

AGRIOMELISSA

„*Agriomélissa*“ – „wild bee“ – the very name of the area demands respect. This secluded rocky dome is not easily accessible. I can only reach it from the sea. No way to just walk there. Years ago I discovered it by chance, and it has been my absolutely favourite spot since. I love its rugged beauty, and there is no holiday without a visit there. This means a day trip.

Packed with all my stuff I cross the mountain in the morning, using the steep goats` path behind my sleeping place. After a while I reach the long, flat peninsula on the other side way down south. Here I set up my base camp. Once I was here with friends, and especially for them I had cooled a few bottles of beer in the sea. Since then this location is called „Tuborg place“ between us. I spread my towel, gulp down some cool water and place the big bottle in a shady gap. The smaller one will be left outside in the heat with a tea bag, some sugar and a cardamom pod in it. I`ll be all chilled through when I come back, so hot tea will be my pleasure and save my life!

I fumble into my wetsuit and fix the underwater camera at the belt. You never know what swims your way! Take another sip of water. Mask, snorkel and flippers fixed, and off I go. I use the crawl for the first part across the bay, far above the slow waving of the dark sea weed. Then I pass the long cliff with its base far far beneath. The clear blue water seems almost black there. My hand automatically checks the camera at the belt. In these deep waters it could disappear never to be seen again. After that spooky part the sea bottom and my adrenalin level flatten out again.

Here the seabed is partly covered with rugged stones providing shelter for all kinds of marine life. It seems to be a play area for black damselfish, red grey parrotfish and ornate wrasses in all colours of the rainbow. A shoal of glittering salemas passes by, golden eyes on stripes of grey and silver. A four-and-a-half-legged starfish hides underneath a stone. Lucky him, just sacrificed half an arm and thus obviously survived a predator`s attack. I go down for a glittering shell and see a stone move nearby. Looking closer, I spot two eyes curiously peeping out of a hole that`s barricaded with rough gravel. A sweet little octopus!

Later on *Mítsos* passes with his fully laden sea bus „*Anemós*“. That`s the Greek word for wind. He`s on one of his daily trips to „*Karvounólakos*“, a small beach with wonderfully smooth pebbles far in the south west. A long toot of the foghorn, a friendly waving of arms. This tells me we`re approaching midday.

After a while enormous dark rectangular shades emerge slowly from the diffuse blue. I`ve arrived. Huge square stone blocks provide a comfortable

exit. I see the impressive staircase for giants to their deeply fissured place of worship. Before I step out I need to visit the spacious grotto nearby. It stretches deeply into the mountain, and my moves slow down to accustom my eyes to the dim light.

A multicoloured world opens up within. Sponges in bright yellow, orange, red and brown. Plants in white, beige, dark green and purple. I lie on the water motionless now, relaxed, drinking beauty with my eyes. Gaudy groundfish in red and black, averse to light. A shy crab disappears swiftly into a hole. Hermit crabs feed on algae, protected by their coloured shells. Two common starfish in red and orange, one seven-armed spiny star in olive green. In the darkest far end small polyps of cup coral in their striking sulphur yellow. Right beside them the head of a curious moray eel, very observant. Long, white tipped orange tentacles of a delicate tube worm in soft fanning movements. One with the flow, an elegant dance. Small treasures.

I'm beginning to freeze, and carefully pull myself back out to the steps. All in a shiver I peel off my suit and climb up to the small, horizontal plateau, white and soft like brushed marble. My resting place, like a sacrificial altar. All around it the area spreads into the water like a furrowed hand, cautiously embracing the tiny lagoon with the grotto. Above me the rock develops into an enormously high overhang. There's the wide open sea in front of me, and from the other sides I'm snugly protected by land.

I lie face down on the hot stone. My goose-pimples soften and I doze away. I sense this place in the moonlight. Wise women circling round a ritual fire...

Very soon the blazing heat of the sun takes me back to reality. I place my steps carefully on the sharp edged rocks and find a reasonably smooth spot to sit down in the shadow. There's the tiny brackish water pool. It's only fed very rarely with fresh water by extremely rough seas. Now it's filled with a green brown sluggish liquid. Around its rim white rings of salt, like annual rings of a tree. Maybe with them I could trace back the days to the last big storm.

There's neither water nor soil here for any plants. Far above the overhanging rock I spot some bright green on the vertical cliff. Up there few terns ride the air, loudly shrieking. Small brown pellets show of occasional goats' visits. Amazing how they manage to come here. They are the real climbers. Some busy ants, a nimble lizard on the hunt for food. Insects looking like hornets fly in and out gaps and holes. These are probably the wild bees after which the place had been named.

I discover cubes of stone in many shades of white and grey, daintily veined with pale blue and russet. Smooth as silk. Looking at the massive rock behind me in an unfocused way I suddenly glimpse a gigantic head with broad jaws and wide eyes. I feel as if the guardian of the place had revealed itself for a second. The sight touches something deep within myself. In a turmoil of feelings I lie down again and close my eyes, irritated.

Sounds take me away on a journey. Today the sea plays with the rock. Like a tender lover, wooing, gurgling and licking, flapping and smacking. There are other days when it's completely different, showing all its fierce power, wild and rough. It then thunders impetuously into the grotto, it boils and bubbles in the lagoon. It slams against the cliff sending heavy sprays high up into the air. The waves whack and roar furiously competing with ghost riders in the storm. They gallop over the ridge, whisking torrents along on the stones. Without mercy they tear everything off that's not nailed or screwed down. On those days it would be much too risky for me to come here.

But today, today the waters are tame. They lull me to sleep. Waves swell slowly. When the sea heaves itself lazily into the little caves, the escaping air wheezes and sings. It rumbles and whispers. The atmosphere is filled with wailing and moaning, with humming and groaning. Some sounds seem intensified by a faint echo. These are calls from another world, a tempting invitation. Maybe the ideas of another, less concrete way of being were born on a place like this. Maybe for the old and wise the entrance into the *Hades* lay hidden on places like these.

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(With a little help from my friend Lynne Neilly)