

## Unexpected Love

by Natascha Pearson

Jacob sat on Grandma's balcony with a guitar. Anxiety overcame him as his heart pounded in his chest. Responsibility called for him.

"Well, J, life is full of choices. It's never too late to change your course. Your father isn't always right you know," Grandma said.

"Father is right, I need to be a man. Someone has to pay for your funeral," a smirk arose from his straight face. Slouched, he played a melodic Spanish tune.

"At your age, I fell in love. The Ohi trees would shed their flowers when I went to visit your Grandfather. I smelled of fresh perfume from the pedals stuck in between my toes. Those were the days. What about you Jacob? Why don't you give me some grandchildren before this funeral you speak of?"

Jacob felt torn between his duty and his dreams. He longed to feel content instead of unnerved. The soft tune from the guitar and the twinkle in Grandma's eyes gave him hope.

"I'll see you later," said Jacob, uneasy. He put the guitar down, cleared the steps on the porch, and ran in the direction of the breeze. When he reached the shore, he took off his jacket and fell asleep on the soft sand. Lost in a dream of a woman's laughter and the melody of the guitar, he didn't hear the sound of footsteps.

"The ocean's almost in, you're about to get wet," said a voice.

"Hello?" Jacob sat up.

"Hi, I'm Mika. Didn't mean to startle you. Do you know where the closest deli is?"

Mika's clothes hung off her, baggy and worn. A large jacket covered her to her knees.

"Next to the lighthouse, you can't miss it," he replied. "I'm Jacob"

“I anchored offshore. I’m on my way to the lighthouse, but this storm makes it hard to see very far. You seem cold without a jacket.”

Jacob looked up at the sky, covered in thick rain clouds. “I better get out of here.”

“Do you want to come with me? I’m not used to company. I’ve been at sea for two months. I’ll buy you a sandwich,” she giggled.

“I have obligations.”

“You must have time for lunch,” Mika’s eyes were green light the shallow ocean, full of excitement.

Jacob wanted to feel that happiness, “I can’t, sorry.”

“Suit yourself,” Mika said as she got closer. She handed him a flower he had never seen on the island before.

“Thank you,” Jacob mumbled, lost in thought, as she walked away.

Jacob went to the recruitment office, about three miles from the lighthouse. The flower smashed in his pocket. He went through the actions; First the test, the interview, he called the General, Sir.

“Jacob, you ready?” said the General.

“Ready for what, Sir?” Jacob replied.

“We can take you to base right now.”

“That’s it, Sir?”

“Your tests turned out good.”

“And the grandkids?”

“Excuse me? The Air Force encourages family life,” the General went on about the amenities of life on base. Jacob could smell the flower from his fingertips as he placed his hand under his chin. He couldn’t concentrate on the General’s words, instead, he felt the need to flee.

“I have to go,” he said.

“You just began,” said the General, but Jacob was already walking out the door.

When he hit the shore, Jacob searched for Mika’s boat, down docks, and along the beach. The scent of the flower-filled a place in his heart with dreams, like memories. His father’s voice drilled in his head, *every man should enlist*. Jets flew overhead but no enemies followed. His own anxiety brought him to his knees. He began to cry.

“The ocean always helps me when I’m sad,” the voice was familiar, it echoed in his heart since the moment he’d heard it earlier that day.

Jacob wiped his tears and got up. He walked straight to Mika who stood with baggy clothes and knotted hair. The smell of the sea and the soft scent of flowers got stronger with each step.

“I’d love to get a sandwich,” Jacob said. To Mika’s surprise, he grabbed a handful of her oversized jacket with one arm and looked into her emerald eyes. Space closed between her lips and his. He took a chance.

Mika’s palm flew toward the side of his face. Her words stumbled as she looked shocked, “I’m sorry, I didn’t expect that.” Jacob took a step back and Mika giggled. “Let’s start with a sandwich.”