

Islands

by Brian Michael Barbeito

Off of the northeastern coastline there was a series of islands that won bread and butter through fishing. We walked off the ferry and through various docks while noticing vessels come in slowly boasting sides protected by worn plastic fenders on ropes affixed to metal railings.

It was wet all the time and if the sun ever did shine there through weeks and months it must have been somewhere far inland or up high. I thought that if that sun was even still in existence it only came round that way in brief interludes, possibly to grant some tall but unknown summit a secret kiss.

We settled in rooms by a long blank corridor of a hallway in a two story building. They were individual rectangular things, with only a bed and a small desk in each. In the night I would hear him come back, fumbling with key and self, with pockets and mind, with gloves and off-kilter soul, and with many other things besides in small instances. We had been sent there together and I felt a sort of responsibility for him though in actuality there was no such duty to be upheld. Maybe it was because he was a likeable sort despite his habits...

I came out from the wooden door and looked at him but he did not see me. Even after I coughed loudly he still did not look up. What an easy mark to roll I thought then, because he was always saturated in the drink.

What happened? Where were you?

Ah...I ran into some trouble with some guys.

How come you're all bloodied up? It is even on your shoes.

Can't totally remember, he said.

Stay there and I will bandage up the big wounds for now.

I went back to the other side of the door and got some supplies before returning to the hallway to tend to his wounds. The big gash

was in the head, and the blood was thin because of alcohol. I opened the metal case. While I searched for what I needed, one of the overhead hall lights went out. I couldn't help wondering if it was just a light that went out, or if more meaning should be ascribed to it, such as some kind of force challenging my 'try' at helping another soul. Shaking of the thought, I retrieved the ointment, gloves, gauze, scissors and tape that was needed and closed the metal case for the time being.

I asked, Why do you not fight back if you are actually a trained fighter as they say?

But he didn't answer and I didn't pursue it. Soon he was mended enough and I put him in bed and didn't even take off his shoes. This was the routine at least once a week, sometimes twice,- me making my rounds after he had lost his rounds. I would at least take his shoes off and put them on the side of the bottom of one of the bedposts. But it had begun to feel inane that, like a pleasantry carrying no actual value, and I was fed up. I turned off the light and left.

There was a cat that had gotten into the building some time before. It was just a couple days in fact, after we had arrived that it got in. And though it was real it might as well have been a spectre for all of its quick appearances and disappearances. There it was at the end of the hallway watching me intently, presenting like a quick and odd turn in a dream. I stared at it and we had a contest to see who would move first. After about a minute I lost because of exhaustion, lack of will, or a bit of both.

You win, cat.

Back on the other side of the door I descended to the bed where I let sleep gather me in wise arms so that I would be ready to begin in a few hours another grey day. In the one dream that was allowed, that Source or God or just nature and biology imparted, I watched the sun come quietly to kiss briefly the top of a summit before retreating, like a coy girl, to a secret room in the clouds.

