Swimmer

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Swimmer

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"It was a quiet day, a peaceful day. The sky was blue and cloudless. The sun was hot and bright; the water neither cool nor calm-but inviting (as inviting as the Pacific can ever be). The boat was anchored a mile or two off shore of an island-no special island, just an island like so many others that dotted the South Pacific area. In some ways the island reflected the day. Its thick foliage was a luscious green, reminding one of a cool, sweet drink. Its sandy beach and brightly colored coral caught the sun's rays and beamed them back and out in all directions creating a jeweled tiara encircling the inner greens."

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At this moment, however, no one on board the large fishing boat was interested in the sky, the water, or the island. It had been a long day, an exhausting day, and most of the crew and all of the fishing enthusiasts were taking a midafternoon rest before heading back for their own island, fifty-odd miles to the north of the one now off the boat’s starboard side.

Unlike the rest, one of the crew decided to take his nap on deck rather than in the cool below. Joe could not explain why, but he found a welcome relief in sitting on the empty deck in the oppressive heat, surrounded by the sun, the sky, and the water. He was fitfully asleep, an empty beer can at his side, when suddenly from deep within the boat what started as a tremor became a tremble, a shudder, a convulsion which exploded with a mighty force, vomiting forth the very innards of the boat.
In the midst of a few muffled screams and shouts, Joe was carried on the crest of the explosion, catapulted free of the ensuing flames, and quickly enveloped in that salty, inviting, blue-green essential—water. There was no time for collecting one's thoughts. The boat was in flames and there was no other sign of life on board or in the water. To swim was the only alternative and there was only one place to swim toward—the island.

Still half-asleep and something less than an expert swimmer, Joe thrashed the water more than he swam in it. For him it was like quicksand, constantly trying to tug him under, and under he did go. His mouth open, his eyes bulging, his lungs nearly bursting, he scrambled back above the surface and madly leaped or crawled in the general direction of the island.

He did get closer to it, but it still was a long, long distance to go, when he went under once again. This time he kept his mouth closed, but that only spared him the acrid, salty taste. His eyes still bulged. His lungs again felt like they were bursting. Again, he somehow regained the surface. Again, he slogged on but the water was more like syrup or glue than the inviting thing it seemed from the boat's deck. Joe was tired, exhausted. The island still seemed no closer, and he felt himself losing control of his body; felt murky fingers tugging, tugging at him. His legs felt like felled tree-trunks. His arms ached and he was barely able to lift them from the deceiving water.

Once again Joe went under, and as he went under he quit, opened his mouth and drank deeply of his enemy. Suddenly an abrupt and razorsharp pain jerked his body erect and upward, crashing through into the air and once more alive. But the upward momentum was quickly displaced by a downward pull which hauled him back and slammed him against the coral floor just five feet below the surface. The bottom! There was a bottom, and by half-treading, gingerly stepping, gritting against the pain he could make headway toward shore. The
water turned red about him in sympathy with his tortured feet, but the coral soon gave way to sand and his ginger walk turned into a maddening, leaping, running, sloughing through the remaining yards to shore.

The shore! When he gained it, he collapsed and embraced it as a child would his mother. Tears poured from his eyes dampening the already damp ground. Once, he glanced up and inward at the inviting greens, but decided that he would go no further. He had regained solid ground. The danger was past. His enemy was behind him. He had fought the good fight—and won. All that was left was the sobbing. And sobbing, he fell asleep as men often do when immediate danger seems to have passed.

But, water is a paradox, and as it recedes from shore so, too, does it return. And so it did now. Joe’s sleep was the deadened sleep of one humanly exhausted, but when the water had returned sufficiently, it was the sleep of eternity.

**NOT WITH DEVILS**

T. F. MELVILLE

Not with devils  
wearing brimstone-horns,  
with smouldering pitchforks.

No, it is not  
bottomless perdition, to dwell  
in adamantine chains and penal fire,

But  
the cold, ineffectual womb  
of the city  
where all you can hear are  
the frightened sounds of  
the screaming traffic-people.