

# The Blue Whale

*by* Christamar Varicella

The blue whale in the bathtub weighed one hundred tons and wore a grin like the Cheshire cat on steroids. Her smile stretched from wall to wall. Her blowhole scraped the ceiling. Sam never learned how she crammed her tail down into the drainpipe, but she sure looked good wearing porcelain like a turtleneck sweater. She was a happy-go-lucky gargantuan beauty and for a while she was Sam's best friend. Sam never questioned her existence, and she never questioned his. They drank tequila and smoked pot and laughed all night until the blue whale disappeared down the drain in a swell, and Sam crawled back to his bedroom to pass out on the floor.

He probably would have slept in his bed had it not been overtaken by the homeless girl. Stupid homeless girl. She grudgingly tolerated his presence, but she tended to kick and scratch in her sleep, so Sam opted for the safety offered by the hard, thread carpet. He reexamined this decision the first time she used his face as a welcome mat. *Under* the bed proved a more secure location. With a wadded up shirt for a pillow and a jacket blanket, he could sleep as peacefully as a body in a casket until it was time to wake up and start drinking again.

The blue whale worried about the quantity and frequency of Sam's drinking, but when she urged him to talk about what was bothering him, he would always change the subject. Sometimes, his face glowed with nostalgia. Had he ever told her about the time his friend Travis shot a snake between the eyes with a bow-and-arrow from over thirty feet away? They had taken a trip to Travis's grandparents' lake house. It was late in the day in early spring, and the two boys were sitting on the bank rising up from the pier, sipping pilfered cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon. Travis had this old yellow banana bow—nothing but a toy really, but it fired real arrows. Sam watched as he drew back that nylon string and—twang—pinned that sucker to the dock. What a miracle shot that was! The blue whale could tell it was an important moment in

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Sam's development even if she wasn't exactly sure why. She noticed how his voice trailed off and his eyes glazed over as he described the snake wiggling at the end of the arrow, dead but for its nerves, and when he told how the departed reptile continued to swim—long after its heart had stopped—in a few inches of rainwater collected in the little red dinghy tied to the side of the pier. For a long time Sam stared into the bathtub like he was staring into that row boat. When the spell broke, Sam looked up and tried to gauge her reaction.

"Isn't that an amazing story?" he asked. "Travis was always doing stuff like that."

The blue whale just nodded and smiled.

Sam shared other personal anecdotes. He even confided in the whale after he began showing symptoms of gonorrhea. Stupid homeless girl. She should have worn a sign around her neck to warn people, "Please beware! I'm lost and desperate and diseased," but the truth was Sam probably would have taken her home with him anyway. The beer stain on her blouse hadn't bothered him and neither had her dusty tangled curls, nor the dark patches beneath her sunken eye sockets that seemed almost natural in the light of a neon beer sign. All it took was her coming up to him in that dark, smelly bar and saying, "You're cute," and he was ready to follow her home. Since she didn't have one, they went to his house instead.

Sam was unbalanced and a bit sweaty after he led her up to the roof. After a brief make-out session, he was shocked when his hand found no bra beneath her shirt. Concerned that they might fall off the roof and get hurt or worse, he led her downstairs to his bedroom where he was amazed that she offered no resistance to his further advances. A bit nauseated during their drunken tumble, he was sick later that night after he picked up the used condom off the floor and saw only a hole with a rubber ring around it. After that came a general feeling of numbness that lasted into the next morning, and was followed by a rush of anxiety approaching full-blown panic the next afternoon when he realized the homeless girl had no intention of leaving. She pretty much took over the bedroom, and Sam took up residence on the floor.

After a few days, he finally came out and asked her how long she planned on staying. The question must have sounded rude to her ears because she kicked him in the stomach with a steel-toed-boot. Sam decided to give her more space. A few days after that, he experienced the first fiery sensation while urinating. He tried to build up the confidence necessary for another confrontation. He imagined the scenario: she would be sitting on the bed adding another layer of powder to her face while he wagged his finger and lectured her on the merits of personal responsibility. In his mind, she denied giving him a venereal disease. He imagined her saying, "You must have caught it from someone else," and then, he would be forced to tell her that he hadn't been with anyone else because he was a twenty-year-old virgin. He would have to try and explain his struggles with low self-esteem and intimacy issues, but he worried that he would never be able to muster the courage to confront her, and even if he did, he wasn't sure he wanted to elevate their relationship to such a personal level. Instead, when he found her awake on the bed all he said was, "It hurts when I pee."

The homeless girl said nothing, and Sam grew accustomed to sleeping under the bed.

The blue whale in the bathtub encouraged Sam to seek medical treatment. She was tired of hearing him scream as he stood above the toilet with one hand flattened against the wall while the other hand gripped his dripping appendage. For a week, he ignored her advice and hoped his problem would go away, but when that didn't work, he relented. Not knowing where else to go, he found his way to the emergency room.

"I think I have the clap," he whispered to the nurse after checking over his shoulder like a nervous shoplifter.

"What was that?" the nurse asked, not bothering to whisper.

"I think I have the clap," Sam repeated in a hushed tone as he rocked forward in his chair.

"You have a what?" She asked loud enough for nearly everyone in the emergency room to hear.

"I have the clap!" Sam blurted. Behind him, the waiting room erupted in laughter.

The nurse leaned back as if she was in danger of catching the clap herself. She scrawled something on her chart, which Sam read upside down. "Patient thinks he has the clap."

Eventually, he saw the on-call doctor, who gave Sam a shot, scolded him for taking time away from patients with more serious problems, and then sent him home with a bill for three thousand dollars, which Sam began paying off monthly in five-dollar installments. Two weeks later, he stumbled out of the bathroom in a particularly festive mood, found the homeless girl awake and receptive, had sex with her again, and once again contracted gonorrhea. The return trip to the emergency room doubled his monthly payment.

When he told the story to the blue whale in the bathtub, she laughed for six weeks. Every time she looked at him she laughed, and Sam would blush and laugh too because he knew how ridiculous it sounded. He continued to recognize the humor until the liquor kicked in and the joke stopped being funny. Then he got mad. The blue whale could tell he was mad because his face turned crimson and he got a crazed look in his eyes. But the madder he got, the more the blue whale laughed. Finally, Sam went berserk. He started punching her, working her midsection like a boxer training against a side of beef.

"Stop, that tickles," the blue whale said.

Unable to locate a harpoon, Sam snapped her with a rolled-up towel. She must have felt the sting because she stopped laughing, darted forward, and sucked him into her mouth like a spaghetti noodle. Sam remained internalized for three days, subsisting on leftover krill rescued from the stomach acid. Finally, a particularly wicked belch landed him back on the bathroom floor in a pool of bile and tequila. Sufficiently cowed, Sam guzzled water from the faucet and then crawled back to his room where he passed out under his bed for another three days, until the homeless girl

woke him up complaining about his smell. When Sam refused to take a bath, she left the house forever.

