

Apparent Wind

Money bought him an extra six months confined to his bed under the supervision of caregivers. He was fed, bathed, and clothed by the various hands of young employees, the only company he had had for the past months. Every now and then he would buy himself a little extra to improve his living, and by recognizing the trifling problems a man of his age could possess, he found the satisfaction in being able to fix them. He now had a bed rail and an air purifier.

One caretaker in particular had been around more often than the others. He figured her to be a kind and compassionate young woman, and he often wondered why anyone like her would want to take on a job such as this. The way she talked to him as she would on a regular basis with anyone, it was void of baby talk and overly excessive care. She cleaned and helped him as she would a family member. Sometimes she would sneak him a piece of candy on his behalf.

“This could kill me, you know?” He would joke.

She would smile and respond with, “But you’re living.”

The doctors prohibited him from going anywhere. He spent most of his time in bed other than when the caretakers came around to get him up for a bath. He could still walk--he was sure of it--it was just a lot harder than it had ever been before. A wheelchair could only take him so many places.

In bed, he’d find his mind wandering to the old days--the days when he hadn’t yet accepted the idea of being truly alone. He had his friends and his work. He had a wife. He had things he never thought of losing. But the curtain closed on many acts so suddenly, that he wasn’t prepared to buy tickets to a new premiere. And he was tired.

The windowpane would cast rays of blue against the ceiling in the middle of the night, like looking through a large aquarium. He would wait until the moonbeams danced across the walls like a ship's navigation lights. He was sure that he'd never forget the north winds whistling against his face, the feel of the water globules spitting out from under the boat's front, and the foaming mouth of the sea as the bow sliced it apart like fine ribbon. He wanted to be there again. He yearned to smell the ocean he couldn't conjure up in his memories, and to at least feel the wind of the waves, the galloping white stags, heading shore-bound.

He begged with the doctors, tried to convince them of his viewpoint. But the sea was far away, and he knew none to take him if it had even been allowed.

"It's not safe for you in your condition to travel so far. You had best stay in bed. But I'll prescribe to you a refill of your pain meds," one of the doctors said.

It was final. He wouldn't be allowed the satisfaction. And as each day passed, he only seemed to grow sicker and sicker. He felt himself become weary of the same routines: the bathing, the clothing, the feeding. He would find himself staring out the window, summoning an ocean view from the depths of city buildings and street lamps.

He found himself continuously being awoken from his reverie by the unlocking of the door and the entrance of various caretakers, most of whom continued to infantilize him. There were no complex conversations, and nothing of his own interests. The talks usually steered towards the chores that had to be done on the caretaker's part.

"Mr. Harris, it's time for you to get bathed. Now if you would prop your elbows up carefully and slide one leg slowly to the edge of the bed before the other..."

He didn't mind, however. He had the same patience they did for him.

The caretaker lady arrived again in the morning after a few days had passed. She set her things down on the little coffee table and sat herself on the chair beside his bed.

“Hey, Mr. Harris. How’s your day?”

“Same old routine.” She was the only one he’d ever been honest with these days.

“I brought some things you might like.” She reached for her bag and rummaged through it, pulling out a copy of Moby Dick. “You know, being a sailor and all. I thought you’d might want some entertainment asides from the ‘same old routine’.”

He smiled and thanked her as she opened the book and began to read. He swayed with the melody of the pages, finding himself drifting along between the veil of reality and the waves of the sea. It drew tears from the bow of his lids, and his eyes became the constellations aligned with the North Star.

“Take me there.” He choked out, ripping himself from the dreams and the peaceful tune of her voice.

“The sea?” She inquired, looking up from the book.

“Please. Just one more time.”

He didn’t have to say more before she understood the depths of his words. Deep down, she understood it even back to the day she gave him a piece of candy. She would take him there, even if it killed him.

His wheelchair wasn’t mechanical, and he hadn’t planned on buying another. His arms did just fine, and if anything, his grip on the wheels might have produced a small cramp. It would be small, and in fact he considered it to be the least of his problems.

She helped him into her car, knowing full well that she could face the consequences of the drive to please a man's dying wish. But she would've wanted the same in his place.

It was a quiet drive. He had barely been out in a while, and the changes of scenery captivated his mind. The passing trees, buildings, and people twirled across his thoughts like old memories. He had looked out a window hundreds of times before, but only now did he seem to piece it all together.

A couple hours passed before they arrived at the beach. The young women had helped him out and allowed him to push himself as far as could be permitted in order to see the lively passion of the waves at war with the sand, and to smell the aroma surfacing from the frothy ripples of the sea.

He shakily pulled himself up by his arms, feeling every bone in his body squeak like rusty hinges. And as he took a gradual step towards the ocean, he could feel his shoe hit the wooden floorboards and the shouts of the sailors on deck over the crashing of the waves. He felt the motion of the ship in a summer dance; his face laid victim to the kisses of sunlight.

His legs gave out at last as he slowly knelt in the warm beads of sand and sat gazing out into the endless sea of memories.

A lone shopping cart rested in the sand in front of him, and he chuckled at its being quite out of place among the scenery.

A homeless man pushed it to the sea, the old man thought. He pushed it to the sea, in the sand, wheels and all, just to eat scraps and watch the ocean kiss the shore.

He was truly content. What people would glance at without a second thought, he embraced. The homeless man and him beheld dreams unaware to the common man. They were

dreams yet to be discovered by the majority. And as he thought on these, the water continued to play the old man's tunes as though he were their conductor. The ground beneath him seemed to sway about like a boat, until he himself floated away into the sea.