Serpentine Lullaby



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He looked up at the sea gulls snatching fish from the sea and wondered, *Do they ever do this just for fun or only when they're hungry?*



A monstrous bolt of lightning split the heavens in two. Eerily silent. In one god-fearing flash, their nocturnal universe was lit up 360 degrees.

As they stepped off the bus the staff greeted each guest's arrival with a garnished glass of *Welcome Punch* and a cheer.



Jake had already changed into his shorts, tank top and flip-flops at the one runway airport and the sun felt good against his skin. He'd been looking forward to his Caribbean diving vacation for months to get out of his head obsessing about the shape and tenor of his life and was eager to get into the water.

He sipped the fruity drink as the staff showed them around the rolling hills. A piece of mango stuck between his front teeth and he was unable to dislodge it with his tongue.

Stranded on this balmy island with 80 feet visibility, white sand beaches and me without dental floss?

He separated from the group to get away from the intense sun and dropped into the boutique to search for dental floss. The wooden hut was packed with island tchotchkes that only tourists buy—like *Times Square* shops that sell cheesy *Statue of Liberty* mugs and *checker cab* magnets.

But the tie-dyed t-shirts waving from the rafters caught Jake's eye. Cartoonish caricatures offered native advice to the tourists:

"We be jammin;

Positive vibrations;

Yes, mon we 'd got de Cuban cigar."

It was easy for Jake to imagine himself wearing any of those colorful t-shirts chilling on holiday with a *Red Stripe* under a coconut



tree. But back home in Central Park such a shirt many may find offensive.

They had no dental floss. But he selected a sun visor with a kiwi logo from the shelf and a miniature palm tree with hanging fruit. The salesgirl sauntered over to the register to ring up his purchases when Jake realized, *Why pay cash he may need later?* and walked back to the bank booth to retrieve his credit card.

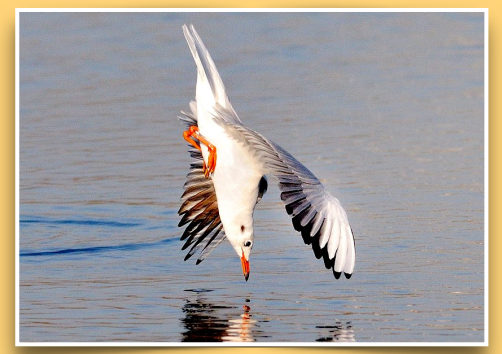
When he returned to the same spot ten minutes later, the boutique



was gone. He sat down the empty patch as the *Welcome Punch* spread into a rush of euphoria.

Normal island activities turned into heady epiphanies.

He thought about the island's nickname "*Nature Island*," from the tour. He looked up at the sea gulls snatching fish from the sea and wondered, *Do they ever do this just for fun or exercise—or only*



when they're hungry?

He zeroed in on one bird diving and tried to choreograph its flight by darting his eyes and juking his head. But conceded, he held no power whatsoever over its dart and catch maneuvers.

Off the beach in the grassy reeds a mother beckoned her puppies with a stern glance.



These two symbiotic relationships showcased Mother Nature at her Personal Best, balanced, and in control.

But then another version of Mother Nature intervened disrupting the balance. The resort's own hostess wearing a fetching bikini with Santa beanie pranced around the beach taking drink orders from the guests. Jake craned his neck as she passed but conceded he held no power whatsoever over her movement. So

he waved her over for a margarita, even though he didn't drink.

In the meantime, the elixir grew more intoxicating and opened doors of a less prurient kind. Especially, when he met Cheryl.

Cheryl singularly beamed waiting in line for a beach towel. Jake was borrowing and she was returning. Jake figured anyone who could give off good vibes while tediously returning a beach towel was a curiosity.

They talked briefly about the lovely resort, nutrition, and the pros and cons of zen and the pursuit of harmony. But she was in a hurry so they agreed to meet later in front of *Le Disco Coconuts*.

As they entered the crowded disco the scent of international fragrances hung in the congested air. It carried from the 30 ft. bar all the way back to the packed dance floor where global bodies jammed to the infectious samba beat.

Suddenly, the dance floor started spinning like Dorothy's house in *The Wizard of Oz*. Jake grabbed on to Cheryl's arm. But she too was off-balanced and together they tumbled backwards onto an overstuffed couch. They bumped



foreheads twice showing Cheryl's rows of symmetric teeth.

Jake looked into her eyes and cracked, "*Our children would have perfect molars.*"

Cheryl slapped his shoulder playfully but with moderate force. He blinked as he braced for the blow and her pretty face froze in the strobe lights.

Her ringlets undulated like sea coral. He reached out to pinch a few strands but Cheryl shrieked at his touch and her voice reverberated a hundred times in his ears flinging him onto the dance floor where his sandals skidded to a stop.

On the downbeat, he swept Cheryl up from the couch to the flashing dance floor. They whisked along gleefully traversing the black



and white squares as if they'd been partners for years. As the music blared he spun her from the waist mindfully guiding her release. But she continued to spin without loss of speed lifting them both straight up dancing in mid-air defying gravity.

Jake cupped his hands and hollered over the music, *"This is a blast."*

As her spin slowed he could see she was smiling. Her silhouette beamed without a light source like the *Burning Bush* where God

delivered Charlton Heston *The Ten*



Commandments.

They touched down lightly. Cheryl added a pirouette. They laughed as the lead changed hands



but held on so as not to drift apart. They skipped on as if in a frictionless plane.

"*You dance very well,"* Cheryl was visibly pleased.

"It's no ordinary person who can dance like this." Jake responded without taking his eyes off her.

"And an extraordinary one to find one," Cheryl topped his gallantry by one.

Their repartee flowed back and forth easily even as Jake felt pressured to maintain the lofty banter. He stepped back to admire her style and good looks and sensed she felt the same about him. Her shift dress betrayed her lithe figure. Her long arms added stature and height to her frame. Their eyes met often and at ease. Their rhythm was in synch. Their hands gripped well.



They danced the same size steps. Their hips sambaed without knowing how. They looked good together toned and tanned. If the maître d' had still been around, he'd surely have awarded them the best table.

As the evening grew late they sought fresh air and exited through the double doors into the night. On the landing of *Le Disco Coconuts* they stood shoulder to shoulder and looked out.

It was a glorious, star-filled night. The full moon shone brightly improbably lighting the beach for miles even as it sat oddly low in the equatorial sky. Towering palm fronds swayed deeply in the breeze casting flickering shadows on the sand. The wind tossed their hair and cooled their skin. A chorus of night-time critters sang back and forth in rhyme. During a pause Cheryl's luminescent face half-turned and spoke first.

"*Jake, have you ever seen a moon like this sitting so low in the sky?"* She smartly observed.

When she spoke his name Jake felt light-headed as if he'd been hiking in the thin air of Machu Picchu.



He grasped Cheryl's arm for balance.

"*I've never felt such joy holding an arm!"* He blurted.

Cheryl bolted down the stairs to the beach. Jake caught up beside her and they skipped down the creaky slats step by step. Then two at a time. They skimmed the hand rails as they picked up speed. Sand crunched under their feet. They tossed their sandals and finally, sensing the bottom, leaped blindly



on a whim into the night.

They landed on their hands and knees turned towards each other and roared with laughter that they had survived. They linked wrists to ankles and somersaulted towards the shore feeling the heat of each other's breath at the apex of each tumble. Cheryl's weaker arms gave way first and she collapsed on top of Jake. Their mouths collided once then again harder. Pursed lips centered and clung like magnets.

Jake tongued Cheryl's upper teeth from Wisdoms to Incisors with ballsy deliberation and confidence. Like a maestro plays an



arpeggio.

The maestro checked on her status; her eyes were glowing like Michael Jackson's in the *Thriller* video.

He helped her up. But unexpectedly, she pulled him back down. Their teeth clinked wildly as



she drew him to her gateway.

A natural easiness bonded their second kiss. It was care-free yet dialed-in; compounded by the beauty of the full moon, the crashing waves, and cool sandy toes.

He marveled at their breakneck intimacy. A fiery kiss felt at home. From zero to making out with a stranger. This was no horny folly like the bikini temptress taking drink orders on the beach.

Lesser emotions fell to the sand.

His rationale bounced between two opposing mindsets.

His first impulse was to enjoy the magic. His second impulse was a need to *understand* it—a fool's errand because it distracted his attention from Cheryl. He tried not to over think it.

He broke the kiss without knowing why. Cheryl looked at him for a sign.

"*Let's take a walk along the beach,"* Jake pointed vaguely with an arm that had sprung free. But his remark rang hollow. The maestro didn't want to take a walk along the beach, anyway. He wanted to stay put and find out what lay on the lower side of her *wall of teeth.*

"*I scaled your wall of truth!"* Jake gushed, then froze like a coiled sprinter.

"My wall of ***truth?****"* Cheryl echoed with an audible gasp, her voice rising on the last word.

Jake meant to say *wall of* <u>*teeth*</u> but spoke *wall of* <u>*truth*</u> instead.



In fact, "*wall of* <u>*truth*</u>*"* better described Jake's triumph when he scaled Cheryl's teeth. It was his moment of liberation from low self-doubt; his own Bastille Day in the Caribbean opening a path to joy and freedom and love.

"*Did you feel a closeness when we kissed?"* He was concerned his jumbled words had derailed the mood.

"*Yes I did feel a closeness, like we know each other."* Cheryl was candid. *"Best first kiss for the record books."*

Jake laughed but needed to know more. He pulled her near by her belt buckle mimicking Brad Pitt.

"*And could this closeness reach farther?* He gazed into her eyes. *"To our souls?"* He followed-up—not meaning to sound neurotic or demented.

But he couldn't wait for her to answer. Anyway, he'd forgotten the question. He knew what he wanted to do which was to kiss her again and cut the chatter. Cheryl seemed to agree and with more intensity than before.

Jake felt wide open alive. He exhaled slowly through his nose to conserve air and extend the oral gymnastics for as long as Cheryl. His elliptical workouts had finally paid off!

He vowed to lock this moment in his cerebral cortex forever—even coaching himself on tips to remember:

- *Rock on.*
- *This is the land of no time-outs; no referees; no middlemen.*
- *No do-overs; no rewinds; no second chances; no instant replays.*
- *No operators standing by.*
- <u>*This*</u> *is Nature at her Personal Best.*

He took her hand and they strolled along the shore towards the



colony of lights in the distance. The breeze and salty air blew in their faces.

The mortal travelers could not have prepared themselves for what happened next:

A monstrous bolt of lightning split the heavens in two. In one god-fearing flash their nocturnal universe was lit up 360º. The bolt stretched from straight up from their heads all the way to the heavens then arced down to the horizon. In eerie silence unlike anything Jake had ever seen.

During the flash, it was clear the lights were at least an hour away. They grew fearful for their safety unprotected beach and figured they'd better get off it—and fast!

They followed a reggae beat in the sand for about 50 feet through knee-high reeds. A welcoming path divided the reeds leading to a red



cabin that seemed familiar. Laughter leaked through the screens. *"Dancin' In The*



Moonlight," a 1974 hit played from inside.

The screen door swung open revealing buddies and girlfriends Jake hadn't seen in decades. They were perched all around comfortably waiting for him.

Cheryl entered first breaking the ice and dancing like she knew them. The gang of ten stood up and joined in.

Jake eyeballed each one of them from the entrance. None had aged and none knew each other through him. But the group shared two things in common:

- Being frozen-in-time.
- And himself.

The interior was intimately lit like an off-broadway stage. But the stage smoke clouded his vision.

He heard, *"It's been a while* as the screen door closed but he couldn't decipher the speaker.

An encouraging second voice laughed, *"You'll get over the jet lag. Suspend your disbelief."*

A third female voice cooed, "*Do you feel anything yet?"* mimicking the gruff voice Jake used that only she could know. He asked her brusquely, getting stoned, as if she was was one of the guys instead of his girlfriend. And they had a good laugh.

Jake considered how to reply to voices that weren't real and blinked slowly.

"*Yes, its been a while,*" was all he could think of.

When he reopened his eyes he was back on the beach watching the sea gulls snatching fish from the sea.

"*Do they ever do this just for fun or exercise—or only when they're hungry?"*

He singled out one bird to choreograph its flight darting his



eyes and juking his head. But conceded, he held no power whatsoever over its dart and catch manuevers.

The End