

## He Played Misty for Me.

Eva was twenty-two, engaged to be married and devastated when her parents insisted she accompany them on holiday. It was 1974 and for the first time they were travelling on a one-class ship, Canberra. Her sister, Caro began complaining as they queued to board at Southampton. She was thirteen and everything in her life was either boring or downright irritating. Exactly the opinion of Caro held by Eva. This year the sisters shared a cabin of their own, both regarding this as a mixed blessing.

First day a sea and a stormy crossing of the Bay of Biscay confined Eva's mother and sister to their cabins. Her father spent time in the library, researching Gibraltar followed by a historical lecture. Neither invalid managed dinner and Eva spent an hour listening to her father rabbit on about Gibraltar. She hadn't yet met anyone of her own age and feared a lonely three-week cruise.

After dinner determined to explore, she found a disco in the Peacock Room, populated by forty-something couples intent on reclaiming lost youth. In the Bonito Lounge a trio of young men played a mix of pop and ballads. She eased her way around the side of the dance floor, totally unaware of a pair of brown eyes following her progress. Next stop was the Crow's Nest, settling at the bar she ordered a large Remy Martin. The addition of two ice cubes to the drink, caused the fastidious little barman to scowl, but Eva merely allowed the gentle piano music to soothe her. She ordered a second drink and whilst staring directly at the barman, added three ice cubes. Finally bored with tormenting the poor man, she headed for bed praying her cabin didn't reek of vomit. She opted for the scenic route back, pushing open the door, she eased into the Bonito Lounge, standing fast against the oncoming surge of tired revellers.

'You're too late, love, the band's done.' A short, man wearing a crumpled dark suit, swayed slightly as he spoke. 'Not got me sea legs yet.'

'So I see,' replied Eva, wrinkling her nose. 'The whisky probably ain't helping either, mate.' For the first time since coming on board, Eva smiled. Hearing the opening bars of another song, she remained by the door and listened. A beautiful song, one she didn't know, sung by a talented guitarist, accompanied by a keyboard player and drummer. The song came to an end in a deserted ballroom and Eva was embarrassed, feeling as though she'd been caught eavesdropping. Blushing crimson, she slipped back out the door.

The following morning both Eva's mother and sister were recovered and the family breakfasted together. 'Do you know this song, Mum?' Eva asked and sang the the first couple of lines from the song she heard the previous evening.

‘It’s *Misty*,’ replied her mother. ‘Johnny Mathis.’

Eva spent her day sunbathing around the Bonito Pool, the perfect way to cruise down the coast of Portugal. That night was the Captain’s Cocktail Party, an opportunity to dress for dinner. Eva rummaged in the compact, cabin wardrobe, pale blue floral or purple silk? ‘Decisions, decisions,’ she muttered, choosing the purple silk which needed to be pressed. The blue and white floral she knew would look better with a tan.

‘Hello. Finally someone else of my age on this ship.’ A voluptuous blonde dumped an armful of black matt satin, delicately laced with silver on the ironing board beside Eva. ‘Mother is driving me insane.’

The somewhat plummy accent, a total contrast to her own cockney twang and Eva immediately liked its owner. ‘First or second sitting?’ she asked.

‘Second,’ replied the blonde.

‘Captain’s Cocktail Party?’ asked Eva.

‘An opportunity to assess the onboard talent,’ said the blonde, beginning to press her evening dress.

‘What?’ said Eva.

‘I crave male company. Mother paid my fare, but that does not buy my time. She drags me along for company, every year, until she finds a friend, then I get dumped like a bad habit.’

‘What about the disco?’ asked Eva, fighting the urge to laugh.

‘What about it? Had a quick squizz last night. They were all old.’

‘Fancy trying again later?’ asked Eva.

‘Fab, about nine? My name’s Julia.’

‘Pleased to meet you. I’m Eva. No officers for me, I’m spoken for.’ Before Julia could ask further questions, Eva grabbed her dress and was gone.

The cocktail party was depressing, Eva drank warm white wine, whilst listening to her father discuss one class cruise ships. She watched her mum fight the craving for a cigarette and ignored her sister’s whinging. Being asked to pose for the obligatory photograph worsened her ordeal.

The dinner menu was not to her liking, she would not eat veal or swordfish and the effects of lukewarm riesling on an empty stomach refused to be negated by paté or créme caramel, as she made do with a starter and dessert. Her one consolation, the dress looked superb. The henna tones in her hair shone. Her slightly tanned face required the lightest of cosmetics. Engagement ring and earrings her only jewellery. She felt glorious. Her parents and sister opted for the cinema and Eva headed for the disco. She pushed the swing doors, stood for a moment and scanned the room, Julia

was nowhere to be seen. Oh well, she thought, too good to last and finding an empty table she ordered a white wine-spritzer.

The trio played *Misty* and as the song ended Julia arrived. 'Sorry, I couldn't get away from Mother.'

'Didn't shove her over the side, did you?' asked Eva.

'Not quite. She wanted to come, but I persuaded her the cinema was a better option,' replied Julia.

'My family's there too,' said Eva.

'Do you like Trident?' asked Julia.

'What's Trident?' asked Eva, thinking Greek Gods and a fork like weapon.

'That lot, entertaining us,' said Julia.

'They're okay I s'pose,' replied Eva 'Heard them last night. Think they probably appeal more to the oldies.'

The two young women danced and chatted. When the band finished a disc jockey took over. Trident's guitarist came over and asked Julia to dance. Eva went to the ladies, when she returned, Julia was still on the dance floor and Trident's drummer sat at the table 'Sorry, this table's taken,' she said.

'May we join you,' asked the drummer.

'Go ahead, free country,' said Eva.

'My name's John. John Clarke.' He extended his hand, which Eva ignored.

'Course it is,' she replied, making no attempt to hide the sarcasm and when he asked her to dance, Eva refused.

'I play the drums. Trident.'

'Course you do,' Eva's unfriendly reply.

'My friends call me JC,' he tried again.

'Course they do.'

'What are you doing tomorrow?' asked JC.

'Wandering around Gib, hoping to avoid apes. You?' Eva asked, looking him straight in the eye.

'Continuing my quest to thaw the ice maiden,' he replied.

Eva cringed. 'Good luck,' she muttered.

Julia and her partner returned to the table. They made an interesting couple. He was somewhat shorter than Julia, bearded, his dark hair flecked with grey, a shy lop-sided smile and a brilliant voice. 'Hello, I'm John,' he said and sat in the vacant chair between Julia and Eva.

‘Course you are,’ replied Eva, and failed to control the laughter that bubbled up.

‘This could be interesting,’ Julia signalled to a waiter. ‘Drink, everyone?’

‘What’s interesting?’ asked Eva.

‘Spending our holiday with men both named John,’ said Julia, looking at Eva like she was an idiot.

‘Not me, sorry. I already have one at home. Gave me this at Christmas.’ Eva indicated her engagement ring.

‘Why’s he not with you?’ asked JC.

‘My father didn’t invite him,’ Eva replied. ‘He decides. I obey.’

‘And do you,’ asked John.

‘Occasionally,’ Eva’s vague reply.

Julia had planned her time in Gibraltar, with practised ease. A taxi had been hired for the day, she and her mother were seasoned sightseers. John had offered to act as guide for the trip and she described it as the perfect way to spend her day ashore.

‘All I intend to do, is avoid apes. Franco won’t let me into Spain, so no jaunt to Marbella.’ The brandy loosened Eva’s tongue a little more than she intended. ‘I think guy’s it’s time to say goodnight.’ When JC offered to walk her to A deck, Eva refused, telling him thank you but she was more than capable of finding her own way.

Gibraltar was better than expected. Julia and her mother had a fabulous day with John. Eva’s mother and sister found Marks and Spencer masquerading as St Michael, her father made it to the top of the rock and Eva, herself spent the day on the beach, adjacent to the airstrip, thankful she’d listened to her father who recommended earplugs. Once she’d become accustomed to the aircraft landing and taking off she quite enjoyed the spectacle. Canberra sailed at eight and by nine thirty Eva and Julia were in the disco. Trident played a late set in the Bonito Lounge. Julia insisted they sneak in to listen, as they did the very next song the group played was *Misty*.

‘Stay?’ asked Julia.

‘Why not,’ replied Eva.

‘Did you know JC’s half Maori, half German?’ asked Julia.

‘Interesting combination.’

‘Muso’s are weird,’ said Julia.

‘Drummers in particular,’ mused Eva.

As Trident finished, the girls headed down to the disco and as they entered, the Peacock Room, the very next record played was *Misty*.

‘What is it about that song?’ asked Eva. Julia merely smiled. ‘It’s a bit creepy, remember the film *Play Misty For Me* with Clint Eatswood? About a radio disc-jockey and a maniac fan who tries to kill him.’ Eva thought the song a strange request.

‘Listen to the lyrics,’ said Julia. ‘They’re romantic.’

They ordered drinks and waited for John and JC. ‘Do you think he’s good looking?’ asked Julia.

‘Who?’

‘JC, obviously,’ said Julia.

‘Can’t say I’ve looked,’ lied Eva.

‘Liar,’ retorted Julia.

‘He’s alright, but I ain’t looking for a bloke,’ claimed Eva.

‘It’s only a holiday romance,’ pointed out Julia.

‘A bit rough on Johnny,’ said Eva.

‘He’s not here.’

‘Are you determined to screw up my engagement?’ asked Eva.

‘Not at all. I’m just watching the slow burn,’ said Julia. ‘The way he looks at you, when he thinks you’re not looking. Those eyes, like molten chocolate. His eyelashes are longer than yours. His skin feels like velvet, silk velvet. He has muscles.’

‘How do you know what his skin feels like?’ snapped Eva, experiencing an unexpected razor-sharp stab of jealousy.

‘How about a wager? Tomorrow’s Race Night and they’re playing in the disco,’ said Julia. ‘I bet the first song they play when we walk in is *Misty*.’ Julia knew she was right. ‘If I win, we all go out to dinner in Naples. We don’t sail until after midnight.’

‘Deal,’ said Eva. There was no way JC fancied her.

Julia won the bet. Trident played *Misty* and Eva got a Johnny Mathis masterclass which included several of his hits.

Every night when Eva arrived where Trident were performing, *Misty* was played.

When they arrived in Naples, Eva was not wearing her engagement ring. Julia, Eva, JC and John spent every available moment together. The cabin John and JC shared, deep in the bowels of the ship, was occupied on alternate nights by each couple.

Eva didn’t see JC to say goodbye the overcast morning they disembarked at Southampton. She cried all the way back to London, much to Caro’s amusement.

Johnny was understanding when she returned his ring. Whether he was truthful confirming his doubts regarding marriage, Eva didn't know, but was thankful. She stayed in touch with Julia, who never mentioned JC, but confirmed she was still in touch with John.

Eva bought a Johnny Mathis album, but it remained unplayed, she could never muster enough courage to place it on the turntable. Summer passed and Autumn heralded the end of the cruise season. Was JC still aboard Eva wondered. He'd probably romanced a different girl on every cruise. She worked hard, but didn't play hard anymore. Her parents assumed it was a reaction to the broken engagement.

Mid December, Julia phoned and invited Eva to the annual Christmas Eve party held at her mother's home. Julia would cater the event and co-host with her mother. Eva's offer to come a day early and help in the kitchen was gratefully accepted.

At mid-day the guests began arriving. Eva was kept busy in the kitchen. She didn't mind, never really comfortable in a room full of people she didn't know. She adored Julia's choice of music Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Nat Cole. Eva sang along with them all.

'Thought you might need a refill.' Julia breezed into the kitchen and plonked down a large Remy Martin. 'Enjoy,' she said.

As Julia and the last of the canapés disappeared through the kitchen door, Eva washed her hands and removed the painfully, frilly apron. She drained the last of the brandy and headed for the fray. To be welcomed by *Misty* and the most gorgeous pair of molten chocolate eyes she never expected to see again.

