

ISABELLA'S CARRIBEAN ADVENTURE

Dedicated to my dear friend Isabella from Freetown, Sierra Leone. A woman of wisdom, character and great strength.

Isabella (or Izzie as she preferred to be called) sat on the warm sand, knees drawn up, watching the cruise liner disappearing over the horizon. The beach was perfect with crystal clear waters lapping the shore, and a row of gently waving palm trees fronting thick undergrowth and jungle.. Beside her, drying in the sand, was her Stella McCartney dress (still wet), her more personal La Perla garments (also still wet) and, most importantly of all, her Jimmy Choos' (sodden) which she had, fortunately, popped inside her Prada shoulder bag (dripping) for safety, just before disaster had struck.

Izzy considered her position, contemplating both the pluses and the minuses. A quick inventory revealed that her bag contained virtually all of the essentials a girl might need whilst stranded on an uninhabited island in what was once, rather romantically she thought, called the Spanish Main. She was a little concerned to note, however, that her stock of Chanel Number 5 was a trifle low, and her mobile phone had clearly, and negligently she felt, not been designed for prolonged immersion in salt water. On the minus side she was (a) marooned, (b) lost and (c) hungry. Furthermore, it was quite clear that nobody had yet noticed that she, Izzy, and the cruise ship, were no longer together.

Izzy sighed gently and, much to her reluctance, had to admit to herself that whilst a spot of bad luck had played a part, she was in this pickle largely as a result of her own natural tendency to over-exuberance. On the other hand, how was she to know how strong genuine Carribean Rum cocktails were? She had her suspicions that the rather dishy young Steward may well have been a little too generous in his measures as well. There was precisely nothing wrong with dancing and the other passengers had clearly enjoyed her re-enactment of the scene from Titanic, when she had leaned forward over the bows, assisted by the self-same Steward who was very happy to play his part. Her dance around the upper Promenade Deck had been a complete success and there was much applause. And another couple of rums. No, the difficulty had arisen when she found herself completely alone at the stern observation platform and it had seemed a totally brilliant idea to dance along the stern rail as a form of grand finale. And on her last couple of steps, just as she was about to leap back onto the deck, the Captain had inconsiderately turned hard to port, probably to avoid some annoying hazard in the water. Totally thoughtless of course.

As a sensible and practical woman, Izzy had held on tightly to her Prada bag, and, after coming up for air, she had trodden water crossly for several minutes, until the realisation dawned upon her that her fall from grace (and from the ship) had gone unseen.

The island was about a mile away, and Izzie was a strong swimmer. In due course she had crawled ashore, cursing her idiot husband who, had he been even half-attentive, would have noticed her absence and raised the alarm. More likely he would be having his usual afternoon slumber, before awakening and no doubt ordering another bottle of champagne as an aperitif, and then wandering down to the Cocktail Bar, eyeing up anything in a skirt. It was unlikely that he would even realise she wasn't about, until he needed her on his arm to impress the equally wealthy business people and politicians when it was time to dine at the Captain's table. He was, Izzy concluded, a pig. Albeit an extremely rich one.

Anyway, it was time to seek out the essentials. Izzy firstly checked the rock pools and noted that many tasty looking fish had been trapped by the outgoing tide. She flicked her gold-plated Dunhill lighter and, of course, it still worked. So a fire could be lit. She made her way into the trees and noticed an abundance of fruits and berries, all clearly edible, and she remembered her childhood in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and her regular excursions into the forests for the purpose of fruit and berry collection. She reflected that her mother's careful advice about what she could and could not eat was going to come in very useful. She was not going to be hungry, her clothes were dry, she had lippy, and she knew that sooner or later her aggravating husband would report her missing and a search would be made. She would of course be rescued. The only downside of that was that she would be forced to be reunited with "He who must be obeyed".

Izzy felt the need for a wash to get rid of the salt from her long swim, and she followed the sound of running water until she emerged into a clearing. A pool of sparkling green water lay before her, fed by a tumbling waterfall, whilst brightly coloured birds swooped over the surface, catching flies. Perfect. And minutes later she stood under the waterfall, revelling in the glorious cool flow. And then she had a horrible feeling that she was being watched. She wiped the water off her face, and pushed her hair aside, and found that she was absolutely correct.

Standing a few yards away was a man. A man whom, Izzy noted, was a few years older than her, very well dressed in a tropical linen suit, and who had the appearance of being both confident and ever so slightly dangerous. He was also, she noticed, looking at her with undisguised admiration. "Good Afternoon", he called "Lovely day for a shower". "Yes" she thought "An accent like that means Gentleman. Eton, Oxford or Cambridge, Guards, City Banker. A Gentleman". And not at all unattractive. It suddenly dawned on Izzy that she was, to put it mildly, a little underdressed, and she advised the man that - if he was a gentleman - he would avert his eyes, until she had recovered her clothing. "Of course my dear, of course" he replied and turned his back to her whilst, blushing, she quickly grabbed her clothes and regained her modesty, if a little late in the day.

Anyway Dominic, as he introduced himself, swiftly learned the story of Izzy's misadventure and, after foolishly laughing and receiving corrective advice from Izzy, invited her to his "cabin", a luxurious building completely hidden by trees. In due course he prepared a sumptuous meal for her with excellent wines, (Izzy sensibly declined a rum cocktail) , followed by a stroll along the palm-fringed beach. She learned that - as she had thought - Dominic had been to Eton, followed by Oxford, had done a spell in the Guards and had then become something in the City, making a fortune, and then buying his island and retiring at 50. It was paradise and Izzy had never met a man who paid so much attention to her or who showed such interest in what she had to say. They walked and talked for hours, and ended up sitting on the balcony sipping fruit juices and watching the sun sink below the horizon. And then it was time for bed. He showed her to a beautifully appointed suite and gently leaned forward, kissing her gently on the cheek. And that one kiss gave her more pleasure than she had had in ten years of joyless marriage.

Izzy woke early the next day and walked alone along the beach deep in thought. Her emotions were in turmoil. There she was, the wife of a hugely rich and powerful man, whom she did not love, and who used her as little more than window-dressing for his political ambitions. And now she was alone on a desert island with an extraordinarily attractive man - a man she had only known for less than a day, but who had stirred passions and feelings she

had forgotten she had. And rescue was imminent. "What are you going to do Izzy?" she thought. And the answer came to her. Voices of her ancestors, of her friends, of her family, all inside her head.

She turned and there was Dominic. He had seen the search boat way out on the horizon and he held his satellite phone in his hand. Izzy took it silently and walked into the trees. She phoned her sister Claudia in Scotland and told her the story. Claudia squealed with excitement when Izzy described Dominic and gave her the sort of advice only a sister can give. And then Izzy called her Attorney - a lady who knew full well what Izzy's husband was like. A quick discussion followed during which Izzy mentioned her husband's political ambitions and also the extent of his - highly illegal - tax-dodging accounts in various offshore havens, along with the \$50 million or so which he actually declared each year. She also told her attorney about the very interesting file her private detective had presented to her concerning her husband's extra-marital relations. Her Attorney's smile could be detected over the phone and several thousand miles. "About \$25 million and the house in The Hamptons do you Izzy?". It certainly would and she concluded the call happy in the knowledge that the money would be in her accounts in days.

Dominic was standing sadly on the beach as she handed him back the phone. "Well Izzy" he said "I have never met a woman like you in my entire life, and until yesterday I never believed in love at first sight. I know you can never be mine and I suppose you will be leaving when the boat arrives". Izzy looked at him and said "No Dominic. I will not be leaving. Not today, not tomorrow and not for the rest of my life". And she took his hand, squeezed it gently and led him up the steps to the cabin.

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Iain Gregory