, walking along the pathway, through the garden. With a surge of joy that passes through me, I smile, and wave to her. She looks up, radiant and happy, and waves back. I am so blessed in my life. I now have everything that I could ever have asked for. Life has been incredibly generous to me.

An Instinctive Affair

I first time I set my eyes on her I was completely blown away. My thoughts turned, quite rapidly, to those of a sexual nature. Rather fortunately for me, that never eventuated. Maybe I had better explain that. It was back in the spring of two years ago. I had decided to get away for five days to Kos, one of the Greek islands. Things had been going fairly badly for me at work, back home in Christchurch, and I really needed to get away. Take a break. I jumped a cheap flight from Bournemouth over to Kos, and there I was, with beautiful sunshine, incredible beaches, and tasty food. Everything I didn't have back home. It was just what I needed. The only thing missing from that list was a lovely woman, and that was where I thought she might fit in. On my first day there I had discovered, by chance, what I thought to be the most beautiful beach I had ever seen. I had been walking around, taking in the sights, when I came across it. Just a kilometre or so out from the centre of the Kos town centre, heading north. I never did find out if that beach had a name, but for the rest of my stay, that was my home base. Beautiful golden sand leading into the bluest, cleanest, water that I had ever seen. The sun's reflections off the water gave it all an almost surreal vision of grace. When you find a beach like that, you look no further. Being on my own I was a bit penalised, in that I had to rent two sunbeds, with an umbrella. In any case, the cost was so ridiculously cheap, that I didn't mind. Each day I would try to get there early, before the flood of Germans arrived, so I could get a good spot on the sea front. The spring sunshine was so nice. The view was absolutely stunning. Straight out in front, over the shimmering water, you could see quite clearly, the Turkish mainland. The water was crystal clear, and always calm. Surrounded, as it was, by other Greek islands, and Turkey, the sea was never rough, even when the wind came up. I would just float in the cool water for ages. I forgot about my problems, back home, and concentrated on relaxing. I let the stress flow from my body. When the heat got too much for me, I would call over Dimitri, the guy running the place, and order a nice cool drink from the bar. That was the life for me. It certainly didn't hurt that many of the women there would sunbathe topless. That just added to the pleasure. Right there, in my favourite spot in the whole world, was where I met her, for the first time. My holiday was coming to an end, it was my last full day. It was the day before flying back home. Home, where I would have to return to the misery that was my job. I tried not to think about that, and just enjoy my last day at the beach. As usual, I had paid for a double spot. There was no other way. All the spots came with two sunbeds, and an umbrella in the middle, giving shade to both of them. Everywhere was geared up for couples. When you are single you really get stitched up, wherever you go. Hotels, beaches, everywhere.

Everything comes with a penalty payment for singles. It was society's way of letting you know that they don't want you single. You must be coupled up, preferably creating another generation, who would then get coupled up, in their turn, and keep the cycle going. A society of single people would soon lead to a gradual extinction of the human race. Who would be there to keep the fires lit? Who would be there to ensure that everything was in place for the next generation, if there was to be no next generation? Being single was not only to be frowned upon. It was to be penalised. You needed to get the message. Society requires you to play your part, in perpetuating society. Find someone, procreate, play the game. Do your share. If not, you will be punished. Enjoy your single life, briefly, and then do that which society expects of you. Your role is not to enjoy your life, but to ensure that life itself continues. Society only functions with continuous growth, one generation following the other, with an endless stream of inconsequential people concentrated solely on creating the next generation..... of inconsequential people. The cycle must continue. Any deviation from your role in that cycle, and you will be punished. Penalised.

'Hey, mate, sorry to bother you.'

Roused from my musings, I looked up, to see Dimitri. Something of a Greek God, was Dimitri. Tall, very suntanned, with a beautiful face, and athletic body to go with it. I'm sure there is a bronze statue dedicated to him somewhere. He was standing over me, in all his glory.

'What's up, my friend?'

'Listen, you don't have to, it's just that all the sunbeds are taken, and this person was wondering if she could use your extra one.'

I turned to look behind Dimitri, and there she was. My God, she looked so beautiful. She was like a vision from another world. Tall, wearing a light semi see through beach shawl over her bikini, and a straw hat. Her face was stunning, caught in the Greek sunlight. This never happened to me. This was the stuff of films. Or dreams. Trying to sound casual, I replied to Dimitri. As usual, I made a right mess of it, in my state of excitement.

'Sure, my friend, no worries. She is welcome to the other sunbed. Hey, one is enough for me, what would I do with two anyway? It's not as if....'

As if sensing my flustered state, the beautiful woman intervened.

'I will pay you half the cost,' she said.

'Sure, that's alright, don't worry.'

She put down her bag, and slowly took off her shawl, revealing her bikini clad body. At the sight of her sensual body, a surge of excitement went through me. I could feel things stirring down below. Things could get embarrassing, very fast. I knew I had to get control.

'I'm going in for a swim. Make yourself at home.'

I took off my sunglasses and rushed into the water. The cool water did the trick, and

I managed to get things under control. Hopefully she, or no one else, had noticed the bulge growing in my swimming trunks. Thank God I never wore speedos! Looking back at the beach, I couldn't believe what had just happened. Normally it was hard work for me to meet women. Now, one had been presented to me on a plate. Without having to do anything, a beautiful woman was now lying on a sunbed next to mine. In that situation, conversation was unavoidable. She was mine. I knew I would have to play it cool. I would be very casual, not really standoffish, but definitely cool. I needed to be on top form. I walked out of the water, feeling good. I had just turned 35 years old, and my body was in good shape. After these days on the beach I had a good tan, I was cooking. I could do this.

'Hey, the water is fantastic. A bit cool, but with this scorching sun, it's really refreshing.'

'I don't really swim much, but I probably will go in later.'

'I'm Nick, by the way.'

'Hello Nick, my name is Lianne. I just got in from Bournemouth yesterday. What about you, where are you from?'

'Hey, guess what? I flew in from there, too. I live in Christchurch.'

'Really? Actually I live in Poole, out the other side of Bournemouth from you. How long are you here for?'

'Unfortunately, I am off back home tomorrow. Just been here for five days, all up. How long are you here for?'

'A week.'

I couldn't help being a bit dismayed at the bad timing, although back home, we were only living about 20 kilometres from each other. If things worked out well, we would be able to continue it all back there. I realised that nothing would be happening in Kos, the timing just wasn't right, but I could definitely set something up for the future. I had something to work towards. I had a project. She lay back and started reading a book. I wouldn't interrupt her. I was playing it cool. I took my book out of my bag, and pretended to read it. Really, I was sneaking glances at her, as she lay there. Lianne had a nice body, not really brilliant, but incredibly sensual. Some of the other women around me looked better. Plus, some of them were topless. On the other hand, Lianne was here with me, the others weren't. I would work with what I had. I thought back on my excitement, at first seeing her. Why is it that in a flash I had gotten so excited? What had I been expecting to happen? It's not as if we were going to make love there and then. Where does this instant, unstoppable desire come from? Maybe it's not just society that wants us all to be coupled up, and permanently procreating. Quite probably, it is built right into our genetic make up. Survival of the species is dependent on us getting together, having sex, and creating another generation. Over the centuries it must have become built into our DNA. Seemingly it is something we have very little control over. We are going about our day to day business, thinking of nothing but the task in hand, when, out of the blue, with no

more prompting than that of seeing a sexy woman, we can think of nothing but sex. There was definitely something primitive about the whole process. Something very basic. However, stealing glances at Lianne, I still did want to have sex with her, no matter whether that was just my DNA talking, or some primeval instinct rooted deep in me. It just wasn't going to be as immediate as my body had first imagined. I could still feel stirrings down there, the controlling instinct definitely hadn't forgotten his objective. Now it was up to me to control those primeval urges, letting them loose only at the appropriate time.

'Lianne, do you want to go out for dinner, this evening?' I blurted out.

Damn! So much for playing it cool. A wave of panic came over me, as I realised that I had really played a big card. A refusal here, and it was game over. There would be no meeting up, or having sex, back home. Why had I said that? Roused from her book, she looked over, at me.

'That sounds lovely. I must say, it seems like there are a lot of places to choose from.'

A feeling of relief flowed through me. I had really risked the lot there. Why was I so inept at these things? She was sitting right there, there was no hurry. I had plenty of time to work up to the big question. Anyway, with a lot of luck, it had gone well.

'That's for sure. The town is full of them, and from what I have seen so far, they are all pretty nice. I love Greek food. What about you?'

'Actually, I haven't eaten it much. Maybe you can advise on what to get?'

'Hey, sure. I'm your man. To be honest, it's pretty hard to go wrong. It's all pretty good. Where is your hotel?'

'Just two streets back from here. This was the first beach I came to.'

'Wow, you really picked a good hotel. I think this is the best beach on Kos. I have to walk for about 15 minutes to get here. Not that I mind, I always do plenty of exercise, so I just consider it part of my workout.'

She looked so sexy, laying back with her sunglasses on, and her straw hat. As I stole glances at her, I could definitely feel that my body hadn't lost interest in her. My primordial instincts were still ensuring that the game would continue. Part of me felt like a puppet, controlled by other hands. It struck me just how basic our primal instincts really were. Shelter, food, and procreation. A hotel room, a good meal out in the centre of Kos, and going to bed with Lianne. Life in a nutshell. Still, I had to admit, it all sounded pretty good to me. Obviously those are the instincts that have been driving us for thousands of years, but, all things considered, it didn't really seem that bad. Maybe mankind's instincts were well founded? We dressed it all up a lot, especially in our affluent age, but at the end of the day, that has been what we have been doing since the time we lived in caves. We were really just cavemen with cellphones. Our caves had become houses, our hunting was now done in the supermarket, and our procreation was decided over dinner, with a nice glass of wine. With all our progress, and new technology, we were still driven in the same way our forebears had been. We were still guided by the exact same instincts. But,

on the other hand, why not? They seemed to be working. Eventually, the afternoon came to a end. People were starting to pack up, and leave the beach. It was time to head back to our hotels.

'Bye, Lianne. I'll see you at 8 o'clock, then.'

'Ok, I'll see you on the quay.'

We had both packed up our things, and we then headed off to our hotels. We had arranged to meet in the centre, on the quay, to go out for dinner. On my walk home I couldn't stop smiling. What a score! I had just been lying there, when Lianne was brought to me. There had been no hard pick up lines, no weird internet dating sites, in fact, no work at all on my part. This was going to work well. Back at my hotel I got myself cleaned up, and put on the best clothes I had brought with me. I wanted to look good. Would this be our first date, or our second? It didn't really matter anyway, no action would be happening here, in Kos. That would have to wait for when we were both back home. I headed into town early, and found a bench down on the main quay, where the tourist charter boats were. The boats had all returned from the day's trips, and the harbour looked spectacular. The centre of the town opened out onto this sheltered harbour, really presenting a beautiful sight, with all the boats at their moorings. The evening sun reflected off the water, creating the most beautiful mediterranean postcard sight. The centre was full of tourists, coming and going. Everyone seemed to be happily enjoying themselves. Easily done, in such a beautiful place. In the surrounding streets, which were very narrow, and mostly closed to traffic, there were dozens of restaurants, and bars. It was all very Greek looking, and just such a pretty picture. To make it look even better, there she was, walking down the quay towards me, and waving. What a beautiful sight!

'Hi there, Nick! You look nice, all cleaned up.'

'Thanks, Lianne. You look stunning!'

She was wearing a white dress, very light and delicate, swishing around as she walked. Her shoulders, and legs, were uncovered, showing off her smooth skin.

'Thank you, that's very nice of you.'

'Let's wander up here. There are plenty of places to choose from.'

I put my hand on her arm, and guided her across the street. At the touch of her skin, I felt a wave of excitement flow through me. I would have loved to kiss her, there and then. However, I knew I had to slow things down. I didn't want to ruin things by moving too fast. That was a bit of a bad habit of mine, throwing myself in at the deep end, only to find I had misread the situation, or maybe ruining things by pushing things along too quickly. This time I was going to be Mr. Cool. The patient man.

'Oh Nick, this place looks lovely, what do you think?'

'Yeah, it sure does. Let's do it!'

The place was a Greek Taverna, one of the many, decked out in traditional colours, with a lot of beachy paraphernalia hanging on the walls. The wooden tables and chairs spilled right out onto the street, where they were covered by a light wooden structure,

from which hung small Greek flags. It did look nice. From my limited experience on the island, anywhere would have been fine. The food was brilliant everywhere. The locals were also incredibly friendly. We found a table, and sat down.

'What do you recommend, Mr. Kos expert?'

'Absolutely everything! Let's order one of everything on the menu. That way we won't miss out on anything.'

Lianne laughed, and gave me an incredibly cute smile. Her lips were perfectly shaped, and incredibly erotic.

'It's a shame you are leaving tomorrow. You could have been my guide here. It's all so easy with someone who knows their way around.'

'Yes, it is. It really is a shame. Hey, why don't we meet up, back in Bournemouth? I know it's not the same, but I know a few good places back there as well.'

'That would be lovely. I would like that.'

I tried to look cool, as a wave of delight passed through me, lingering in my loins. I felt like jumping up and yelling:

'Yes!'

However, I remained composed, and just gave her a little smile.

'The food will definitely not be as good, though. Let's eat!'

We ordered various plates of Greek delights, and had a wonderful meal. Her shoulder length, brown hair, really set off her face well. Her green eyes sparkled as she talked, and smiled. She looked so pretty, sitting there in that Greek Taverna. Certain moments in life are really special. A photo never gives them the credit they deserve. Maybe it was also because of the fact that my work life, back home, was in a total state of shambles. Maybe it was just the effect of being in Kos. Whatever the reason, that dinner with Lianne, in that Taverna, was just such a special evening. The memory of it will linger with me forever. Sitting there with her, I had the feeling that anything was possible. Happiness could invade my soul. I could return to Christchurch, confront all my problems at work, and break out of the unhappy situation that had been dogging me. With a good woman, like Lianne, at my side, everything was possible. We chatted until late. The time had just flown by. Eventually, we knew we would have to call it a night, even though neither of us wanted to. We walked back down to the quay, to say goodnight. My mind was racing. How would I play this. I knew a kiss was called for, but how big a kiss? I didn't want to overplay my hand, but on the other hand, I wanted to show how much I liked her. In the end, it was Lianne who took control. She leaned in, and kissed me, lightly, on my cheek.

'Bye Nick, see you back at home.'

'See you, Lianne. It has been so nice to meet you.'

She wandered off, with me staring after her. My Greek break had really come up trumps. I was refreshed, relaxed, and had found Lianne. I was ready to go home. I could face whatever life threw at me.

Back in Christchurch, the days passed incredibly slowly. I couldn't wait to see Lianne again. Since I had been back, it had rained every day. It was so bleak, and miserable. And cold, really cold. My problems at work just seemed to be the same as before my holiday. Then I wondered if maybe I should just quit, and start all over again, in another office. Probably, there was no fixing the bad relationship I had with my colleagues. All things considered, it was probably for the best to just start again. Why not? At the end of the day, it probably wouldn't even be that hard to find another job. Maybe even with better pay? Actually, just the fact of coming to that conclusion really helped me feel better. In the end it hadn't even been that difficult. The problem was easily fixed. Was this the Kos effect? Or was it the Lianne effect? In any case, my holiday in Kos had brought me good counsel. It had given me time to reflect on what I should do to fix my dismal situation. Having accepted the idea of quitting, and starting a new job, I felt free of all the disquiet that I had been holding onto. Now, this was the Lianne effect, of that I was sure. It was funny how office politics worked. People pairing off, to attack a third person, or grouping together, to ravage the others. Even though we were all dressed well, and working in a modern environment, the behaviour we followed was really quite basic. The dominant ones feeling they owned the place, and had the right to denigrate others. For no other reason, seemingly, than the fact that they could. Probably that attitude would have made sense when we were all fighting each other, for a limited supply of food, and shelter. In a primitive setting, it would have been a necessary instinct for survival. When, however, you worked in an office, shuffling bits of paper, what was the need of this primeval beating of the chest? Did man still need to show how strong he was, even when he was wearing a white shirt, and a blue tie? What sense did it make? What was the gain in it all? Man's progression just seemed to be one of having an easier life, with all modern comforts, but, deep down in our souls, we were still just primitive beings, acting in the way of our ancestors. Modern society had been thrust upon primordial man. The hunter and collector now worked in an office. Instead of hunting prey to eat, necessary for survival, the hunting was now of a malicious, sadistic, kind. The prey was those presumed to be weaker, or not part of the dominant group. To a certain extent, the noble instinct of hunting for survival had been debased. It had been turned into an unnecessary bloodlust, for no other reason than that of showing the dominance of the strongest, at the expense of the weakest. I would no longer play their game. I would no longer be primordial man's victim. As soon as I could, I would find another job, hopefully with nicer people. Just arriving at this conclusion brought me a sense of relief. Knowing that I would be leaving, that I would no longer be the brunt of primitive man's bullying, made me feel like my old self again. A holiday in Kos, and meeting Lianne, had helped me reflect clearly on my work situation. It felt like I was getting my life back on track. I was letting go of the grip of unhappiness, and planning my future. At the end of the day, it had really been me who had allowed primitive man to dominate me, by my acquiescence. Without my submission, primitive man really had no

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