A Naked Man’s Song

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“Never again,” he declared to the empty rooms. “Finally, I am free.” Stripping off his one thousand, eight hundred, ninety-seven dollar suit, three hundred, twenty-seven dollar collared shirt, and hundred and seventy dollar silk tie, he ran. Up the stairs and back down. From the front door to the back. From the back door up the stairs once more. Only then, as he bent over the mahogany, hand-carved banister, heaving for the breath that comes so easily to a young boy, did he stop to question this catastrophic shift in lifestyle. Last week, he had been the fourth richest man in the Free World. This week, he wasn’t even in the top million. His business was no longer his. Nor were his stocks, bonds, and savings. And, soon enough, he would add this very house to the list of things he no longer possessed.

He hadn’t give everything away. Just most of it. All the luxury cars went to Oxfam, a private jet to the Girl Scouts, a house in the Hamptons to the Sierra Club, the balance of his bank account to the Red Cross...all as anonymous gifts to be used however the organizations saw fit. And WhaleSong, the foundation he’d poured his entire soul into over the past year, was endowed with a private trust, ensuring the group’s continued research and conservation efforts for at least another 200 years (although most scientists predicted all but the most resilient species of whales would be extinct in a mere 20). All that he had kept was more than enough...just one, old boat.

Docked out back at his own private marina, rocking gently and tugging at its moors, was the first boat he ever bought. It had been meant as a gift, for his only Love. And while he had loved her, she had loved the ocean, loved the freedom that came with the wind and the waves. Perhaps that explained why she had rejected his proposal, all those years ago. “I am the sea,” she whispered in his ear, as she gently pulled him up from one knee. “And the sea cannot promise itself to just one shore.” That night they lay together, in love, but before the sun even had a chance to warm the cool dawn, as he dreamed of her sweet face and soft touch, the tide slipped out. And with it, her. But the sailboat he had given her just last Christmas was still there.
Bobbing up and down, in unbridled anticipation, for its next journey upon the water.

That had been years ago, and only now could he appreciate the hope that had refused to let him sell the little sailboat, even after he accepted she would never return. Its floating red hull contrasted with the blue-green of the water. Its sails were white...whiter now than the day they'd first hugged the wind, bleached to purity by an unyielding sun. Leaving the house, not bothering to close the door behind him, he walked across manicured lawns towards what would always be her sailboat. Passing trimmed hedges and pruned rose bushes, the sun drew long shadows ahead of him. His very own shadow-man called his name, urged him onward, gave him the confidence that came only with having someone to follow, someone to go on ahead and lead the way, on this last journey of a too-comfortable life.

She was the one who had taught him to sail and he had never forgotten. Climbing aboard, the latent knowledge resurfaced, allowing him to prepare for departure with relative ease. "Goodbye forever," he yelled to the land, "my soul is sinking!" And with that, he untied the ropes that held not only the boat to the dock but his spirit to society. The naked man on the sailboat took nothing with him and left nothing behind as he headed west. West, as all men must travel, to search for truth.

Morning turned to afternoon and afternoon to evening while he sailed on. Evening yielded unwillingly to night, as the sun's last splash of red was quietly forced from the sky. The man cried, then, for the dusk, and for the day the sun would set and never again rise. The man mourned the inevitability of the darkness as he finally lay back and let the tide take him where it chose.

How long he drifted, he did not know. How far he was from home, he did not care. And then slowly, with the patience of eternity, stars appeared to fill the void. One, two, four, eight...almost without his noticing, the stars overtook the sky. Calmly, steadily, he stood up.

Staring out across the opaque ocean, hands reaching up as if to grasp at the pinpricks of light, he sang. No discernable words, just the ethereal melody of a lonely creature longing for the comfort and understanding of history. Low and sweet, his voice carried across the ocean, danced upon the waves, and finally came to rest in the heart of his beloved muse. Hungry for companionship, he sang on. Waiting for someone to reply...waiting for someone who felt as he did. His plea went unheeded, as despair loomed ever closer. But then came an answering song, weaving its way through the dark to remind him, to remind him that he is not alone. That he feels and cries and mourns in the solitary company of the ages. Just one of the lost and
the dead and the hopeless who have no other recourse but to wail in rage and anguish at the silent Heavens. “It is not only me. It is everything,” he thought. And then, a man afraid of the water, he leapt from his floating civilization, piercing the night with one final scream of defiance. The ocean, shattering into a million shards of glass, welcomed the intrusion.

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