

Orbs in the Ocean

by Anita Kestin

I wanted to find one of the glass spheres tossed into the ocean near Block Island that I had read about in the newspaper. A glass blower had created hundreds of glass orbs and had tossed them into the ocean or hidden them on the shore or further inland. People hunted for them all over the island.

To be honest, I also needed to conquer my fear of going out alone on adventures. I was divorced now and sixty years old and I did not want my life to turn small. As I faced life, newly alone, children far away, I tried to imagine myself as Emma Peel in the Avengers: sleek, poised, elegant, and fearless.

I am not a morning person, but I set the alarm for 5 am and threw on an old pair of jeans and my favorite sleeveless shirt. Everyone else in the house was still sleeping when I unlocked the chain on my bike. I tossed a pop tart into the bike basket along with some iced tea I had made the day before. The road to the lighthouse was still shiny from yesterday's rain and here and there were beach roses and hydrangea bushes lining the road.

I stopped at Mohegan Bluffs and stood looking at the beach down below. It was rocky and desolate, still mist-covered in the early morning. I climbed down the long wooden staircase to the beach. 140 steps. It used to be an easy thing for me to do, but ever since my concussion, I had to be much more careful. The steps were slippery in places and I had to hold the railing as I went.

The sand on the beach was sodden and my steps sank down more and more as I approached the water. It might be too much to expect that a luminous sphere had washed up on the beach, but I looked anyway. Nothing.

Further out in the ocean, I scanned for signs of the round glass balls. Here and there, a glint of shiny color appeared and then disappeared under the waves. I waded out again and again but one after another proved to be a mirage, just light glinting on water as the sun rose or a shell caught in a tangle of seaweed. I focused on the water, looking on top of the water, just under the waves, and even far out into the distance. Nothing.

I would have to return empty handed but I had seen the sun, lustrous and luminous, the light sliding on top of the water and tumbling with the waves, and I had a pop tart and iced tea waiting for me at the top of that long staircase.

The wind was flinging the waves on to the sand, but the sun had just started to warm the air.

My feet stuck in the sand as I turned around. That was when I saw him, sitting on the beach, watching me. He waved. He was unfamiliar and I tried to decode his wave. Friendly? Menacing? Someone who lived here and came every day to think?

I waved back, picked up my sandals and walked across the wet sand to the staircase that loomed high above me, slippery and taller than it had seemed before. A seagull hovered over my head, the wind died down, and the air around me was suddenly static.

The man turned toward me and started to rise from the sand. My jeans were dripping and heavy, plastered to my legs, as I struggled to put on my sandals.

I reached for the railing with my right hand, but my hand missed the railing and my arm flopped at my side as I stepped on to the bottom stair and began to climb clumsily, unmistakably clumsily, my awkwardness visible even from a distance, often missing a step or slipping to one side or the other of the damp stairs. My jeans were still dripping and the strap in back of my left sandal was too loose and too low, but I did not stop to fix it as I climbed upward on the steps and forward

over the stair landings. The man was climbing steadily behind me, following in my disordered wake and was now near enough that he could probably smell my fear. I tried to conjure up Emma Peel, but she had evaporated, and I saw myself, wounded, stumbling; prey.

Just then, three people appeared at the top of the stairs and started to walk down the long wooden staircase as I continued to climb, gripping on to the railing. I nodded to the new arrivals as they worked their way down and, when they reached me, we had to take turns navigating the narrow stairs. When I looked back, the man was traveling downward now and when I reached the top of the stairs, surrounded by beach roses, I looked back and saw that he had returned to his spot on the sand.

Who was he? Did he mean me harm? I would never know but I did see that the water had called to me and I would venture out again to see the waves sparkle in the sunrise and to look for those magical orbs of glass that might be hidden in the seaweed, bobbing on the waves, or waiting to be rescued out in the open water. As I paused at the top, I smelled the beach roses and the ocean and waved to Emma Peel as she rode the waves into the distance.