

## The Island of Lilacs

I had no idea how I ended up on that island. Perhaps, when I was there, I knew how I came to be stranded on that floating piece of land, yet now, I'm afraid; I don't remember any of the circumstances that lead to my arrival there. So forgive me, dear and patient reader, if you feel confused about or reluctant to believe in the story I'm about to narrate, and know that I – you may call me R. - will take much comfort if you recognize that place, or maybe went through a similar experience, for that will prove that I am no mad man.

The island was not very vast, I recall. It didn't feel vast, that is, when I first arrived. If I were to estimate its total surface, I'd say it was no larger than the square back in my hometown. I remember walking on those shores of white sand, tired with a roaring stomach, and not baring to walk any longer; I lay down on my back on the sand, and contemplated the sky.

I cannot trust that when I will try – and I can only try - to relate to you, dear and kind reader, what I saw in the portion of the heavens that roofed that island, you will be able to grasp, or at least believe, what I say. Though the sun shone brightly, I looked directly at it and my weary eyes were not the least bothered by its flagrant radiance. “How odd!” I thought, but my exhausted mind didn't have the strength necessary to ask “why?”, and was that question ever to echo in my head, I definitely had not the will to seek an answer. My *esprit*, as if a prisoner long beaten and tortured, was willing to accept any idiosyncrasies that passed by it. How I wish, now as I write these very words, I had pushed myself to investigate the strange things I saw on that island. But the intense yet eye friendly sun light was not the weirdest of what I came across during my exile.

A shooting star appeared from one side of the sun, as if out of nowhere; as if out of my mind really, since, strangely, I had the feeling that the image of a shooting star appeared in my head an instant before one appeared in the sky. I wasn't very surprised: a shooting star, I thought, was very fit for the situation. I followed the trailing white dot to the other side of the sky, and then I freed it from the chase of my eyesight, for I noticed that entire nebulas and constellations of stars were visible to my human fatigued eyes. I have only seen a similar site before through the lens of a telescope, and certainly never while the sun was still up. I felt so expanded, yet so small; I felt I could reach and grab the whole universe and distill it to obtain its deepest secrets, yet I didn't. All I wanted was to contemplate the beauty of the stars. Beauty, I thought at that moment, was greater than the sum of the parts. At that moment also, I realized that the background colour of the sky, was a beautiful, well balanced mix between blue and purple.

My staring into the heavenly glowing spirals didn't last long, for my attention was caught by a passing bird. So great were its wings, that for an instant it blocked the light of the sun from reaching the spot where I lay. A bird, I would have said, existed only in the books speaking of faeries and elves, yet it was there, gliding slowly through the air, and descending as it did. My eyes followed it with incredulity, until it disappeared among the dense tree population that spread beyond the shores. At that moment, I got up, shook the sand off of my clothes, and started walking along the shore, exploration in mind, of course, but I also had to find some nourishment, for I was famished. At that moment I

still feared to enter the forest, as I was sure I had no idea what was waiting for me in there.

Remember, kind reader, that I said the island was not very vast. I felt so at first, and I knew so when I circled the shore and ended back where I started. On my walk I found nothing but sand, a few pebbles, and a wooden branch that I took for myself to lean on as a walking stick. Also during that promenade, I took time to examine the ocean. It was very calm; hardly any ripple could be seen on its surface, even when looked closely at. So well did it reflect the colour of the sky, there was not the familiar line of the horizon, instead water and sky blended together, and gave me the impression that the ocean was rather an ocean of mist rather than that of water. No neighbouring land was to be seen. I seemed to be at the center of an infinitely large oceanic disc. Seeing that the forest was my only chance to find food, I finally dared to venture through it.

With disinclination I set my feet beyond the line that the forest defined along with the shore. I thought it would be better at first to traverse the forest in a straight line until I reach the shore on the opposite side of the island. I walked indefinitely. I would have said I walked for days, for that's how long it felt, though the day – dare I say day? It seemed to be a mix of both day and night – never turned into night. Though always straight was my path, the shore remained out of the reach of my eyes.

I found no edible vegetation, but plenty of fruitless trees, and wild bushes and weeds. Animal life seemed to be almost extinct: except for the giant bird I saw when I was back at the shore, which now was nowhere to be seen, I saw nothing that dared to move without the permission of the gentle, refreshing wind that blew at intervals. I searched long, and finally came to a somewhat noticeably different scenery.

I reached a river. It was not very wide, but I wondered how a river could run there, and I still have no answer. It had to pour somewhere, I thought, but on my exploration of the shore I saw no river pouring into the ocean. I stepped closer to make sure it was real. The water was crystal clear, and the sound of it was music to my ears, for I was quite thirsty. I knelt and let my hand spoon out some water. There was no water in my hand, only sand. Shocked, I threw the sand in the stream, and it disappeared as soon as it touched the surface of the water. I tried again, and again I only got sand. Dry sand. I sat there and wept. I wished to die, for death seemed inevitable, and I did not wish to endure any suffering. Death seemed a merciful exit. Then I realized that this strange river must – better say 'could', since it seemed anything could happen on that island – be starting at some point, and I could use it as a reference to guide me through the land. I started walking again, this time along the river.

Flooded with the irrational happenings, and feeling lost and hopeless, I became paranoid. Not a step I took without looking back to make sure no one – or no thing – was following me. I'm not sure how much I walked, but at a certain time I could not go any longer, and I stood still. I wanted to go back to the shore, for, certain that I was not going to survive this ordeal, the shore felt a much safer place to die. Out of despair, I looked up at the sky, imagining that a magnificent sign will appear and guide me, much like that shooting star. I saw no magnificent sign, only the moon, which seemed unusually large and close. I lowered my eyes once again. To my surprise, the river was gone! All I saw was an old cottage a few meters away from where I stood. A hoary gleam the moon shed upon the cottage, and a gleam of hope it was. The idea that I was not alone on the island, or that I was the only one to ever step this land, gave my spirit a bit of a push. I found

myself standing at the door, though I hardly know how I got there, for I don't remember ever making any move at that time. I knocked. I could have opened the door right away. But I thought that if someone answered my knock, I could be saved. The door slowly opened, and a voice said: "come in!"

I did not hesitate, instead I rudely walked inside. A simple hut it was: a rug on the floor, some shelves, a table, and a chair with an old man on it. The man had long white hair and beard. He was facing a window, and I stood in front of it, blocking the view. He didn't seem to mind. I dared not speak a word, still recalling what happened with the river. He was braver than I was, and spoke with a trust worthy voice: "sit down, my son. You must be starving." I looked and I saw a chair which I did not see before. I sat down. On the table now were a bowl and a glass of water. I ate and I drank. I'm not sure what I ate, but it did put strength back into my weary body. The old man still had not given one single glance at me. Had he done that, it would have been useless: I soon realized that the old man cannot see. I now had the strength to ask questions.

"May I ask you what this place is? And how did you get here?" I asked.

"This place is a hut on an island, my friend. And I never got here. I have always been here", said he.

"-Who are you? What is your name?"

- I am a part of this island. And had I a name, it would have been useless for you to know it.

- Is there a way off of this island? A way that leads me back to the real world?

- I'm not sure of what world you speak. But there is a way off the island. I will tell you about it in due time."

I knew not what to reply to that statement, so I felt I should temporarily change the subject.

"- Do you mind if I asked you about your eyes? An unfortunate accident, I presume?"

- Had it been an accident, it would have been unfortunate indeed. Yet I chose to relinquish my eyesight. For it is not with eyes that the truth can be seen."

I recounted to him the events that came upon me from the moment I first walked the white shores. I took care not to miss the mention of the giant bird, the sun, the stars, the river, the moon, and the moment of my seeing this hut. The man nodded at every one of those words. When I was finally done, he handed me a disc, which I accepted reluctantly. It was a golden disc. There was an engraving of a lilac flower on it, and there was some inscription on it which I could not read. The old man spoke.

"- The bird always comes and never leaves. The river always flows, yet it pours nowhere, and it starts nowhere. It is no different than everything else on the island. It has always been here. The island has always been here.

- And what do you mean by always?"

- Since the river started to flow. Now, it is time for you to leave. I will be seeing you again. Yet you will not remember me."

He rose and opened the door. I didn't see the scene from which I came in, but instead I saw a field of lilac flowers. I walked out, and never looked back. I stepped into the field, I lingered for a moment, and then I ran. I ran until I noticed I was on the shore once again. There was a row boat there. I dragged it into the shallow water on the shore,

and I jumped inside it. I saw no land to row to, yet in my head still echoed the phrase: “it is not with eyes that the truth can be seen”. I started rowing.

It seems to me that the island wasn't infinite, but rather changing whenever I looked away. For three days after my return, the golden disc lay on my desk, and received my incredulous glances silently. And up to this day, the disc still appears there at times, and disappears at others. As for me, since the moment of my return, I had ceased to exist.

R.