FLASH NONFICTION

# The Bracelet Seller

by Viviana De Cecco



"Worth a Thought" by Clara Poetas

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The first time I saw him, he was sitting in the shade of an oleander tree, on a stone bench a stone's throw from one of the kiosks on the waterfront. He was silent, alone, staring at an indeterminate point on the horizon, where the sea looked like a crystal table and the boats swayed under the pull of the mistral. Dark skin, black hair slightly graying at the temples, a long black tunic and a rucksack at his feet.

Here in Sardinia, we are used to seeing migrants trudging back and forth across miles of beaches, dragging their heavy merchandise behind them. Lonely figures, wandering under the scorching sun among the bathers in search of hope.

He, too, was a peddler. I don't know why I stopped to look at him that morning. Maybe it was because there was a poignant resignation in his expression.

Nor do I know why he turned to look at me. Perhaps he sensed my gaze. Our eyes met for a moment. They say that sometimes words are not needed to understand each other, and I think that in that moment whatever I could have said would not have been enough.

He stood up, picked up his backpack and slowly approached me. I was sitting on a nearby bench, waiting for my friend Alice.

"I'm not here to sell you anything. I just want to talk," he said in broken Italian as he stopped a meter away from me.

Thus began what I could call an encounter between two distant worlds, between people of different cultures and languages, between two souls who could perhaps say much more to each other with just an exchange of glances.

He told me that he was from Bangladesh, that he had arrived in Germany after a 40-day journey on foot, following the Balkan route. He had moved to Sardinia because he could not speak German, a language too difficult for him to learn.

"I have two children and a wife. I haven't eaten today, so hopefully Allah will provide," he continued, pulling some bracelets out of his backpack.

"Do you like them?" he asked. "I made them."

Enameled metal bracelets appeared in his hands. Little fishes, little stars, little hearts hung from thin wires.

"Tomorrow I'll buy one. I don't have any money on me today," I replied.

He nodded. I could see that he did not believe me. Maybe he had been deceived too many times by false promises. He seemed a bit disappointed, greeting me with a slight bow before he began his tour of the beach.



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I returned the next day.

He was sitting on the same bench, like a shadow in the shadows.

Once again he seemed to feel my gaze. He raised his face and smiled at me. A half-toothless but happy smile. Then he raised his clasped hands to the sky and said a prayer of thanksgiving to Allah. I bought a silver bracelet with red flowers on it.

I wore it all summer.

Whenever we saw each other, I raised my arm to greet him and show him the bracelet on my wrist shining in the sunlight. But it would never shine as brightly as his smile of happiness.

Now that the summer season is over, I have not heard from him. Maybe he went back to Bangladesh. We couldn't even say goodbye to each other. I don't even know his name.

Maybe we will meet again one day. Who knows. What I do know is that I will never forget his joyful smile because sometimes even a chance encounter can bring a brief moment of happiness.



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