



Blue Sea, Wilt Thou Welcome Me?

By Ingrid Anders

Sun glitter on the water flirts with me; wavelets lap the deck posts below.

“Jill? Down here,” says my laptop, rudely. I should have taken the conference call inside, but this view—

“Right. As I was saying, keep up the good work, Ty. You’ve done a great job these two weeks I’ve been gone.”

“Thanks, boss. So, how was the trip? Not too awkward, I

hope.”

Through the open kitchen window, I can see my daughter and Lorenzo’s mother. Gemma is up on her tippy-toes on a chair, peering into an active pot; Claudia has one hand securing the toddler’s waist, the other holding a steaming spoonful of broth.

“Hot, Nonna, hot!” Gemma squeals.

“Sì, tesorina, stai attenta,” Claudia says in tranquil tones. She blows on the spoon to cool it. To Gemma, this is sorcery.

I sigh. “No, not awkward at all.”

“Wow, that’s ... amazing. Well, I confirmed your flight. You’re on schedule to leave at four fifty p.m. Swiss time. And I booked your car to the airport. Did you get the email?”

I hold up the confirmation page that Lorenzo printed for me. “Yes. We’ll be ready to go after lunch.”

“Great. And you said your sister was picking you up in New York?”

“Yes, she’ll be there for us.” Ty doesn’t know I mean this literally and figuratively.

“Well, have a smooth flight. See you at work on Monday.”

The door to the deck swings open and Lorenzo pokes his head out into the Goldilocks morning. My laptop snaps itself shut.

Lorenzo: My River runs to thee. Blue sea, wilt thou welcome me? Jill, stop that! Emily Dickinson would not approve.

“Ciao, Mees Jeel,” the young man says. “Can I bring you a coffee?”

I snort-laugh. I’ve told Lorenzo countless times not to call me “miss,” but he thinks it’s hilarious to treat me like I’m still his boss. He stands there, imp-grinning, until I say, “Yes, thank you, a coffee would be great.”

“Ciao, mamma!” booms through the window as Lorenzo lifts up Claudia and kisses her on each cheek. Gemma gets a “Ciao, bella!” Now he’s back outside, handing over a demitasse of dark, eager fuel and settling down with his own diminutive cup. Together, we sip and watch the kitchen.

“Nonna!” squeals Gemma. “Can I do it?” The two of them add salt to the brodo. Claudia manages the grinder expertly in Gemma’s raw double grab.

“Sì, tesorina. Lentamente. Così guarda!”

“I’m cooking, Nonna! I’m cooking!”

“Sì, sì, amore mio.”

Claudia is a prima ballerina in the kitchen; she leads Gemma from stove to table to counter in an exquisite pas de deux.

“I’ve never seen my mother so happy,” Lorenzo says.

I’m so sorry! I want to blurt. Sorry, I failed you. Sorry, I wasn’t the grown-up you needed me to be. But I am not sorry—not for me, and not for Gemma.

Lorenzo shakes his head. “I’m sorry it took me so long to invite you here.” He tips the rest of his coffee back and swallows. “Before you came, I could not imagine seeing her. Now I cannot imagine not seeing her.”

“...”

“And my parents ... well, they welcome you here anytime.”

My gaze finds the mountains across the lake: green, abrupt, and stunning like the peaks of Rio de Janeiro, yet largely forsaken for their Alpine siblings.

“Your sister will be happy to have you home, no?”

I shrug. “Two weeks of our apartment to herself and no childcare responsibilities? I am sure she enjoyed the alone time.”

“I am sure she was lonely.”

Funny Lorenzo should mention my little sister. When I first met him while visiting the Zurich office, I mentally matched him with Liz. They were the same age; he was an intern, she an MFA student. Ambition piped from them both.

Lorenzo’s father shuffles past the door with a worn leather bag.

“Nonno!” Gemma exclaims when she sees him. She and Claudia are co-slicing bread; the woman’s arms encircle the child like a cello. “Watch me, Nonno! I’m cutting! I’m cutting!”

“Bravissima, cara mia.”

Silvio’s tender words prick my heart. My own father has never said such things to her. When I announced my pregnancy, he and my mother distanced themselves, favoring their more sensible children, their more legitimate grandchildren. Only Liz stood by us.

“Vieni qui.” Silvio lifts Gemma off the stool and leads her toward the front garden.

“He’s got his bocce set,” Lorenzo says. “It was his father’s. We all used to play when I was little. I cannot remember the last time he took it out.”

Yesterday, Lorenzo took Gemma and me on the funicular up San Salvatore. From the mountaintop, Lugano was a crescent of beige Legos around a spill of mineral blue; its people, their sentiments: invisible.

“Nonna!” Gemma yells. “Come see me! I’m playing!”

Claudia pivots her head, unties her apron, and drifts out of view. Lorenzo’s eyes fall to the table and land on my airport shuttle confirmation page. He scoffs.

“What?”

He shakes his head.

“What?”

“Jeel. I know you are supposed to leave today, but ...”

“...”

“I do not think ...” Lorenzo’s masseter muscle distends in his cheek.

“...”

“I cannot let you go.” He stands up, paper and cell phone in hand. My airport shuttle is cancelled.

“Lorenzo!”

“Nonna!” Gemma’s voice wafts from the front garden. “Look at me! I’m rolling them! I’m rolling them!”

“Ah,” says Lorenzo, like he’s just cracked a stubborn joint.

“Brava, cara mia!” Silvio cheers.

“Ben fatto, tesorina!” Claudia claps.

The young man silhouettes himself against the sparkling lake; his back and shoulders inflate.

“Silly boy,” I whisper, “you’ll have to drive us to the airport now,” though I know I am no longer in charge.

Lorenzo’s car keys jangle in my face. Then—with that familiar, reckless blaze in his eyes—he turns and hurls the keys. A plunk in the water. A ring in a swath of diamonds.