

IT'S ABOUT MOVING FORWARD

by

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She sat up and looked around. The red dirt path was hard. She began brushing its fine dust from her body.

“Bastard!” she yelled. “Why didn’t you just ask?”

But the dust was well settled fore and aft. He’d been gone for a while. Had he knocked her out? She thought he’d just delivered a body blow, grabbed it and run.

She left the road, kept looking around to make sure she was alone as she walked through bright green grass and tall bushes. She stepped into the cool clear stream, needing the healing powers it brought from the jungle-clad mountains.

Adrienne splashed her face, rinsed her mouth, drank, then just sprawled on her back, legs and arms extended. Swirling and surging over her body, nature’s elixir worked its magic.

She sat up and surveyed the lush growth. Not really jungle but its perimeter, she marveled at the multitude of greens. A yellow globe caught her eye and she gasped with delight.

Dripping, she climbed over knee-high rocks, rubbed smooth by the river the stream had once been. She stepped carefully through some bushes, stretched up to full height, gave a little jump and grabbed the ripe mango. She clasped it to her breast, glanced around just in case, and clambered back to her place in the stream.

She ripped open the smooth skin and buried her mouth in the sweet golden yellow flesh. Letting the juice run down her chin and neck, she devoured it slowly, sucking loudly on the stringy remnants that clung to the seed.

Setting the cupped skin afloat, she murmured, "Bon voyage". The two pieces gathered way. The seed she buried a couple of feet from the water's edge. "Bonne chance," she wished, then lay down again to be cleansed.

"I love you, Dominica!" Adrienne sang out. A cascade doused her head and she sat up coughing, sputtering and laughing.

Moving out of sight of the path, she untied the brightly patterned sarong from her hips. Laying it and her shirt over a bush to dry, she sat on a rock in the middle of the stream to let the sun dry her hair and warm her body. "So, you took my 'surrogate penis'," she shrugged. "Well, maybe you or whoever you sell it to will be able to play it."

Had it really been a year? She'd been so excited when they'd decided to sell out and sail away. They'd shed everything but bare necessities, bought a 30ft fiberglass sloop they christened 'Star', and moved aboard. She sighed, plans and dreams.

Brett's indulgence had been a case of supplies for sketching and painting. Hers had been her flute collection. The one she'd purchased especially for this voyage, the elegant concert flute, had just been stolen. She longed now for the Dragon Flute she had left on display in the university music department. Her dad had brought it from China for her. She had feared the ornate lacquered bamboo was too delicate for a life at sea.

"Things have changed," she thought sadly.

Taking her time, she dressed and walked back through the village to where she'd tied the little dinghy to a palm. She rowed out to 'Star', deep in

thought. As she climbed on board she wasn't honestly sure how she felt but knew Brett would call her down for her carelessness.

After hearing her story Brett shook his head. "You walked through the village carrying that expensive flute case? People here are poor, Adrienne. Why did we take off our rings and watches and stuff?"

"Climb down, Brett. I know all that. I was going to the market to ask around about selling or trading it. But, I needed to get off on my own for one last effort before parting with it." A tear escaped so she looked away.

"I couldn't play it, Brett. It defeated me." She shrugged. "Never thought I'd say that."

"So, you've given up." His voice was low. He was sitting at the saloon table with a Heineken in his hand and Cadance purring in his lap. It was then that she realized his blue canvas travel bag was on the cabin sole beside his feet.

"Only on that one. I'll work on the others now. You cleaning out the locker?" Even as she mouthed the question she knew the answer. She'd tried to ignore his dark cloud, told herself he was struggling with the landscapes

he was painting.

“I’ve got to go, Adrienne. You read yesterday’s E-mail. Mom’s not doing well. And, I need to check out this new offer. The company didn’t really appreciate my designs until I was gone.”

“Brett, we’ve only been in the West Indies a year”. She stopped, studied his face. “You’re not satisfied, are you? It’s not just these last pictures, is it?”
She sat down.

“You’ve noticed,” his down-turned lips were tight, his dark eyes sad beneath the full brows.

“Why haven’t you said anything?”

“And disturb your ideal world? I didn’t have the heart.” He got up, with three steps was out of the companionway into the cockpit.

Adrienne was stunned. How had she not sensed how intense was his turmoil? The boat was small, they lived on top of each other. Only occasionally did they socialize with other yachties or inhabitants of the islands they visited.

She joined him. "Can you talk to me about what's wrong?" She put her arms around him, pressed her face to his back, but he pulled away and stepped up to lean on the boom to port.

"Not a day's gone by that you haven't babbled on about the beautiful sunset or the perfect weather or the fascinating reef or the friendly locals or some other superlative on nature's wonders. Okay, it's nice. But, I need more than surviving the occasional storm and managing to navigate island to island. I've spent a lot of time developing this brain of mine. It should be used."

He looked away, stared at the lush island that was now bathed in the pastel gold of Caribbean sunset.

He sighed, "Yes, there's nothing to compare. My attempts on canvas certainly don't do it justice, never will. I'm not an artist, Adrienne, and I'm not designed for the deCadance of cruising around, high on life."

"So what's the plan?" she asked with effort, her chest tight.

"I'll fly home, feel it out." He gave a nervous laugh, "I may be back on the

first thing smokin', saying what a fool I was."

Or you may not, she thought, and in her head was the melancholy call of a bass flute, like a cold wind through the hollow trunk of a lone tree.

"You're forgetting something," she finally spoke.

"I love you, Adrienne. I'd never ask you to give up what you've found. You're in your element. Can you bear with me while I clear my head, decide what I really want?"

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He'd been gone two weeks when she set sail. She picked up his message on E-mail that morning and was on her way before noon.

Determined not to disturb the island's tranquillity, she didn't engage the engine but stayed on the tiller to play the light easterly. Not a soul did she see during the hour of perpetual jibing out of Portsmouth Harbor. Birds could be heard but not seen, wise to the advantages of tree sitting when midday heat lessened the efficiency of current riding.

Dominica's verdant mountains ran interference so steady wind wasn't to be had until she was a good ten miles off the coast. Ready for a break, Adrienne let 'Star' steer herself and went below. She would head due south and tack into Martinique the next day. Cadance covered her with strokes and purrs as soon as she sat down.

"I'm cooked and tired," she sighed, taking a long drink of a cold Coke. "Its more work solo but more satisfying. I did that exit just fine." She held the can so the cat could press her face to it, increasing purr volume. "I miss him terribly, Cadance."

She stared unseeing at the waterproof bag to port. As it slowly came into focus she registered she'd not touched any of the flutes, her treasures, since Brett's departure. Had her obsession driven him away? She couldn't seem to get it right. She'd composed several pieces aboard 'Star'. They were good. Why couldn't she bring them alive?

On deck she scanned the horizon. No fish pot buoys or fishing boats. 'Star' rocked with beam seas, the breeze too light to counteract the swell that resulted from the open Atlantic's roll being interrupted by the island. Sensing movement to starboard, she turned to discover several dolphins coming to dance with them.

Overjoyed, she rushed to the foredeck. Her big disappointment over the months had been their absence. A few had visited one night when Brett was on watch but he hadn't awakened her. Her anger and hurt had lasted for days.

Two adults with a small one between them seemed to lead as others dipped and darted, their perpetual smiles contagious. Adrienne was feeling giddy, a bit light-headed, couldn't stop beaming as they cavorted about 'Star's' bow.

"Wait, don't go anywhere, I'll be right back!" She crawled quickly down the deck, afraid of scaring them off if she stood. Below she loosened the rope that held the bag in place, unzipped it, hesitated. The stolen concert flute was what she wanted. With trembling hands she pulled out the panpipes. The most difficult to play, but the most enchanting, she clutched it tightly to her side and scampered forward.

"Thank you for waiting," she whispered and put the panpipes to her lips. She started slow and low, not trusting herself so intense were her emotions. From the longest of the reeds she made her way to the shortest of the twenty-two. There she found the shrill tone that nearly matched the

dolphin cry.

She stopped, listening, then tried to mimic them. Again. And again. Silence.

One startled her by leaping out of the water close by, returning with barely a splash. Her heart was pounding. The cry. She answered. Again.

She felt Cadance press against her back, felt her stillness. Prayed she wouldn't leap for them the way she did for flying fish that landed on the deck at night. No, the cat seemed mesmerized.

Adrienne played. Her music flowed with their grace. With them she dived, glided, leapt, flipped. No conductor nor page of music could have so freed her. Swimming and snorkeling had conditioned her lungs, she could meet the demands of the panpipes.

She played, unconscious of time. When finally her friends departed, their silver bodies reflecting the setting sun's rays as they cruised West, Adrienne wilted. She was fiercely sunburned, her hands and fingers numb to movement, her mouth so dry she could hardly swallow.

The breeze had picked up so she reefed the main and rolled in the jib a bit for a slow and gentle night. It took much effort and concentration. She

needed rest. Exhausted but exultant, she joined Cadance below.

“I’ve done it,” she whispered. Smiling contentedly, she stroked the panpipes, wrapped it in velvet, and tucked it away.

Every step, even sacrificing Brett, had been necessary. Now it all made sense. Now she could move forward.

finish