Return to Reality

A short story by Carol Radstone
The chatter amongst the six of us at a table for four on the narrow pavement outside the Bon Accueil café, was getting more and more animated as the glasses of wine mounted. It was a gorgeous day in the middle of April; after the long and cold winter; it was no wonder spirits were high.

It had become routine on a Sunday morning, after visiting the market, to congregate at the café. Francette, the owner, was so charming and made everyone welcome. As was the habit, we just ordered our drinks as we needed them, and somehow Francette seemed to know at the end of the morning, just exactly what each of us had ordered and how much we owed her.

I was particularly excited as I had been away for over six weeks and it was so nice to be back with old friends. I was sitting with my back to the narrow road, along which very few cars passed, and twice during the
morning people had warned me about being careful in case one of the legs of the chair, on which I was sitting, should slide over the edge of the high pavement. Then it happened - Don had just told a really funny joke, I laughed so much my eyes were watering. I leaned back, the chair leg went over the edge and I fell backwards towards the road.

Falling, falling, falling, I remember thinking ‘I must relax!’ , but still the hard bump didn’t come. Instead I felt a splash and then the warm waters closed over me. Surfacing I looked around and found myself in a beautiful lagoon. I could see the light collared sand with its backdrop of palm trees and behind me just endless blue see. ‘This is crazy,’ I thought, ‘I am in a photo shoot for a travel brochure.’ Just as this thought flitted through my brain, I heard a voice hailing me.

‘Hello!, I have been waiting for you for so long, I thought you would never come.’

‘Then I knew that I was really crazy, or I was dead and perhaps on my way to who knows where.’ These were my thoughts as I turned to see who had spoken.

Swimming out to me was a powerfully built, handsome man, beautifully sun-tanned, white teeth smiling at me. ‘Wow!’ ‘I knew then that I was dreaming, but what the hell I was going to enjoy this whilst it lasted.’
As he approached I felt the comfortable feeling as with a good friend that has been around many years; I contentedly waited as he came nearer. As he came closer, to that comfortable feeling came an excitement, located low in my body. I turned towards him and relaxed as he put his arms around me with a feeling of ‘YES! This is what I have been waiting for,’ as we sank below the tiny waves that rippled the surface of the warm blue water.

We surfaced, still embracing, but now with more urgency and without a word we swam strongly towards that enticing shore line. As I lay down on the sand with my arms reaching upwards, I heard him say.

‘Lay still my dear, you’ve had a nasty bump on the head.’ I opened my eyes to gaze at my handsome lover and saw the kindly, weather beaten and very lined face of an older man dressed in medical scrubs looking down on me. ‘Don’t move we are taking you to hospital, just to check you out, although I don’t think any damage has been done.’ As he spoke and I caught the full blast of his garlic breath, I closed my eyes and tried to return to the lagoon.

No good I was stuck with reality.

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