

Path of Unexpected Bliss

My eyes widened in anticipation as the warm, balmy air kissed the side of my cheek. A bright swirl of greens, blues, and golden hues danced in the distance of my car window view. Pirate's Cove, a beach spot located along the beautiful central coast of California, was the destination ahead. The goal was to see the glimmer of my first beachside sunset in San Luis Obispo, a scenic college town found in the heart of California—or so I devised. As I proceeded through the unfamiliar route that the GPS announced, residential streets dashed through my peripheral range of vision. This momentary blur steadied itself in my eyes, as my good friend, Rhys, and I came to a slow stop. A dead end—that's what it seemed to be. It was a mere five-spot parking lot overlooking the cerulean blue waves. We exchanged confused glances, realizing that this was not the spot either of us had intended to reach. My frustration with having been routed to a faulty address peaked as I peered over the edge of my car window, only to see a dense blanket of fog begin to smother the dimming sapphire sky and mahogany mountain crests. Just as the sky had faded to a dull ultramarine, my plan of catching the sunset had faded to pure unrequited fantasy. Being a person who craves organization and structure, unplanned failure stung intensely for me, just like a fresh wound. It wasn't until I noticed a concealed pathway that serpentine around the clouded hills of San Luis Obispo that I realized I had the chance to transform this mishap to an escapade. A glistening opportunity for spontaneity is what it was. Spontaneity went against nearly every inch of my character, but I lusted for fulfillment.

Venturing out of my vehicle, Rhys and I made our way to the hidden path that called out to us, begging to be explored, known as the Avila Ridge Trail. The faint sound of gravel crunched beneath his toes. Our noses eagerly met the scent of salt and sea as we began to scale the winding path that led to the unknown. Gentle yet noticeable, the crisp breeze swept softly through the strands of Rhys's dirty blonde hair. A genuine feeling of tranquility roused within me as the sound of waves crashing violently echoed through my ears. With each footstep I engraved on the trail, my anticipation grew. The initial eerie solitude of the area was shattered within seconds though, to my surprise. A group of rowdy surfers strode down the path, chattering amongst themselves. As Rhys and I approached them, one stopped to greet us, exclaiming, "If you think the view from down here is beautiful, just you wait." I couldn't help but chuckle at this remark, because I had thought that the current view was already something out of a dream.

My eyes were consumed instantaneously with a particularly grandiose sight. A series of lavish mansion homes paralleled the continuation of the trail. Shades of blues, greens, pinks, and tans gleamed through the fog. Each and every home was crafted with the utmost attention to architectural detail, making each house more impeccable than the last. An idea rang through my mind, which was coincidentally voiced out loud by Rhys, as he said, "Living in one of these

would be like living in paradise.” I agreed, fantasizing about the bliss of seeing daily sunrises and sunsets from one home’s luxurious glass-paneled balcony.



Diverged from an intimidatingly uphill portion of the trail, Rhys and I decided to take a brief pause to scan and absorb the magnificence of our hazy surroundings. The fog had become a thick layer of pale grey, hungrily engulfing the edges of the mountains in the distance. I fixated my attention on the scarce bits that were left in view. My eyes leapt to the abstract silhouette of the hills, paired with the silver glimmer of city lights twinkling in the distance. A subtle crescent moon playfully peered out from behind the cover of gloom, bidding farewell to the sun for another day. My skin was met with the invigorating sting of the brisk coastal air. The temperature had become evidently cooler. The sky lost its color gradually and then all at once. The horizon merged into one with the ocean, fading to a muddled blue-grey, with a faint swatch of lilac. The dampness of the night sent shivers down my body, putting my thoughts of serenity to rest.



The night raced to put our adventure to an end, but I fought back. My heart scampered with determination as Rhys and I began the tiresome trek up the final part of the trail. Step by step, I steadily trudged upwards. Rhys panted softly as he quipped, “I’m definitely counting this as my workout today.” I laughed as I simultaneously agreed with his remark. With each staggered breath I took, the taste of damp, ocean air seasoned my tastebuds. I was momentarily distracted by the tiresome odyssey of a walk I was putting myself through, as the soft whistle of the breeze drifted through my ears. Fragments of rock cascaded down from beneath my feet, softly pattering down the hill. After what seemed like an eternity, Rhys and I reached the peak of the hill. Panting from the strain of the walk, we were pleasantly greeted by the sight of an empty bench. We gazed into the marvel of a view that was painted in front of us. It was as if each individual piece of the vista was crafted by a divine entity. Emerald green vegetation delicately topped the hillside and swayed with the vibration of the night. Sailboats alternated between floating gracefully on the surface of the deep-blue water, to bobbing rhythmically with the ripple of the roaring waves. The soft sound of crickets merrily chirping serenaded the stillness of the night.



In that moment, in that oasis of serenity at the top of the hill, I felt eternally grateful to have surged at a chance immersed in unpredictability. When I remove myself from my previously established set of beliefs, I can appreciate the art of being spontaneous in moments that prompt flexibility. Fluidity and openness are crucial following a mistake, if I want to progress towards eventual fulfillment; my mistakes are not hindrances, but rather points for personal redirection. There is a clear, certain beauty in the unpredictability and uncertainty of life.

The stigma around me needing to have everything go according to plan is merely a fantasy. The concept of personal perfectionism remarkably detracts from the fun and charisma of living in the present moment and leaping for chances where the result is uncertain. Any blunder I

encounter can very simply be a second chance for success. Thus, from what initially appeared as my failed attempt for an adventure turned to a medley of unpredicted fun, as I discovered what was actually the Avila Ridge Trail.

Following the journey back down the steep hill, past the luxurious mansions, after the breathtaking view of the city, I found myself thinking, *Why was I even upset that the GPS accidentally brought me here in the first place?*