

THE GLISTENING BEACHES

A Short Story

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Peter was sitting on a chair, watching the stream of tourists. Not that there was much to see. At that time of day people were few and far between.

'There are never many people here,' he thought regretfully. 'It is not quite the same as it is in the centre of the Shining ones!'

Sighing, his eyes wandered again. Peter needed time to adapt to his new situation. Having moved recently, he didn't know his new coworkers yet and, honestly, he didn't want to know them. They were losers who worked in a miserable place, making pitiful amounts of money, but not he!

He came from the centre of the resort. From the real money-making machine. From the essence of the tourist business! How had that happened!? How was it possible to slip out from the very front line in just a month? He did not yet have a reasonable explanation.

'Hey, Peter, I am going to get a sandwich from Ivan. Want one too?' The question came from his pimply coworker at the stall opposite his.

Peter did not like him at all. He was one of those men who would constantly grin and talk bullshit with the only aim of attracting women; speaking with so much confidence, as if he knew and understood everything. Peter kept wondering if the chap had ever looked at himself in the mirror. He was tall and thin, still had acne and was over thirty. He had a weird name Kostadin—difficult to pronounce and remember.

'No!' Peter answered. 'I am not hungry.'

Actually, it was almost noon, but it seemed that the holidaymakers were still on the beach. There was not a living soul in the small, outlying street where his souvenir stand sat.

'Very soon they will move from the beach to the restaurants and cafes,' Peter thought and sighed.

He wished he were in his previous work place – almost smack in the middle of one of the most renowned resorts—the Shining Beaches. Its name was not pure coincidence. The sand of the beaches was almost white and glittered intensely in the sun. This created a luminous and bright environment—or at least so he thought—and it attracted many holidaymakers. It nourished their euphoria and made them spend a lot of money on hundreds of things. This was how business flourished on its own.

Peter remembered the warm feeling he experienced about two seasons ago, having arrived at the resort for the first time. It was wonderful back then. They had employed him right away thanks to him knowing a few people and placed him right in the centre of the huge resort. He managed a stand with exotic fruit in a small market, consisting of another five similar small stands. The profits were insane, and the tips he sometimes received sometimes or—on occasion—collected himself, were exorbitant.

What had happened? Could it have been because of that wee banana scam of two months back? There was no way they could have found out! He had taken care to cover up everything, and yet...

Maybe he was never going to find out and did not care either. He did not care about anything anymore. He would sit on his chair all day and watch the stream of people, whenever they came. Occasionally, somebody would stop at his small stand and then Peter would smile expectantly, but rarely would anyone buy anything eventually. At the end of the day he had to listen to the jabber of his new boss, who was complaining endlessly of the small or non-existent profits.

'You are driving away the customers! I will fire you! You keep sitting on this chair all day long, not doing anything! Look at Danail,' he would say,

pointing at his coworker, who was an artist. He was the only one who had certain success with the tourists in this outlying, unfrequented small street. 'He talks to the customers and shows interest! You, on the other hand, just stand there goggling! Pull yourself together, boy! I will kick you out and you won't see it coming. Buy yourself a phrase-book for foreign languages. I want you to double the profits by the end of the month or else I will shut down the stand, mind you!'

Those were the words of his short, fat and swarthy boss. Peter hated him. Actually, he hated everybody, mostly Danail.

'May his paintings burn down!' he thought. Peter was even wondering if he should set them on fire but was afraid of being caught, and on the other hand, he did not feel like making the effort. He was tired and wanted to take a break from all that fuss.

Damned fortune which had hurled him into the outskirts of heaven!

Peter was sitting alone on the bench, munching his sandwich. Lunch break? Such a concept did not exist. He had just asked Kostadin to keep an eye on his stand and had come to the beach alley to have his lunch. Anyway, there was no chance that someone would ask to buy something. That happened quite rarely, and the chap gladly undertook the task to guard the stand. He seemed to be obliging by nature and did not mind Peter's trying to avoid him.

It was warm. A little unusual for the end of the summer but he did not pay much attention to such things. This way or the other, Peter was used to the hot weather. He had spent the whole summer here. A long and fruitful season, which had ended in such an unpleasant way. What was he going to do the following year? At the same stand again? He shivered.

A couple of lovers passed by. They did not pay any attention to him. He looked at them with envy. In all likelihood, the couple did not have Peter's problems. They lived happily and contentedly as holidaymakers. He was the mechanism, which made sure that they had a good time, but the holidaymakers did not realize that! They never gave a thought to the efforts he had made. They ought to come and buy some of his useless souvenirs so they can feel better!

Was that really true? Actually, who cared what the holidaymakers were thinking. The important thing was that they had to lay out money. They were holidaymakers, right?! That was what they had come here for. To spend money! To spend and feel well. And he was the mechanism...

Oh-oh...

The brilliance of the sun on the tiny sea waves outlined a fishing boat in the distance. The boat was a little difficult to notice because of its small size. On the other hand, the old engine rumbled indistinctly in the distance. It was such a familiar sight in the sea yet so unusual for this place. This special place, where the water was furrowed by yachts, jets, motor boats, surfboards, sea mattresses, people... Actually, what was a fishing boat doing there?

Peter squinted.

Nevertheless, those were the outskirts of the resort. The outskirts! And he had come from a bright place in the centre...

Maybe it was time to return to the stand!

Just a little longer...

He had to go back to the commercial heaven, but how? A plan was necessary. Peter was not like the rest of them in that obscure street. He knew what it was like to be THERE and intended to go back. In just a moment he would come up with something... So, let's see: he, alone on the bench. The beach. The sea. Two jets. Some tumult coming from the beach, though not loud. They were hiding in the restaurants and cafés. The restaurants and cafes!

Yes! That was it. He was going to be a waiter! That's it. Actually, was it going to work? He had never worked in a restaurant. Most probably, they were not going to hire him. They would prefer somebody more experienced or simply the staff from the previous season... And who was working at His stand for exotic fruit!? It wasn't fair!

A pause halted his thoughts.

Peter was going to wriggle out of it. That was certain. He was going to change his life and even start his own business, not even in that resort but in the larger 'Sea Brilliance'! That was the truth about resorts. That was where he was going...

Hmph.

Wasn't it time to go back?

The beach. The sea. The fading rumble of the fishing boat in the distance. He pondered about the sea for a moment. Was the sea aware of the resort on its shores?

No doubt the man in the fishing boat knew the answer to that question. He understands the sea, and we, the people here in the resort, understand the holidaymakers. Actually, we rarely notice the sea, unless we have to work with it. In fact, I think that we can entirely do without it, as long as there are enough holidaymakers.

Or maybe that was not so. Perhaps there was something special about the sea itself?

Peter rose and shuffled his feet towards his work place.

'I wonder what a mess the pimply one has made,' he asked himself.

'You haven't made any profits today again! I am getting tired of you.'

His fat boss hauled him over the coals behind the stand in a low voice. A greedy man, but at least he was discrete. He made an effort to hide the subject of the quarrel from his coworkers but Peter doubted that there was anybody to whom everything was not clear. He was thinking that those kinds of conversations had to be held tête-à-tête but at the same time had the impression that his boss was simply playing games. He enjoyed lecturing people. It was strange how he managed, while talking, to look over from behind the stand the somewhat deep-bosomed elderly lady, who was passing by slowly, without even interrupting his train of thought.

'I sold a varnished sea-shell on a stand!'—Peter retorted.

'So, this is what you call a profit? I am telling you - If you don't pull yourself together, I am shutting down the stand and you are going home.' He stopped for a second and then his thoughts took another course: 'You are not to leave the stand either! I came around this afternoon and you were not here. You had left the pimply one to look after the merchandise! I am telling you, if you do this once again, I am going to replace you with someone else!'

'But I had to have my lunch!'

'You will eat here! Get a sandwich from Ivan and eat at the stand, just like everybody else. I am going to replace you, you know.'

With nothing to say, Peter just looked ahead vacantly.

'There, call it a day now and you are free to go for the evening,' the Fatso continued. 'I have found you a new coworker. She will work tonight. I want you here tomorrow morning at eight.'

I am going to tell you later how the shifts will work. Get lost now.'

Peter was shuffling his feet slowly on the wet asphalt of the central alley. Loud noise surrounded him. Evening had come. Crowds of tourists were walking in all possible directions. They were laughing, shouting, whining, gesticulating. In other words, they were having a holiday. Wasn't this what they had come here for? To rest. From what?

The way to his apartment wasn't in this direction precisely but he did not feel like going home. Peter had started off simply like that, without any particular direction, just to have a walk before returning home. Naturally, his feet took him to the centre. Or maybe, following the tumult, he was headed toward the most amusing and variegated place. Gradually, while approaching the central beach and the square, vacation fever began to overwhelm him. For a flicker of a moment, Peter forgot that he had actually come here to work and liked it. He even wanted to be a holidaymaker, not a street vendor. A visitor dazed with euphoria, carrying a wad with an excessive amount of money in his pocket, seeking and yearning for amusement. What power of attraction there was in the idea.

He reached into his pocket and took out his wallet. There was very little money in it. Rent was due, and what about his boss's threats too... On the other hand, he could always withdraw from his savings... Still, it was better to be careful with the money.

'Oh, what beautiful luminous bracelets! And inexpensive, too!'

But where was he going to wear such a thing - at his stand!? In the presence of his coworkers?

'Fie! It's absurd.'

Peter walked on with a feeling of anguish. There had to be a reason for all of those people to come to this exact place and not elsewhere. There was something in the air. He could feel it with every fiber of his being.

'Have some! Funny jumping frogs. They will make you laugh and put you in a good mood..., ' somebody shouted almost in his ear.

Peter looked at them. They were really funny. Without giving it a thought, he took out his wallet and a considerable amount of money disappeared from it. Peter went on with a smile on his face. He was now part of the crowd. A holidaymaker!

After about three hundred feet he couldn't restrain himself and bought a pancake made from a special recipe. Peter couldn't understand what was so special about it, even after devouring all of it, but nevertheless...! It was pleasant being a holidaymaker. Walking with a brisk pace, his mouth greasy from the pancakes and a plastic trinket in his hand, Peter kept smiling at the passers-by but most of them did not notice him.

Noisy crowds walked past him, he bumped into them in the packed alley, and the people, who were engulfed in their sparkling passions did not notice him and passed by ever so drunk and noisy. Happiness! Yes, this was happiness. In the purest form. Genuine and complete happiness!

Suddenly Peter felt terribly lonely! He stood as if he were nailed to the ground, with a frozen face, in the middle of a huge bubbling crowd of people.

Everybody around him was laughing, shouting, floating in ecstasy and he was standing in one place, his unseeing eyes riveted somewhere above the crowd, only a little plastic trinket to keep him company – so utterly lonely.

He wished he were not there. He turned and looked around. His eyes accidentally fell on the low neckline of a gorgeous girl passing by. A pleasant wave swept over him and it seemed that his loneliness disappeared for an instant, then it returned again when the girl who did not pay any attention to him anyhow walked on.

For the first time after he had started his walk Peter stopped and thought where exactly he was headed for. He seemed to feel like going to the other end of the centre, where there was an amusement park with a Ferris wheel, but then started wondering what he was going to do there. Enthusiasm, euphoria and total disgust with life constantly interchanged in him. Eventually, the negative feelings prevailed, so he turned around and dragged himself amongst the tumult towards his flat.

The huge warm happiness seemed to have suddenly left the whole resort. The people were still there. The entertainment was there. The last rays of the setting sun as well, but they looked somewhat grey and dull. For a moment he wondered if he had changed or if somebody had waved a magic wand and everything around him had lost its essence.

Peter did not care and had already come to hate the crowd. He did not want to be part of the entertainment and wanted to get away as far as possible. In the quietest place in the world. He felt terribly strange about how, a little while ago, he had wanted to be friends with all those disgusting people at the same time, who were jostling like sheep? How could he have even thought that he loved them!? Or rather, that he wanted to love them? They were simply holidaymakers. Mechanisms that were laying out money, that hardly thought about anything else but how to entertain themselves in all possible ways at any time, even when they were sleeping. Compensating for the following year when they would not entertain themselves. Still, they were just mechanisms.

He!

He was the prudent one. The shepherd. The one who understood what was actually happening there and that was precisely why he knew how to make the best of the place and the time. Those stupid holidaymakers had no choice but to give him all their money and maybe even take a loan in order to give him more!

Yes, that idea was definitely pleasant for him. He, the trader, like a ruler of the stupid holidaymakers who, lured by the glamour of the beaches, turned into grinning mechanisms, yearning for pleasure, who could no longer think but they were just giving and giving...

He stopped in front of his flat smiling, threw the plastic trinket towards the near litter bin and tried to forget he had bought it in the first place. Half an hour later he was already lying in his bed, still smiling, his hands crossed under his head. The beat of a bass drum from the nearby disco and the falsetto croaking of a pop-folk singer from the nearby restaurant were coming through the open window. They mingled with the common background noise of the resort, which would normally reach its peak at that time of the day.

Still, somewhere from far away, as if from the bottom of a huge concert hall the sound of the breaking waves sneaked through. Only every now and then, finding a chink in the thick wall of sounds, it seemed to remind of something else, which was such an inseparable part of the resort that it had

almost blended with it. Perhaps that was why people forgot about it. They feasted their eyes on it and used it but did not remember it. They longed for it, hustled on its beaches but how the sea felt, they did not care. It was enough for them to take from it their share of joy but it occurred to nobody to leave something in return.

Nobody, except for the lonely man in the fishing boat. Perhaps...

Peter fell asleep, wondering why the thought about the fishing boat had rushed into his mind again.

Even though Peter had come to his stand in a fairly cheerful mood in the morning, the profits that day were as poor as always. That was somehow in contrast with his inner feeling of warmth but it did not bother him. He was not offended even by his fat boss's empty blabbering.

It was already clear to him what was happening there and in his life in general. It was clear where the troubles came from. It seemed that he had known that before, but now he had come somehow to understand it...

It was a serious thing too. It made him feel serious and not pay attention to trifles like the lack of profits and his nagging boss. There was a reason for all that and it was very clear: the stand was in the wrong place!

It was as simple as that. However, he was not going to share his newly acquired knowledge with anybody, least of all with that short and plump man. Peter had a plan! He suppressed a smile, so that his boss wouldn't think he was ridiculing him.

Peter was going back to the centre of the resort, where the real money-making was. His mind was made up. Nothing could stop him from leaving that deplorable and obscure place. From his stupid coworkers, who preyed upon the passers-by like vultures, almost aiming at stealing a banknote. He was going to a place where the tourists voluntarily produced money out of their pockets and willingly shoved it into the hands of the polite and smiling salespeople, who selflessly gave them the gift of happiness...

Or something like that.

Nevertheless, he had the whole winter ahead of him to contrive the way. The important thing was that he knew exactly what he wanted and had to preserve that zeal.

He waited for the harangue to end, then gave the stand over to his large-toothed coworker, who had managed to make close friends with all their coworkers from the alley in two days. Peter was fully convinced that she was going to get acquainted with everybody in the next alley by the end of the week too. She was one of that kind of terribly 'polite' saleswomen, who seemed to be aware of all the needs of a customer even before he had entered the shop. They would even guess needs he had never suspected he had!

Peter hated that kind of people. Something made him feel like an amateur in her presence. It is true that such a skill - to outtalk the customer and foist on him something he doesn't need at all, was quite useful. It was also true he was not the master of that skill! Still, she was there, in the outskirts, which suggested that she was actually not so good, and that made him feel somewhat relieved. If only the boss could stop holding her up as a model and emphasize how she had made double the profits he had made in a twice shorter time.

It sounded quite incredible and Peter hoped that was not true.

He left the stand and headed towards the centre again in order to drive away the bad thoughts from his head and admire again the clearness with which he understood the resort business.

The season was over unexpectedly and quickly. The north wind started blowing earlier and the beaches were deserted. Some people predicted that it was about to bring warmer weather at the beginning of autumn, but still that naturally wouldn't bring back the holidaymakers. Maybe some people, yearning for the sun, would appear here and there and brighten the deserted beaches but the money-making machine, as a whole, had ceased running.

Peter had paid in advance the rent for his flat until the end of the month. He did not like it, but it was his stupid landlord's requirement, so he decided to stay a few days longer in order to think things over at leisure.

He walked down the empty alleys, wearing almost all the clothes he had. He was watching with sympathy the remaining holidaymakers from the Nordic countries, who found the weather perfectly normal and who were not bothered by the wind, which had suddenly started to blow. There was something strange and different about the deserted resort then. It seemed that the place had changed.

The first several days, you could see everywhere salespeople, who were hectically gathering their goods and the smaller stands. Everything that was left behind was closed and locked soundly. It was girded with chains and locks.

Now, that they had left too, there was something strangely pleasant about the sight of the closed stands and stores. The indifferent eyes of the salespeople, who had stayed behind and no longer invited the passers-by to buy their goods. They were just bored and nobody knows why they had decided to stay behind. Maybe they expected that obscure prediction about a little more summertime in the beginning of autumn. Peter watched how their hopes flew away together with the gusts of the cool wind.

So, one by one, they slowly gathered the goods they had offered and closed their stores, putting an end to it...

For that year.

The feeling of inevitability was the new inhabitant of the resort.

Peter got up earlier on the last day. He was not in a hurry, his bus was only going to leave in the afternoon, but he wanted to make one last tour. Who knows why his feet took him to the coastal alley. It was still morning. Thin ragged clouds enshrouded the sun and only some mystical glitter in the sky hinted where it was. It was cold. The rumbling of the sea was subdued but the low waves pounded on the shore violently. The seagulls and the herring gulls, now the only inhabitants of the beach, were chasing each other for an ice-cream wrapper or some other garbage. From time to times a raven would come flying to rummage in the seaweed, which had been thrown out by the sea.

The resort was a strange and unfathomable place in that cool autumn day.

Peter was staring at the sea and it seemed he was not thinking about anything when a dull rumble came to his ears. He turned his head.

The fishing boat with its lonely inhabitant was going out to sea again.

How normal and ordinary they looked now. The only watercraft on the still warm sea.

A strange feeling of calmness and a feeling of safety came over him. He was thinking of the year to come when the noisy cheerful holidaymakers will again populate the beach and the fishing boat will surely be there again? Doing the very same thing. As if taking no heed of the resort.

One last thought flashed through his mind before he left the Shining Beaches—the sea, the birds, the beach and the fishing boat were always going to be there.

The End