

The MADMAN

**SORRY I HAD WASTED SO MUCH TIME IN CROWDED PLACES
I DROVE UNTIL THE ROAD DWINDLED INTO USELESSNESS
THEN LEFT THE CAR AND WALKED THE REST OF THE WAY
ON A STONY PATH THAT GOD HAD PUT THERE
ON THE EIGHTH DAY OF CREATION
(THE ONE WE DON'T HEAR MUCH ABOUT)**

**THEN THERE WAS THE CLIFF, AND THE SEA
THREE HUNDRED FEET BELOW, BLUE GREEN WHITE
ITS CEASELESS WAVES DOING THEIR BEST
TO BEAT THE ISLAND BACK
AND KEEP IT FROM ENCROACHING FURTHER
ON SEA-GOD MANANNAN'S (THEIR LORD'S) DOMAIN.**

**BEHIND A BOULDER I FOUND A PATCH OF SOFT GRASS
AND SAT THERE TO ADD THE SOUND OF MY WHISTLE
TO THE OCEAN ROAR.**

**WHEELING SEABIRDS LAUGHED AT MY PRESUMPTION.
ONE BRAVER OR MORE CURIOUS THAN HIS FELLOWS
HAD MANAGED, DESPITE THE GUSTING WINDS,
TO LAND NOT FAR FROM MY SHELTERED PLACE
AND WITH DIGNITY AND PRETENDED UNCONCERN
HIS TILTED HEAD AND BRIGHT EYE
WATCHED ME PLAY ... I FELT GRATEFUL
FOR HIS INTEREST (THOUGH HE WAS, I KNEW,
ALWAYS READY TO TAKE QUICKLY TO FLIGHT
AT ANYTHING HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND)**

**AND AS I PLAYED FOR GULL AND FOR MYSELF
I NOTICED COMING ALONG ANOTHER PATH
A SCARECROW, OR, MORE REASONABLY,
A THIN MAN DRESSED RAGGEDLY IN BLACK.
UP HE CAME, SLOWLY, OVER THE BROW OF THE HILL:
I WATCHED, PLAYING NO MUSIC, AS HE CAME NEARER
(MY AUDIENCE OF ONE HAD ALREADY SPREAD WHITE WINGS
AND GONE TO SING GULL-SONGS WITH HIS FRIENDS)**

**THE MAN STOPPED FIFTY FEET FROM WHERE I SAT
AND POINTED AT ME, AND SMILED. - I HEARD THE WHISTLE,
HE SAID. - I WAS DIGGING IN THE FIELD DOWN YONDER
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL WHERE YOU CAN'T SEE IT.
BUT I HEARD THE WHISTLE, AND SO I CAME HERE.**

The MADMAN

HE STATED HIS ARRIVAL AS A FACT
WHOSE MEANING I SHOULD ALREADY UNDERSTAND.
HE STOOD WHERE HE HAD STOPPED, LOOKING AROUND FROM TIME TO TIME
AND DID NOT SEEM INCLINED TO COME CLOSER
OR TO SIT. HE HAD A WORRIED LOOK.

- *MY NAME IS ...* BUT IN A SUDDEN NOISIER GUST OF SEA WIND
I COULDN'T CATCH HIS NAME.

- *MINE IS JIM,* I SAID FOR SOMETHING TO SAY.

HE NODDED AS IF HE HAD HEARD SOMETHING IMPORTANT,
WAS SILENT, THEN SPOKE AGAIN - AN EXPLANATION.

- *WHEN I HEARD THE MUSIC, I HAD TO COME,* HE SAID.

TO MAKE SURE YOU WERE ALL RIGHT.

*NO ONE EVER COMES HERE, AND THE MUSIC IS A RARE THING
AND I COULDN'T BE SURE OF WHAT I WOULD FIND ...*

HE SEEMED TO BE WAITING FOR ME TO REPLY.

- *I HOPE YOU LIKED THE TUNES I WAS PLAYING,* I SAID,
BUT I WAS SURPRISED: HE SHOOK HIS HEAD.

- *IT'S THE SAME AS ALWAYS,* HE REPLIED IN A SAD VOICE.

- IT NEVER CHANGES

*NO MATTER WHO PLAYS IT, YOU CAN'T KNOW IT,
YOU CAN'T TRUST IT, GOOD OR BAD.*

I MUST HAVE LOOKED CONFUSED.

HE POINTED TO HIS EAR AND MADE A MOVEMENT WITH HIS ARM
TO BLAME THE WIND AND SEA.

THEN HE APPROACHED A FEW STEPS CLOSER
AND CROUCHED DOWN, GLANCING ANXIOUSLY TO RIGHT AND LEFT
AS IF PREPARING TO SHARE SOME GREAT SECRET.

- *NO, MUSIC CAN'T BE TRUSTED,* HE SAID WITH FINALITY.

YOU PLAYERS THINK YOU KNOW IT, BUT YOU DON'T ...

YOU CAN'T!

HIS BLUE EYES STARED SEARCHING INTO MY FACE.

I BEGAN TO BE UNCOMFORTABLE,

AND THOUGHT WITH REGRET OF THE CAR, HITHERTO UNLOVED,
STANDING PLACID AND UNCARING AMIDST SIMILAR CATTLE
AT LEAST A HALF-MILE AWAY.

... ARE YOU AFRAID? HE ASKED SUDDENLY.

The MADMAN

***- I'M NOT SURE I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, I STAMMERED,
AND THEN, WITH FALSE BRAVADO - WHY WOULD I BE AFRAID?
- OF COURSE NOT, HE SAID WITH A SUDDEN GRIN.
YOU ARE A GOOD PLAYER; I HEARD YOU FROM DOWN BELOW.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID
BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T SEE IT.
I AM THE ONE WHO HAS TO BE AFRAID.***

- OF ME? I ASKED, AGAIN SURPRISED. - AFRAID OF ME?

***- NO, AFRAID OF THE MUSIC, HE REPLIED IN A LOW VOICE.
I FEAR NOT MAN, NOR GOD,
NOR LOUD ANGRY SEAS, NOR HOLES IN BOATS, NOR FAIRIES
NOR, MOST TIMES, WOMEN'S TEARS.
BUT I SAY IT TO YOU AND YOUR WHISTLE
I FEAR MUSIC
AND MUSIC ONLY.***

***AND AS IF TO PROVE THE TRUTH OF WHAT HE WAS SAYING
HE PICKED UP A STONE
AND RUNNING TO THE VERY EDGE OF THE CLIFF
THREW IT INTO THE WIND AS FAR AS IT WOULD GO.
I COVERED MY EYES AND PRESSED AGAINST THE BOULDER;
HE SAW ME, AND LAUGHED.***

***- WE ALL HAVE OUR OWN FEARS, HE SAID CROUCHING DOWN NEXT TO ME AGAIN.
YOURS PERHAPS IS A FEAR OF GREAT HEIGHTS; MY MOTHER
(GOD REST HER) WAS AFRAID OF MICE; MY SISTER
LIVED IN LONDON BUT SLEPT ALWAYS WITH A LIGHT ON.
MY OWN FEAR IS MUSIC.***

***HE HAD SEATED HIMSELF NEXT TO ME IN THE SHELTER
OF THE GREAT ROCK. IT HAD BEGUN TO RAIN,
SWEET DROPS FALLING FROM GREY SKY
TO SOFTEN THE CHURNING SEA'S SALT SPRAY ...***

***HE STOOD AND MADE A GESTURE I DID NOT UNDERSTAND
IN THE DIRECTION OF THE SEA, THEN SAT DOWN AT MY LEFT.***

***- WHEN I WAS A VERY SMALL BOY, HE SAID,
MY MOTHER SENT ME TO LEARN MUSIC. I HAD TO GO
INTO THE NEXT PARISH WHERE THE TEACHER LIVED
AND EVERY TUESDAY AFTER SCHOOL I WOULD BRING MY WHISTLE
AND SIT WITH THE OTHER STUDENTS, AND PLAY LITTLE TUNES,
AND LISTEN TO THE TEACHER TALK ABOUT MUSIC.***

The MADMAN

**LIKE YOURSELF, SHE WAS NOT FROM THESE PARTS;
SHE COULD NOT KNOW OUR WAYS, OR OUR FEARS,
AND SO SHE WOULD SPEAK TO US ALWAYS
ABOUT THE WAYS MUSIC COULD TAKE HOLD OF YOU
AND CAPTURE YOU, AND ENSNARE YOU, AND TRANSPORT YOU ...**

**TO HER THESE WERE GOOD THINGS; TO US
THEY WERE TERRORS NEVER SPOKEN.**

**HE SHUDDERED AS HE SPOKE;
I KNEW IT WAS NOT FROM COLD OR WET
OR ANY COMMON FEAR.**

**- WE WERE ONLY CHILDREN, HE SAID SOFTLY,
BUT WE SAW THE LOOK IN HER EYE WHEN SHE SPOKE
AND, SIMPLE CHILDREN FROM A SIMPLE PLACE,
WE DID NOT UNDERSTAND. WE KNEW ONLY
THE OVERHEARD STORIES TOLD BY THE OLD PEOPLE
AROUND THE FIRE ON STORMY WINTER NIGHTS
STORIES THAT USED THE SAME WORDS ...
THE TEACHER WAS A KINDLY SOUL, BUT A FOOL.
SHE HAD ONLY TO SAY TO US:
IT IS FROM GOD.
PERHAPS SHE DID NOT KNOW HERSELF ...**

**A SEABIRD LANDED NEARBY, AND MY FRIEND RAN AFTER IT
SCREAMING AND WAVING HIS ARMS
AS IF HE WOULD CHASE IT OVER THE CLIFF.
HE CRIED STRANGE DARK WORDS AFTER IT
THEN SAT BACK DOWN BREATHLESS
TO RESUME HIS TALE
AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.**

**- ONE EVENING I WALKED HOME AFTER MY LESSON
HOT WITH A FEVER AND FULL OF DREAD.
I DREAMED A HORRIBLE DREAM THAT NIGHT:
A DREAM FILLED WITH IMAGES
THAT MADE ME WANT TO SCREAM
(BUT OF COURSE I COULD MAKE NO SOUND):
I WAS IN THE PLACE OF THE TEACHER'S TELLING
A VICTIM, CAPTURED, ENSNARED, TRANSPORTED
THERE WERE FENCES, FIVE-BARRED, LIKE MUSICAL STAVES
FORMED OF RUSTED DIRTY METAL HOT TO THE TOUCH:
I WAS TRAPPED WITHIN THEM LIKE A BEAST IN A SHAMBLES.**

The MADMAN

**THE THICK BUSY BLACK NOTES WERE DEADLY INSECTS
CLINGING MALEVOLENT AND HATEFUL TO THE FENCE
READY TO PUNCTURE AND POISON WITH SHARP WAVING TAILS
ANYONE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO APPROACH...**

**OTHER NOTES WERE WHITE
LIKE STATUES' EYES, EMPTY AND STARING
AND TERRIFYING: THEY COULD WATCH YOU,
KNOW WHAT YOU WERE DOING,
AND WHY.**

**IN MY DREAM THE CLEF (YOU SEE HOW WELL I REMEMBER NAMES OF THINGS!)
WAS AT ONE END OF THE FENCE, A BIG TWISTED THING
CURLING AND UNCURLING ABOUT ITSELF LIKE HELL'S OWN SNAKE
WITH BLACK BRIGHT EYES AND DARTING TONGUE
INSINUATING ITSELF BETWEEN THE LINES OF THE STAVE
AND AT THE OTHER END THE DOUBLE BAR
HAD BECOME TWO HUGE STICKS BURIED DEEP IN THE GROUND
TO HOLD THE FENCE AND ITS PRISONERS IN PLACE
TWO DOTS LIKE TWO BLOODSTAINS
FROM HANDS THAT HAD TRIED TO GRASP, AND FAILED.**

**... I WOKE TWO DAYS LATER. MY MOTHER SAID
THAT I HAD BEEN CLOSE TO DEATH FROM THE FEVER,
AND THAT I HAD BABBLED INCOHERENTLY
WHILE MY WORRIED FAMILY SAID THE ROSARY
TO ASK THE BLESSED MOTHER FOR MY HEALING.
THEY COULD CATCH SOME OF MY WORDS
AND TOLD THE PRIEST AND DOCTOR
I HAD BEEN TALKING ABOUT MUSIC.**

**BUT I SAID THINGS AFTER I WOKE
AND LONG AFTER THAT, YEARS EVEN,
THAT MADE THEM WONDER ABOUT ME ...**

**THE THIN MAN ROSE FROM BESIDE ME
AND WALKED CLOSE TO THE CLIFF EDGE ONCE AGAIN.
HE DANCED LAUGHING ON ONE FOOT
BUT STOPPED WHEN HE SAW
THAT I COULD NOT WATCH HIS PERFORMANCE.**

**... BUT YOU SEE, THEY WERE RIGHT, HE SAID,
SPEAKING NOW LESS TO ME
THAN TO WHATEVER HIS BLUE EYES COULD SEE
IN THE WILD INFINITY BEYOND THE CLIFF.**

The MADMAN

***- IN MY FEVER I HAD BEEN BABBLING ABOUT MUSIC
BUT SOME WAY OR ANOTHER
I CAME TO REALIZE IT HAD BEEN A VISION, NOT A DREAM.
SO THEN THE FEAR OF MUSIC CAME UPON ME.
I FELT THAT, IN THAT NIGHT'S SEEING,
I HAD SEEN INTO ITS HEART.
I KNEW ITS NATURE NOW, KNEW ITS POWERS,
KNEW WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE ITS VICTIM.***

**SUDDENLY HE WAS THE MOST RATIONAL OF MEN
A TEACHER, AND I HIS PUPIL.**

***- THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS, HE EXPLAINED,
COUNTING OUT THE POINTS OF HIS ARGUMENT
ON THE FINGERS OF HIS RAISED RIGHT HAND.
FIRST IT COMES SMILING, AND YOU RUN TO MEET IT
TO EMBRACE IT LIKE YOUR FIRST AND ONLY LOVE
BUT YOU SOON FIND THE EMBRACE
IS FAR FROM A LOVER'S CARESS
AND MORE LIKE THE GRIP OF A DROWNING MAN;
THEN YOU REALIZE TOO LATE
THAT IT IS TO BE FEARED, MORE PERHAPS
THAN DEATH ITSELF:
DEATH TAKES YOU ONCE, AND KISSES YOU, AND RELEASES YOU
TO WHATEVER FOLLOWS;
BUT MUSIC TAKES YOU AND KEEPS YOU
ENCHANTED, ENSLAVED, BEHIND ITS FENCES
BEGGING MERCY FROM INSECTS AND SNAKES
AS LONG AS IT CARES TO KEEP YOU THERE ...***

**HE HARDLY SEEMED TO BREATHE;
HE DID NOT SEEM TO REALIZE THAT HIS RIGHT HAND
HAD BECOME A TIGHT TREMBLING FIST;
LITTLE STREAMS OF BLOOD RAN FROM PALM TO WRIST.
AT LAST HE TURNED TO ME
HIS LOOK PLEADING FOR UNDERSTANDING.**

**THE SKY HAD GROWN DARK, THE RAIN HEAVIER NOW.
HE KNELT ON BOTH KNEES NEXT TO ME
HEAD BOWED AND HANDS JOINED AS IF IN PRAYER.**

***- EACH DAY I BEG FOR DEAFNESS, HE MURMURED AT LAST:
FOR THE POWER NOT TO HEAR.***

The MADMAN

SILENCE, THEN:

**- I MET A GREEK SAILOR ONCE, HE SAID
IN A VOICE NEARLY OVERWHELMED BY THE STORM.
IT WAS IN A PUB IN LISCANNOR.
AND HE TOLD ME THAT A MAN HE KNEW
IN A FAR PLACE AND TIME
HAD TO STOP HIS EARS WITH WAX
TO AVOID THE EVIL SONGS,
THE TEMPTING SONGS THAT CALLED THEN AND CALL NOW:**

BE WHAT I DEMAND!

BE WHAT I DEMAND! HE SCREAMED.

THEN IN THE QUIET VOICE:

**- I WAS TERRIFIED. THE NIGHTMARE OF MY FEVER CAME ALIVE AGAIN,
AND I ASKED THE GREEK SAILOR:
WHO DARES SAY THAT?
AND WHAT GAVE IT THE RIGHT TO SAY THAT?
TELL ME, BROTHER, FOR PITY'S SAKE
TELL ME IF YOU KNOW ...**

**... THEN SUDDENLY HE LEAPED UP.
GRABBING MY WHISTLE LYING MUTE ON THE WET STONES
HE RAN TO THE CLIFF AND HURLED IT OVER THE EDGE.
IT FLASHED ONCE IN THE DYING LIGHT AND DISAPPEARED.**

**IN THE RISING WIND, I FEARED TO LEAVE
MY LITTLE SAFE SPACE BEHIND THE BOULDER
TO FOLLOW HIM AND ASK A QUESTION.
A SHOUT OF LAUGHTER SPLIT THE AIR BEHIND THE HILL
AND ANSWERED WHAT I DID NOT ASK:**

-YOU COULD NOT SAVE YOURSELF; I HAVE SAVED YOU.

**AND IN ANOTHER MOMENT, I WAS ALONE.
I TRIED TO RUN; THE WIND WAS GATHERING STRENGTH.
THERE WAS, THANK GOD,
JUST LIGHT ENOUGH TO FIND THE STONY PATH.**

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