

The Inner Light

Escape

In the late afternoon, she decided to go and watch the drum circle. To her, LA often resembled an amoeba pushing in all directions, constantly changing the form of the whole. Everything seemed to happen right on the surface, as if people were in a state of flight. A refuge from that phenomena was life in Venice. Here, the muscle tone seemed to relax automatically and the atmosphere was marked by a noncommittal, almost artistic lack of focus. Venice was somewhat like a well-meaning but slightly absentminded grandmother.

The drum circle on Venice Beach was an antidote to the hustle and bustle of the city in itself. At first, it gave the impression of superimposing the whole frenzy, only to turn it around completely. In the direct vicinity of the elements, a connection was established which made even bankers drop their jackets on the sand and grab an instrument. Native Americans melted into the general mix of hues and colors, while the inevitable New Age geeks were never missing. Tourists and pot smokers with their improvised towel tents rounded up the unlikely crowd which would grow by the minute.

Shortly after arriving, an angular and slightly stern looking man caught her attention. He was wearing his long dark hair tied back in a braid and slowly made his way through the rows of drummers. He exuded an air of dignity which separated him somewhat from his environment. After examining the crowd, he positioned himself right behind a young man who was drumming with an almost feverish vehemence. He did not seem to be aware of the person behind him, who stood there like a protective shadow and then left as calmly as he had appeared. Still musing on this sight, she continued looking around, carried by the powerful drumming which seemed to change the entire energy of the place, slowly but thoroughly.

She wasn't aware what exactly she was seeking or looking for. Her gaze brushed ring after ring of the concentric circles of people. Despite the turmoil, her mind was calm and clear. At last, she turned to the sea, to catch a look of the evening sun. One of the marijuana tents - an unshapely affair of loose sticks and beach towels - had been set up in her back. And right behind the tent, she could make out the shape of a small figure who looked slightly familiar: a person of slender yet muscular build, with a shock of dark hair and eyebrows like two strong strokes. He stood very still and was watching the drummers with focused attention.

Their eyes met and he frowned briefly and then indicated a slight nod. Apparently, he also couldn't place her but wanted to be polite.

For a moment, her own attention went back to the drum circle. Then, with a typical gesture, she abruptly turned on her heel and, almost tripping on the tent, made a few, staggering steps to reach him. They both laughed and she managed a "Hi" which he reciprocated in a friendly manner. After both had kept their eyes on the drummers for a while, he said lightly: "I know you." - "Yup." she answered. And as neither was sure where or when they had met before, they only smiled at each other and then as if on cue turned their heads away again.

The drummers gradually became louder and louder while the light was growing into a

symphony of red and orange hues. The drum circle which had started in the afternoon would end with the last rays of the evening sun disappearing in the ocean. She was wondering what would happen once the drummers stopped and there would be no reason to remain, when she heard him clearing his throat. "I need to leave soon, to an Open Air event nearby. Feel like coming? It's a street festival - but it might get loud. So brace yourself for the police turning up at some point."

She decided to ignore her "one chapter a night" dogma and nodded slowly, as if she had to convince herself. Why not? He now finally gave her his name but it wasn't before they had exchanged the names of mutual friends that they realized on what occasions they had met before: Release parties, charity galas - mass events, which explained why they had seen each other several times but never had been personally introduced.

Wasting no thought on how she would get back, she followed his invitation and clambered into an old Chevrolet. The energy of the drum circle was still reverberating in her body and the sea air had made her ravenous. Suddenly, he stopped the Chevy abruptly. "What is it?" she asked as there was no street festival in sight as yet. "The best burritos in LA" he grinned, jumped out of the car and returned minutes later with two packages.

They immediately dug in while he slowly drove on, two fingers at the wheel.

Slowage

The air was dusty and the streets were filled with people surrounding the food-stands in clusters. They could hear the stage from afar and equipped themselves with two bottles of craft beer before making their way through the masses.

A relaxed mix of rockabillics and tattooed skaters was assembled in front of the stage, lined on the outer fringe by couples with kids and some older hippiesque types. She craned her neck and made out a Bowie-lookalike and some musicians in flashy gear on stage. "So are plateau shoes back after all?" she asked. "Oh, I think to them, they were never really out" - her companion was rummaging in his overstuffed jeans pockets. He took out a scratchy mobile and typed on it for a while. "I can't find that backstage code for the life of me - bollocks. I guess we just have to wait until they've finished their set."

They sat down on the pavement. "Cheers--" he said. "Slantje!" she replied and they downed their beers in large gulps, only now realizing how thirsty the spicy burritos had made them.

The drink was bitter and refreshing and she felt grounded for the first time in days, sitting in the dusty street with people all around them, oblivious to their presence. The music was providing a surreal background-soundscape somewhere between bombast and psychedelic. His dark eyes now and then scanned her face and then went back to scrutinizing the crowd.

"Well." he said eventually. "This is pretty unusual. Normally, I would have run backstage in search of a guy I *thought* I needed desperately to meet, and then run back to the car to go to . . . whatever is planned for tonight, I don't even know what that is exactly. I'm

sure, someone will call or text me as soon as they'll miss me though", he went on. "How about you - ?" She smiled a little. "I feel like I am playing hooky just now", she said, "I should have done some writing this evening, and then there was a loose agreement to meet up with friends for drinks later on."

- "Do you think they'll miss us if we dare to extend this a little longer?" he said musingly. She looked at him with some curiosity. Then her gaze turned inward as she was thinking about her flat with its own soundscape of the old-fashioned AC blurring away and the never-ending sad barks coming from the shed next door. Meanwhile her friends would be catching up on their semi-eventful week in some retro bar. She said simply: "As long as no one calls, we can risk it, I guess." And rather unexpectedly, her face lit up with a smile.

"Trees." he said as if answering a question. "Beg your pardon?" - "I'd prefer a park to this."

She wondered how many more songs it would take for the band to complete the set, when suddenly all mikes and lights went out in unison, revealing the noise of people shouting conversations into each others' ears before realizing that no one needed to shout anymore.

"Seems that the police has arrived", said her companion with a smirk and at the same second, a helicopter appeared in the sky right above the stage. "Must be past bedtime for the neighbors", he grinned, "I just wish the LA police would learn the difference between crime and fun." - "Oh my", she said incredulously, "In Berlin, the concert wouldn't even have started yet". Meanwhile, a disenchanted looking roadie had appeared on stage and unhappily announced that the show was over. The crowd was already thinning under the pressing noise of the low flying helicopter. Never in her life had she seen that many cool-looking people leave an event so quickly.

"Bear with me", he said, "I'll be back in five". She watched him crossing the square until he disappeared behind the stage. Taking economic sips from her bottle, she glanced at her mobile to pass the time. She counted at least ten messages, and about twenty new Emails. *God, no. For once, I won't check them*, she thought and slipped the phone back in her pocket. Stretching out her legs, she peered at her dusty red chucks, suddenly feeling overwhelmingly tired. Tired of the city, tired of the LA police, tired of the noise and tired of the people.

As the space had so quickly cleared around her, she simply put her bag under her head and lay down on the pavement, possibly looking much like any given homeless person. Balancing her beer on her belly, she exhaled deeply for what felt like the first time in days.

A face hovered above her in the sky. He'd come back quicker than expected and his dark eyes had taken on a look of concern. "You alright?" She sat up and realized that they were almost the only people left. "Oh", she went, "I must have dozed off. Did . . . did you find the guy you were looking for?" He tentatively touched her hand and said: "Sure you're OK? Must say I *am* glad the helicopter didn't take an interest in a person lying on the ground for once."

He took hold of her hand with a firm grip, got up on his feet and pulled her right up with him. "Come on, sleepy head." They were standing quite closely for a moment and she

observed in the fading light that he looked a bit worn and scraggy around the eyes. But the grin had reappeared and a strange thought fluttered through her mind. *Either I don't smell a thing today, or his scent is so familiar for some quixotic reason, that my system doesn't register it.* She snickered like a teenager. "Anything funny?" he inquired.

"No-oh. I was just wondering what happens next", she said, feeling slightly lightheaded from both the heat and the beer and from getting up too quickly. He looked at her with a grave expression. "What happens next is up to us, I guess", he said. Suddenly, he snatched his phone out of his back pocket, offered it to her as if introducing a third party to their conversation and then switched it off with a flourish. "All clear", he said - "And you?"

She briefly grabbed his sleeve for stability, followed his example and then made as if to exchange phones with him. "This", she said, "could be a new form of '*who gets my last rolo*' - romance." He laughed. "I think I'm good." Both were aware of having brushed over something entirely different - something which had just happened on a much deeper level, right after they'd stood up together.

He had let go of her hand after pulling her up, but as they slowly walked back in direction of the car, their hands and arms touched now and then during their conversation, which by now had turned into a lighthearted chatter - shooting the breeze, as it were. He spoke about the bands and producers he was in touch with for his work, while she offered some tales about her former life in Berlin, her impressions of LA and her writing.

The helicopter had lost interest in the now almost deserted streets and was veering off just as they climbed back into the car.

Ocean trees

During the drive, he seemed contemplative and almost absent. Now and then his gaze went to the back or side mirrors, and between them, a not unpleasant silence pervaded. Guided by an intuitive trust she hadn't even asked him where they were heading.

She had forgotten about the inner light for quite some time. Driving like this to an unknown destination, she suddenly realized that she had stopped meditating around the same time she had started working on her book. It was as if the pleasure of writing represented so much luxury that the rest of the day had to be reserved for work and duty.

The wavering feeling they both had experienced while standing closely had returned and developed into something else. It now seemed to fill the air not only between them but also around them - as if they were sitting together in a translucent bubble.

Her eyes rested on his hands of which one at times left the wheel to brush back his hair which was being tossed here and there in the evening breeze. Eventually, he left the road and turned into the parking area of what seemed to be a protected part of the beach. "So - not Mulholland drive exactly, but less city and more nature, for sure", he announced almost proudly. "Care for a swim? A neoprene suit might come in handy though." Laughing, they ran towards the beach stretching before them, its iridescence

lined by the dark eternity of the nocturnal Pacific.

There were no other people around and the air felt so pure and fresh coming from the city that they whooped with the sheer joy of it. She dipped her toes into the chilling waters first and screeched involuntarily. He threw some punches towards the oncoming waves: "Come here, ocean" he yelled, "I'll take you on!" She laughed and ran up to him, splashing through the shallow surf. This in turn made him roll up his jeans and heroically wade in to "save" her. He held her lightly around the hips as she flung out her arms towards the ocean, *Titanic*-style: "Jack, Jack, I'm flyyyy-ing!!" The waves meanwhile kept rolling up the beach unperturbed, following their ancient, moonstruck rhythm.

Giddy with oxygen and encouraged by the thrill of the expanse, they walked the beach for a good while. Eventually, they turned and made their way back up to the car park on one of the winding paths crisscrossing the coastline. The air was chilly now and he went to get some blankets and a jumper from the boot, the latter of which he gallantly offered to her. She put it on thankfully and drew up her knees underneath, pulling it around her like a tent.

A light breeze was rustling up the trees' leaves and she could hear faint sounds such as uttered by half-sleeping birds. "So where are we, exactly?" she eventually inquired. "Home." he said, matter-of-fact. "Home?" she smiled, "What do you mean?" He paused as if weighing something in his mind. Then she heard a low cough. "Actually - I live here. I mean, not here exactly, but my house is up there." He pointed over his shoulder into the dark. - "And this is . . .?" He quickly answered her unfinished sentence: ". . . a nature resort".

"Goodness, how did you *score* that place?" she mumbled, half lulled by the sound of the waves. "Nothing much to score" he said, "I inherited it. Talking about lucky. . ." and they resumed their mutual silence. His outline was barely visible in the dark. Shivering slightly, she moved a little closer and as if in response, he turned his head: "Come here?" He suddenly sounded more like a boy than a grown man. The former bravery seemed to have disappeared and his almost worried looking eyes were searching hers in the dark.

She in turn felt an old, familiar surge of grief hitting her which reared its head at the oddest of times and had the power of turning her into a small, birdlike creature, wanting to hide from the whole world forever. Suddenly, she couldn't move a bone.

And then, he started singing. He sang what must have been an ancient tune from the continent, a tune knowing about loss and grief, about love and heartbreak, about death and about life. By and by his voice grew fuller and he sang out every word intensely, out towards the ocean at first and then for her alone. The birds had fallen silent as if listening, and she felt a pull so strong that it took up her whole rib cage and finally carried her towards where he was sitting and pleading for the door to open and let in the light.

He kept singing, willing his soul to strengthen enough to welcome her. She reached out and lightly put her hand on the spot where his heart was pounding with the effort. And as they started caressing each others' faces, they laughed through tears, knowing that this could never have happened among other people or with the help of any influence or substance other than nature herself. It was, as if they were coming home after an eternity, to a home which they themselves had started building within the stretch of the

past few hours.

Silver lines

It had rained all morning and the beach lay undisturbed.

They were resting on the simple bed in the Bauhaus bungalow, which was held in pale green, yellow and gray hues, corresponding with the outside panorama. A generous front of windows opened towards the expanse of the ocean.

For a while they lay facing each other, quiet and calm after the turmoil of the night. Then, she turned to the window and his arm now covered her waist. From above, they might have resembled the tableau of two children seeking shelter with each other.

None of them felt the wish to say anything. It was simply time to rest. For now, they remained in the moment and the knowledge that the future was bearing a silver lining which would show them the way. They would continue together what they had started apart. Around them, others would benefit from it and thus the shining tissue would grow in strength and size, every day.