

Liberated Seas



I was working as a deck hand on a ship in the South Pacific at the threshold of the global pandemic lockdown. There are myriad sensations a sailor knows on any given day: the varying strength, temperature, and sound of the wind or the feel of the sun or its absence. Yet what struck me that day was an absence of the usual boat traffic and the distinctive sounds of powerful breaths punctuating the rush of sea on the hull. In the relative unusual scarcity of ships to threaten them with injuring or fatal collisions, migrating whales had gathered on the surface in unusual numbers.

The usual dull roar of the maritime roar had been replaced by throaty deep breaths. The puffing sound of them exhaling in choir as they rose from the azure depths surrounded us, as the captain ordered for the ship to slow and halt. A pod rested on the waves, surrounding us. One can project human attributes on animals, but the whales are sentient beings and their breaths did sound like sighs of relief in the absence of any ships besides ours. The captain cursed at the delay but artificial sense of time of course was a human construct that seemed

so dwarfed then by those giant breaths, a reminder of the primal rhythms of the sea and that we were ultimately an invasive species humbled by a virus and the natural power of the ocean.