

THE SACRIFICE

by
Jeannette Dean

Old Leo sat on his porch. He could hear the Atlantic's whisper, feel the sun edging away. He knew his boat tugged at her mooring. Couldn't work her any more but his son Jay, now a doctor, took his boy out when they came to visit.

"Grandpa," the little boy on the steps said impatiently, "you were telling me the story."

"What? Ah," he set his chair to rocking. His scarred fingers commenced the task they'd mastered when he was about that size, though there were no longer nets to mend. "Your dad'll tell you."

Jay sighed, joined his son on the steps. "One afternoon, long before you were born, I was watching the bar for Uncle. There was just one customer, a man from the mainland, and he'd been drinking beer most of the afternoon. It had been a hot one but the sun was just settling down when a woman walked in."

"And she was pretty and had long black hair and was wearing a blue flowered dress," the boy piped up precociously.

Jay ruffled his hair, "She walked right up to the bar. 'What would you do if I handed you a million pounds?' she asked, her dark eyes boring into the freckled, sunburned face of the tourist. He grunted, straightened his shoulders and made an effort to pull in his bulging gut."

The boy imitated a drunk, "I'd buy this little island and make you the queen, m'luv."

Leo laughed and Jay continued, "She sneered at him, slipped off

the old bamboo stool and moved like a snake as she walked across the bar to the door, her bare feet not making a sound. She stepped out on the veranda where Grandpa was working on his nets in the shade.”

The boy smiled and said, “He asked her, ‘What answer you expectin’?’ ‘The right one,’ she said.”

“And I just stood there watching them. Everything was golden, like now, and you could hear the chickens in their perpetual grumbling food search and the gulls screeching and the waves on the beach.” Jay stopped, turned to look at his father, “I miss those things.”

Leo nodded. “I had to think about my answer, it’s not the kind of thing ya have a ready answer for. She had sort of a mocking tone, but I figured that was just her way, that she really did want to know.”

He gave a couple of rocks, seemed to move back in time. “Told her I’d get some new nets. And a boat with a big ol’ Gardner diesel thumping inside and a cabin on top. Even in those days there was nothing close in, ya had to go out a ways to get a good catch. She wanted to know what I’d do with all the fish I’d catch. Told her there was a big market on the mainland, that I’d use the money to send my kids to those big schools on the mainland.”

“Then Dion showed up in his clean jeans, ready to cruise the village,” Jay smiled. “You should have seen his face, just stood staring at her. She asked, ‘And you, what would you do with a million?’

He frowned. ‘You’ve been all over the village with your foolish question. You’ve got no money to give away, you’re just winding folks up.’ She just gave a real seductive smile with those full lips.

'Now how can you be so sure?' she asked."

The boy piped up, "Dion demanded, 'Show me!'. And she said she'd charge for that so Dion said, 'Name your price'."

Jay stood, scoffed, "You're getting too old for this, you know the story. I'm going for a walk."

"Dad!"

Leo chuckled. "Just like always, too impatient."

Sighing, Jay sat down. "She said, 'What would you sacrifice for the people of your island?' Dion said he was related to most of them so he reckoned most anything. He was laughing but she just nodded, said he was to meet her on the beach at midnight. They shook on it and she wandered off toward the village. I closed up and Dion and I made the rounds. Everywhere we stopped that night everyone was talking about her and Dion's good luck. I watched him walk up to her on the beach, then I went on home."

"What happened then, Grandpa?" the little boy asked.

"I got up early the next morning and was getting everything ready to go take down to the boat. There, wrapped in my netting, was that blue flowered dress. And wrapped in the dress was lots of stacks of notes tied with string."

He smiled, remembering the moment clearly. "There was so much I had to get your dad to help me count. He was only a boy then, but he was good with figures."

But, where did she come from and where did she get all that money?"

Leo stared out to sea, though his opaque eyes saw only what his memory drew. "No one knew. Didn't come on the ferry from the mainland. Weren't any new boats around. She was just here one day, wasn't the next."

“What about Dion?” He loved this part.

Leo stretched and grinned, “Ain’t been seen or heard from since. So, ten years later when you were born on the very day he left, with the same color eyes and hair as him, we named you Dion. Figured he’d have liked that. And you’re worth more than all that money put together.”

They sat together, contented, watching the sun settle into the sea.

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