The Taste of Loneliness

A Philippine fisherman left his house to go fishing. It was a normal day. Nothing out of the ordinary had happened. A storm had passed through recently, but he did not expect anything unusual to happen that day. The fisherman said good-bye to his wife, hugged his children, and he went to his boat on the shore. As he left, he thought about how great it would be to catch a nice large fish. When he was a couple miles offshore, he dropped his hook. About an hour later, his line tightened and he began to reel it in. He felt no wiggling like normal, but more of a dead weight as if he had caught sea weed.

\*\*\*

The man slowly opened his eyes as the island began to wake up. The birds began to twitter, the crickets stopped chirping, and the monkeys began to scream at each other with their high pitched screams. He rose from his makeshift bed and walked to the front of the cave that had been his home for the last two years.

The sun had barely been up for a half hour, but already the island was very hot. The man wiped sweat off his forehead and thought, *Two years is too much time to spend on this island alone.* He looked at his hand and the ring on his finger, and thought about the days leading up to being stranded on the island. He thought about the day he walked into his kitchen to talk to his wife because he was upset about something that he had long forgotten. They had a fight and he had left the house afterwards. He did not even think about making up until later. That was a rash decision.

He looked around and decided it was time to get on with his day. He got a banana from the stash in his cave and began to walk to the beach to gather driftwood for the night’s fire.

As he walked, he began to think back to his previous life. He had left his house in anger for a trip that was supposed to take him to China for a business meeting. It was a trip he wouldn’t return from but he had not known it yet. As he sat on the plane the night after the fight, he realized what a mistake he had made by not making things right with his wife. He had looked at his wedding ring and had begun to rise from his chair to call his wife when the private jet hit turbulence and knocked him to the floor where he lost consciousness.

When he came to, he could feel the plane dropping sharply for reasons he did not know. He slowly tried to make his way to the cockpit but never got there. He suddenly felt the plane stop moving down and he knew that they had hit the water. He saw the pilots come tearing out of the cockpit. They opened the door and deployed two of the emergency life rafts. They jumped into one while the man quickly scrambled into the other and paddled away from the plane. He had tried to see the pilots in the darkness, but he could not see more than five feet from his boat. He accepted the realization that he was alone.

It was a beautiful day on the island, but as he got to the beach he realized it was going to be a scorcher underneath the trees not to mention on the beach. It was so hot and humid that he had already sweated through what was left of his clothes, and they were clinging to his body like a big suction cup on a window.

The man began to collect firewood from the beach. As he did, he looked at the ocean and saw a couple of dark clouds and realized that it would soon turn into a gale. He hoped it would pass his island without too much rain. He hated being stuck in his cave. It was more of a prison on rainy days than the Island ever was. He finished gathering enough wood to last the night and he started back up the trail that he had walked so many times and was so well worn that it was now comfortable for his bare feet.

The man returned to his cave, put down the firewood, took another banana, and sat at the front of the cave to eat it. He knew he will have to gather more food later but not yet.

When the day broke on the first day after the plane crash, he realized he might never get home. The pilots were long gone. There was almost no hope of being found. Unless he found land soon he knew he would die. He scanned the horizon, but there was no land in sight so he continued to drift. Slowly the day faded and darkness overtook the ocean. and the man drifted to sleep. After a long time, a sudden stop in the motion of the boat woke him up. He raised his head and knew that he might survive as he saw he had found land.

The storm was growing. He was not worried because it was still very far off. He looked at his wedding ring and once again, thought about his wife and how he should have made up with her before he left on the trip that he would not come home from. It was something he would never forget.

He had thought about it for a long and hard. He had even made a sturdy raft to carry him off the island. Now he had made up his mind. It was time to leave the island that had been his home and prison for the last two years. He gathered up all the food he had in his cave, gathered up his possessions, his water containers and set out for the beach. He might not be as well supplied as he could be but it was time. Without a second thought about his future, he left the Island.

As he explored his sanctuary in the first weeks on the Island he thought about how lucky he was to even be alive. He was able to live well off what the island provided, however, the one thing he lacked was human companionship. He attempted to befriend a group of monkeys but they fled whenever he came close to them so he tried to accept being alone.

He pulled up his make shift sail to the top of the mast and slowly his small raft began to move away from the shore and into the unknown. He looked behind as the Island faded into the distance and tells himself, that if he makes it home he will make things right with his wife no matter what. That is if he makes it back.

The sun had moved a long way and it was into the hottest part of the day. The man was as hot as he had ever been. It was as if a fire breathing dragon was breathing on him. He attempted to use the sail to shield himself from the sun’s rays, but with no success. He saw the storm looming ever closer. He had not thought about the possibility that the storm might cause him harm but he could not turn back now. He was not sure he could find the island again so he continued to sail in the direction he was going.

As the night settled in around the small raft, the storm thickened and the man got worried. It was a gale. This was the last thing he needed. As soon he completed this thought, the wind picked up. This was not a good sign.

He soon felt the hint of rain in the air and had a sinking feeling as lightning crackled above his head blue and bright enough that he could see for miles. Ever so quickly, he scanned the horizon but saw nothing other than the rising and falling of waves on the ocean. Then the light faded and was gone leaving him once again alone in the dark.

Soon the waves were rising, thunder was booming, rain was flying into his face, and lightning was crackling across the sky. The looming storm was tossing his little raft like a rag doll. He soon realized the possibility he might never make it through the night and he might die alone on a little raft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Soon the swells were reaching ten feet. As high as some of the trees that he had climbed during his time on the Island. His stomach began to churn and he threw up his breakfast over the side. He now clung on to the mast of his little boat each second wondering and hoping he would make through the night.

The storm continued to rage when at the darkest part of the night as the raft was reaching the top of a wave the man saw something he had not seen in two years. It was a welcome sight, an electric light from a ship in the distance! He had waited so long to see that glowing orb smiling at him and he had thought he would never see it again. He pulled on his sails and turned his small craft towards the light and hoped that the winds of fate would take him home.

After an hour had passed he saw the ship in the distance but it was still a long way off and the storm was increasing in force. The wind now felt like he was smashing against a brick wall instead of pushing through a thick forest.

The rain had increased to where he almost couldn’t open his eyes. The man slowly began to lose hope. He rose to the top of the next wave and saw the ship was even farther away. As the raft came down, he saw that the next wave was already upon him and even as he went to hold his breath the wave overtook him.

He felt his body being ripped from the raft like a leaf in a hurricane. He was tossed under the wave and did not know which way was up. Just when he was running out of air he felt his hand touch air and he ripped his head to the surface. He saw the remnants of his raft and he swam to the nearest log, clinging on to it for dear life.

He knew he was probably going to die but there was always a slight hope that he would survive. Then another wave came. He had no choice but to open his eyes if he was ever going to find the air that would keep him alive. He looked up and saw the waves above him. He panicked like a horse in front of a whip.

He opened his mouth and let water in. He tried to reach for the surface, and found nothing but water. He thought he had finally broken the surface so he tried to breathe. Immediately it was clear, he had not reached the air. All he got was a breathe full of water. As he began to lose consciousness, his last thought was why he did not appreciate his life more while he had it. He had a wife that loved him. He knew he would never see her again. He had been given a chance at another life on the Island, but he longed so much for his old life he did not realize what he had until it was gone. With that he faded out of thought and time……..

\*\*\*

As his line reached the surface, he saw the object on his line take the shape of a human body and he pulled the figure of a man to the surface of the water. A man with a long beard, scrappy clothes, no shoes, floated on the water. But the thing that drew the fisherman’s attention was a bright golden wedding ring, worn for long years in hopes that it would find its way home.