

Return to Paradise

Lisa gazed out over the Caribbean Sea, feeling the faint breeze against her face - eyes shut, the white sand warm between her bare toes. The place was beautiful beyond belief, but it was still unable to ease the grief she felt as she remembered the last time she had been here.

She had married James right here on this spot three years ago to the day. Dressed in a simple white shift dress, miniature white roses attempting to tame her long dark curls, Lisa had been happier than she had ever thought possible. James was even less formal but utterly irresistible in creased summer trousers and a loose white cotton shirt. His dark hair slightly ruffled and his eyes full of adoration as he looked at his bride to be. The justice of the peace had read their vows as they held hands and laughed at the sheer joy of being young, in love and staying in a five star resort on the Caribbean island of the Dominican Republic. They had seen the years blissfully stretching ahead of them, together forever. They planned their children, two she said, he said four so they compromised on three (two girls and a boy of course); where they would live, the travelling they would do together - it was all certain, so they had thought then.

But that seemed such a long time ago now. A lot can change in just a few years - a lot of heartache can change a person and drive a wedge through the strongest ties, break even the deepest love. Three years to the day and they had returned, though this time not for the beachside marriages the island was famous for but for one of its equally popular quickie divorces.

Lisa let out a sigh that was filled with pain and regret. What could she do but move on, find a new life and new dreams? - the old one was beyond repair. How could this beautiful place, with its lush green coastline, eternity of azure blue sea and endless sands be a place for the agony she felt now?

The man stood watching from the edge of the palm trees. He couldn't take his eyes off the dark-haired woman he saw standing at the water's edge, gazing out to sea as though she was waiting for something - or someone. She was beautiful, with her slim figure dressed in a loose flowing cotton dress, her crazy hair and bright blue eyes not far off the color of the sea itself. It wasn't her looks that attracted him though; he came across many beautiful women in his work as a freelance photographer. It was her loneliness and intensity that lured him. Even at some distance he was aware that she was different from any other woman he could meet.

Lisa sensed the man approaching even before she turned around. She had been aware of him standing there staring at her and had felt strangely calm about being observed. She

looked at him and felt the instant spark of connection she had only experienced once before. He walked slowly towards her and they held each other's gaze. It felt like meeting a long lost friend - not a stranger on a strange beach.

Later, sitting at one of the many bars on the resort, sipping the local cocktails they began to talk. First pleasantries, their hotels, the quality of the food and friendliness of the locals. Their conversation was strangely hesitant considering the naturalness and confidence of their earlier meeting. Onlookers, however, would have detected the subtle flirtation as they mirrored each other's actions and spoke directly into each other's eyes. Only later, after the alcohol had had its loosening effect, did the conversation deepen. They talked of why they were here and finally, against her judgment, Lisa opened up about her heartache of the past year and how events had led her back to the place where she had married the only man she believed she could ever love. She told him of things that had been locked deep inside her, able to tell no one. She told him how she had felt after she had lost her baby.

She was six months pregnant and the happiest she had ever been when the pains had started. She was staying with her mother as James was working out of town. He hadn't made it back in time. The doctor had said it was just one of those things, that they could try again. But how could she when she couldn't even look James in the eye. She hated him then, for not being there, for not hurting as much as her but most of all for looking so much like the tiny baby boy that she held for just three hours before he took him away. All through the following months she had withdrawn from her husband, family, friends. Not wanting to recover from the pain she felt - that would have been a betrayal of her son. At the funeral she had refused to stand next to her husband and the next day she had left him.

Looking up, Lisa could see her pain reflected in the man's eyes. For the first time in months she didn't feel alone, she felt the unbearable burden begin to lift from her, only a bit but it was a start. She began to believe that maybe she had a future after all and maybe it could be with this man, with his kind hazel eyes, wet with their shared tears.

They had come here to dissolve their marriage but maybe there was hope. Lisa stood up and took James by the hand and led him away from the bar towards the beech where they had made their vows to each other three years ago. Tomorrow she would cancel the divorce; tonight they would work on renewing their promises.

Eliza Riley