

# 12

---

When I arrived this evening, some nut strapped to a gurney was being hauled from his room. EMTs were called to take him to psychiatric care for threatening to kill himself. As the chaos faded I heard his room calling me. I wanted to see the vortex of the insanity. I wanted to see a bed covered in chewing gum wrappers, walls plastered with tinfoil. *Something! Anything!* I was compelled and pulled to that room. I grabbed the key to room 219 and went up in the elevator. The doors opened to another long fluorescent-lit hallway and I noticed a thin, bluish mist hanging over everything, making things seem eerie and off, the walls more rubber than plasterboard. The silence was terrifying. No televisions churning. No humping howls. There was only my thumping heart. It was just a few short steps to his door:

The key slid in and I turned the handle very gently, opened the door slowly, trying not to stir the air this guy was obviously suffocating in. I looked in the bathroom. The shower curtain wasn't moved, towels still in the pyramid-shaped holder bolted next to the mirror; paper-packaged piece of Brink Hotel soap still at a 45° angle on the side of the bathroom sink. It hadn't been touched. I looked around the room and didn't see a thing he had done. There was no change from his pockets, not a single scrap of paper; not a fucking thing anywhere. Even the television remote hadn't been moved. The air seemed colder than normal, but other than that the room was in perfect shape—ready to rent to the next suicidal maniac, pimp, prostitute, drug dealer, killer or adulterer:

Headed for the door, I noticed a depression of the bedspread at the foot of the bed—a single depression where he sat and then decided it was time to die.

# ***SPLASH ZONE***

“When Moomoo come?” asked a little girl leaning into her mom’s side as they sat in the designated “**SPLASH ZONE**” of the aquatic arena.

“Hold on darling,” her mom said caressing her daughter’s glowing, blond hair that seemed extra soft in the warm summer sun.

“**AND HERE HE COMES!!!**” boomed the announcer as the black and white form of a killer whale raced through the depths of the gigantic tank.

Mamu streaked through the water and burst into the air to a flurry of applause, screams, cheers and clicking cameras. The audience was in awe as the whale did a 180-degree spin and splashed down on her back. A shockwave of ripples washed over the low-lying Plexiglas shield encompassing the tank.

“EEEEEEEEEEEEEE!” shrieked the little girl as a few stray drops of water landed on her legs.

Mom squeezed her tight and smiled, realizing the adult admission price of \$23.50 plus the \$14.50 children’s rate, minus the AAA discount of \$3.50, could indeed buy happiness—at least for the visitors. Needless to say, Mamu wasn’t very happy, was downright depressed if you want to know the whole truth. A living-breathing-caring-feeling mammal just like man might as well have been a big goldfish in a small bowl. She was treated with all the respect of a slave. A corporation owned her, kept her captive, and profited from her tireless work. Three shows a day. Four shows on Saturdays and Sundays. Besides the fact she had no choice in the matter, the main reason she did the show was so she could eat, as many a depressed person tends to do.

But, even the eating situation was depressing. For every trick, Mamu earned one fish. One fucking fish. Not a whole school like she used to suck down in the ocean, but one fucking fish per stupid skin-smacking flip. Her once durable derma had developed many strange scabs of late. Luckily, the scabs were very dark and matched the black on her body so of course the head honchos said the show must go on. Every painful trick

chipped away at her a little bit, a little bit just like a little fish for every single trick.

Mamu swam up to the trainer, who was batted down in a thick, red polyurethane body suit. He dropped a large white fish into her mouth. It slid down her gullet like a single raindrop on the freshly waxed hood of a giant gas-guzzling '70s muscle car.

"Welcome to *The Ocean's Brink*, the theme park that brings the ocean to you!!! My name's Kev and as always,

**WELCOME TO THE MARVELOUS MAMU SHOW!!!"**

the trainer announced as he tooted his high-pitched whistle twice.

Mamu dropped under the surface and swam to one end of the tank. She rose vertically until most of her glistening body was out of the water, propelling herself backward with her gigantic and powerful tail. Giant waves left in her wake rushed to the side of the tank, splashing onto the cement stage and over the clear, plastic encasement. The sun blasted into her black eyes as her droopy dorsal fin slapped her in the back. Her fin used to be rigid and strong when she swam 100 miles in a single day. Now, most of the time, she floated like an empty-headed goldfish in a tiny tiny bowl.

"*You never told me you could do the moonwalk!!!*" cracked Kev, capping the joke with a septic chortle like he had just pulled that one right out of the air rather than from a two-page script. Mamu dropped back underwater and swam over to the slave driver in the red suit. She opened her mouth real wide as he slipped a white fish inside. "*Let's hear it for Mamu!!*" Kev cajoled as the audience broke into a fit of mad clapping.

Mamu sank under the water and drifted to the Plexiglas wall as Kev frantically blew his whistle. Mamu didn't feel like being an organ grinder monkey anymore. The sleek creature eyed the strange, shape-shifting mutations through the glass—just another big batch of Kev's with feeble bodies and simple language. With a powerful burst, she rose up on her tail and blasted the white fish from her mouth, knocking a large tub of popcorn out of a fat man's hands. He was as surprised as Kev. As everyone

started to hoot and holler and snap their stills, the fat man held up the fish like he had caught Barry Bonds' 73rd homer.

"*Mamu's always been very generous!*" quipped Kev, laughing nervously before blowing three shrill toots of the whistle. Mamu fell into Pavlov mode, swam to the trainer and popped her head out of the water. "Mamu, Christmas isn't for another six months. What were you doing?"

Regaining her senses, Mamu blasted Kev in the face with a bellyful of water. The crowd roared with laughter and snapped their shutters. The fat man gripped the tail of his fish and waved it like a rally towel at a college basketball game. Kev hacked out some water and stepped up to Mamu. She held open her mouth, expecting a fish.

"I don't think you need another fish. You seem to be full of it as it is *OL'BUDDY!*" Kev percolated.

He went along with the mischievous mammal's pranks because he saw the audience was loving it. For the first time in the year they had done the show, he felt things were fresh— spontaneous rather than scripted.

Mamu couldn't believe the audacity of the trainer calling him "*Ol'Buddy.*" Kev hadn't been there the first five years of her life when the Atlantic was her home. Kev hadn't been to the bottom of the ocean and back, swam to and from both polar ice caps. No sir. Kev had worked with her for a year, forced her to perform for food, acted like she was his special caring friend, and always called her Mamu—*that stupid stupid name.*

Mamu nodded her big fat head as Kev tooted his whistle once and hopped on her back. He had a tight straddle-hold on Mamu as the great animal took off. The whale circled the tank as Kev waved and most everybody in the audience obediently waved back. He moved his body close to the magnificent mammal's like he was accelerating down a straightaway on a rice-rocket. Mamu raced along the edge of the stage and shot below the surface. Kev and Mamu took a hairpin turn at the side of the tank with the greatest of ease, then blasted out of the water, catapulting Kev into a beautiful and arching swan dive. He fell through a rainbow mist and perfectly punctured the rippling plane of the pool with his needle form. He swam to the surface and waved, the audience roaring like Romans

watching a gladiator match.

Mamu came darting up from underneath, grappled Kev in her sharp teeth, and chomped down with the power of a car crusher. His frail, human body snapped in half like a stale cracker. Blood flooded the water like a jet of ink from an octopus. The audience erupted into chaos as the two halves of Kev floated to the surface. The head half left a bloody red snail trail as it swam desperately toward the tail half, attempting some silly resurrection via reconnection.

Mamu darted around the tank and seemed to smile as she blasted over the Plexiglas like a toy poodle jumping over a bench in a dog show. Her two-ton body landed in the "**SPLASH ZONE**," what should have been called the "**BLOOD'N'GUTS ZONE**." Two whole families were instantly crushed, including one little boy who was batted unconscious and into the tank with a home run shot from Mamu's thrashing tail. The little girl with the golden hair escaped harm when her mom was killed upon impact. She tried to run from the suicidal mammal, but Mamu arched her neck and snagged the terrified girl's feet with her teeth and sucked her in like a piece of spaghetti. The little girl didn't make it home that day. And once again, money couldn't buy happiness.