

## Aye, Calypso!

Melissa, the Writer

Jacques, the Explorer

**Setting:** *The observation chamber of the R/V Calypso, possibly the most famous non-military ship in recent history. Two people are there, an American woman dressed in whale-shark patterned dive leggings and a matching swimsuit top with a fleece hoodie half-unzipped over it, and the Frenchman, whose prominent nose and red watch cap make it obvious that he's the late, great, Jacques Yves Cousteau.*

*The lights are dim, the better for the cast to see the occasional fish flitting by outside.*

*They are sharing a pot of tea as they talk. No, it's not Earl Grey (hot). It's just plain old Lipton (the brisk tea).*

MELISSA: *(offering a package)*

I know space is at a premium here, but I couldn't come empty-handed so I brought you these. I thought we could use them for our tea.

JACQUES: *(opening the package as he speaks)*

You did not have to. It's enough to know that a love for the sea and that which dwells in it lives into the future.

*(reveals the gift – a pair of vintage submariner's mugs. They are white. And have no handles.)*

These are exquisite. Your father served, perhaps, or your grandfather?

MELISSA: My grandfather was career Army. My father-in-law was a Navy man, but never served on a sub. These were a gift from my uncle. His father wore dolphins. I know they're military, but...

JACQUES: But the *Calypso* was also military, once upon a time. A minesweeper. Now we sweep the sea for new discoveries and better understanding of ourselves and our world. *(beat)* I find it very appropriate when military creations are repurposed for peaceful use. Don't you?

MELISSA: Oh, I do!

JACQUES: Do you know why these were made without handles?

MELISSA: I do. It was so the submarine officers on watch could wrap their hands around them for warmth.

JACQUES: Warmth is something we all need when we are at sea.

*(he places the mugs on a low table between them, and pours tea from a pot into each)*

Do you need milk or sugar?

MELISSA: I used to. Not so much anymore.

JACQUES: I find I like the bit of astringency that comes with black tea. It's bracing. Reminds you you're alive.

MELISSA: I doubt you need much reminding.

JACQUES: *(teasing gently)* Perhaps. Perhaps not. But you did not come here to talk about tea.

MELISSA: No. I guess... I wanted to know more about you. I've been visiting Baja Sur a lot over the last couple decades, and I grew up on your documentaries, but there's a lot left unsaid.

JACQUES: I suppose what you have to understand is that the ocean is my lover, and Calypso is my mistress. *(laughs)* I'm not so sure that's flattering to my wife, but she is very generous about what I do. Understanding. Even supportive. Are you married?

MELISSA: Twenty-five years next month. Well... my next month.

JACQUES: And your husband, does he support your dreams?

MELISSA: He does. He... I tell people that he's the string to my kite. He keeps me grounded but gives enough slack for me to fly.

JACQUES: That's a vivid image.

MELISSA: You're not exactly a stranger to those.

JACQUES: No, I'm very fortunate. I get to see vivid images in front of me every day, and then I attempt to translate them into images that are vivid to others, on the television, in papers, in words.

MELISSA: You said the sea was your lover... how do you mean?

JACQUES: Other people attack the sea; I make love to it. I immerse myself in it. I...

MELISSA: You become one with it.

JACQUES: Oui. Yes. Exactly.

MELISSA: It must make you sad, what we humans are doing to the oceans.

JACQUES: Sad. Angry. Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans.

MELISSA: It seems pretty hopeless. We've destroyed so many species of plants and animals. We fight over guidelines to keep the air and water clean, but money seems more important than sustaining life.

JACQUES: It isn't hopeless.

MELISSA: You sure about that?

JACQUES: Absolutely. Listen, we were logical, the future would be bleak, indeed. But we are more than logical. We are human beings, and we have faith, and we have hope, and we can work.

MELISSA: Faith? That's an odd term from a scientist.

JACQUES: What is a scientist after all? It is a curious man looking through a keyhole, the keyhole of nature, trying to know what's going on. (laughs) I am not a scientist. I am, rather, an impresario of scientists.

MELISSA: That's an interesting way to put it.

JACQUES: Is it? I don't think so. Plato said that science is nothing but perception. Perhaps I have a unique point of view, my own perception.

MELISSA: And your perceptions are mostly about the water.

JACQUES: The water, and the air. You cannot have one without the other. But you know this.

MELISSA: I do.

JACQUES: I am at a loss. You know what I do; but I know nothing of you. What do you do?

MELISSA: I... I write. I'm a writer. Mostly I make stuff up. I tell stories.

JACQUES: Sea stories.

MELISSA: Sea stories. Space stories. I try to use the other – monsters, aliens, androids – to explore emotional truth.

JACQUES: Then you, too, are an explorer, of sorts.

MELISSA: I... guess?

JACQUES: Embrace it. We all have a calling, and many of us never know what it is, what we are meant to be until we are old and feeble.

MELISSA: I've always been torn, between writing and performing. But... I'm really bad at sharing what I create.

JACQUES: You must learn to be good at it. Look, you brought a gift to an old man you conjured up from memories of books and television presentations, so I know you are generous. Use this.

MELISSA: Generosity?

JACQUES: Creation is generosity. It's the greatest act of it. It takes generosity to discover the whole through others. If you realize you are only a violin, you can open yourself up to the world by playing your role in the concert.

MELISSA: *(musing)* I like that.

JACQUES: I thought you might. So, what sea creatures speak to you.

MELISSA: Sharks, rays, octopuses.

JACQUES: You're not afraid of sharks?

MELISSA: I used to dream of diving with them – in a cage I mean – but not one of those diving companies that uses chum and ruins the environment.

JACQUES: And you have not done so?

MELISSA: I... I was told I shouldn't *ever* dive because I have chronic sinusitis.

JACQUES: But you still swim, yes? You snorkel?

MELISSA: When I have the chance, yes.

JACQUES: Keep doing that... the sharks will come if you're meant to see them. Just be calm when they show up.

MELISSA: I'll try to remember that.

JACQUES: *(reacting to something unseen)*

I'm afraid our time together is ending. There is another... I think he is also no longer present in your present... a singer... songwriter. We share a commitment to the environment. He wrote a song about this ship.

MELISSA: John Denver?

JACQUES: You know him?

MELISSA: I know his music.

JACQUES: Good, good. So, my dear writer, is there a wish I can grant you?

MELISSA: Are you a djinn now?

JACQUES: I am your construct. You brought me a gift; I wish to respond in kind.

MELISSA: I think you know...

JACQUES: Oh... yes, I suspect I do.

*(He removes his watch cap, leans over, and places it on MELISSA's head.)*

Wear it well.

MELISSA: I promise...

JACQUES: And remember...

MELISSA: Yes?

JACQUES: The sea, the great unifier, is man's -

MELISSA: *(amending, teasingly)* – and woman's –

JACQUES: *(accepts the correction with a nod then continues)* - only hope. Now, as never before, the old phrase has a literal meaning: we are all in the same boat.

MELISSA: *(adjusting her hair beneath the hat)* You really made that pun?

JACQUES: *(not at all contrite)* But you find it charming, because I am an old man.

MELISSA: I... well... yes. Thank you for talking with me.

JACQUES: No, my dear. Thank you for remembering.

The set begins to dissolve as blue light takes over the stage. The ship set transitions into MELISSA sitting at her desk, a laptop open in front of her. She puts a pair of earpods in her ears, and presses a button on her phone. We hear what she is hearing... John Denver's song CALYPSO, and she sings along with the chorus.

MELISSA: *(singing)*

*Aye, Calypso! the places you've been to  
The things that you've shown us, the stories you'd tell.  
Aye, Calypso! We sing to your spirit  
The men who have served you so long and so well.*

*Blackout*