



Crystal-Clear Mirage

Melissa Huff

Majestically anchored in the calm, crystal-clear Caribbean Sea lays a white-sanded, palm-covered, post-card-perfect paradise. As we embarked upon this secluded paradise in the early morning sun, my husband and I, engulfed by warm ocean winds, misted by salty sea spray. Overwhelmed by the island's beauty, we stood awestruck on our balcony. It was perfect.

Although the memory of this moment seems timeless, we savored it briefly. Instead, we quickly gathered our island necessities—sunglasses, snorkels, and towels—then hurried to the dock to begin exploring our newly found land.

Crusoe and I spent the morning lounging in the baking-hot sun, splashing in the sparkling turquoise water, and lounging in the baking-hot sun some more. Early afternoon buffets, situated on the water's edge, began filling the air with mouth-watering aromas. With warm sand between our toes and cold margaritas between our fingers, we ventured from our towels to see what was on the menu. We were greeted by a vast array of food: pork, chicken, turkey, burgers, hot dogs, potato chips, potato salad, pasta salad—just to mention a few. Overtaken by hunger, we allowed our pallets to pile our plates high, and then found a quiet, shaded picnic table.

As we sat at the water's edge, enjoying our lunch and listening to the waves, I could not have imagined a more perfect moment in a more perfect place.

"Can we stay here?" I asked my husband.

"Sure," he replied.

Then I saw him.

A frail teenage Haitian boy—his clothes barley clinging to his skeleton—had just swiped a half eaten turkey leg from a trash can, and now stood, almost camouflaged behind a palm tree, eating it in a very nervous and hurried manner. Within seconds, he dropped it and ran back to his post at the beverage table before he could be missed.

We later learned, through speaking to some of the locals, that the food was only for the island's guests. "Dis is good work, yes," one of the elderly

native women told us. To have a job on this side of the island was a good, respectable, well-paid (almost one American dollar a day) privilege not to be taken lightly. Eating the food could not only result in unemployment, but severe punishment as well.

Standing on my balcony that evening, under a cloudless sky, I could see the dark shadow that hung above my perfect paradise. Its outer beauty was no longer enough to make me want to stay. All I could see was that boy. All I can see now is *that boy*.