

Casual Visitor,

Tourist over-towner returned,

Bend an ear -- or perhaps you've heard it once and must again confirm. Treasured new friends, a tale of interest to you! Sweeter than her lobster, or her urchin, I urge you to listen. Listen closely: to the wind and the waves, to the eagles, gulls, and ravens, to the insects only children hear, to the ancient voices emanating from below the streets, to the shell berms and sea in concert with the children on the beach. Close your eyes and have it read to you by someone close and dear, and you will hear a story of when Pimu spoke to only me.

| My tenure is a ten-year vacation. Everything's gone. I sit on the beach on something that cannot sink. The chair is a Tommy Bahama with all the bells and whistles: neck-brace, adjustable back, cupholder, and an armrest for writing. A very sweet piece -- and the very last vestige of my princely self. Dante's Inferno got nothing on me. I'm the new cut, the one below the sidewalk and just above the street. I'm writing, but still I ask myself: "another summer broke on the beach?" There was nothing ahead or behind me. A walk would ease the stagnation. On the Pleasure Pier, through the crowd, Robbie Clark and I meet eyes. He said he was taking Pete Edwards' sailing catch over town for some work and put her up for sale. He and me are close, "If you need a guy, I need to go." He knows my work and thought for half a second: "You got 20 minutes." Through my life I've packed a light sea bag. In 45 minutes we broke Casino Point on the port-side. With its namesake bouncing away on the stern, mixed emotions raise the jib and main. A man with friends and a good boat to leave paradise for a poo-poo lagoon...clean and broke.

The work went well, as those on the dock passed by and approved of everything. In that marina I improved, with friends and more and more work. A couple of boat deals led to an Albin Vega 27-foot sloop. Built in Sweden. Her sister-ship sailed to Antarctica from Chile (and made it back). The story's told in a novel by an aspiring from hollywood. I made her my choice: couldn't do better! I trimmed her out as fine as could be and within that year we, the sloop and I, are loaded to the gills and ready to come back to where my fondest parts await.

It's been years since last sailing out of LA to the island. I use her native name Pimu now, and personalize this inanimate, semi-arid rock, as her. On the NOAA chart, she's Santa Catalina Island with lats and longs, numbers, and bathymetrics. Put a blindfold on me at Angel's Gate, LA harbour's entrance, I'll still find her, light or dark. And I did. The following day is glorious. I'm on a heavy anchor on my old spot off Pebbly Beach. Morning welcomes me, birds are crying and sea-lions come for a visit to the new boat. It's a short kayak ride to the beach and the walk into town, down Pebbly Beach Road, passes waving to old friends. In town, it's the same welcome back. The afternoon paddle back is all smiles and cabernet.

If accepted by her and her people there's a feeling one gets...and on my return this beguiling surprise enveloped me. I was missed by this community, and there's been a space made. I no longer had to scrap and fight, and I popped a cork on a second bottle and am soon asleep.

Flashed on instances over the years of my life here on the water, of me falling prey to Pimu's clown, a puckish piece of mischief. The rising wind through the sloop's rig I mistake for Kokopelli's flute. The clown laughs as he plays. I'm entertained in the forever instances of a dreaming REM.

In the oncoming storm, the open hatch lets in the rain. The seas come way up and all around it's white-capping. The sloop's in a sideways attitude and drifting. I awake from the flute to the wind and run forward to safety-check the anchor line. I can't pull a foot of it -- the anchor's still there. Two-hundred feet of 3/8ths chain, and a hundred of hard nylon rope. I tell myself, "It's gotta be off the edge and keeping me drifting along that fathom line. Anytime soon to bite on anything." In disbelief, "Not this again" just makes it from thought to speech.

Points of reference are approached and passed. Casino Point. Hamilton Cove. Not once does my vessel feign to bow into the weather for a hard-bit hook. The light at White's Landing is closer in its circled beam. I'm tired, shaking from the cold and the rain. We pass the point and light at White's and enter the dark on the stretch to Long Point and the Isthmus.

Under a clouded full-moon, home-movie shudder clicking, her face comes from a canyon. The mists from clouds -- her hair -- medusa wild then tight-spinning in immediate karma. Her face is high-cheekbone cliffs. Deep ravine eyes, rain cry lines to a beach of thunder rolling boulder teeth. The sea would rather the lathered vortex. In the maelstrom Pimu speaks to me.

*Wha.....a-.....aat? Whaaaaat do you waaaaant frommmmm meeeeeeeeee?
(and still again) Whaaaaaat....Dooooo.....youuuuuu....Waaaaaant?*

I paused my panicked thoughts -- Am I still in the dream? Her Kokopelli never spoke. Only played the flute or laughed. A glance in the cabin for a stowaway. A ridiculous flashlight beam up the mast (I hid there from a girlfriend in a storm once, bad joke). Around the sloop's waterline where, in this storm, no other else could be. I knew it was her, yet I looked...nothing. A large gust near knocks the sloop's rail down to the waterline. Again her voice:

*I'll give you anyyyyyythingggggggg....
Wha...a-.....aat.....Do youuuuuuu....Waaaaaant?*

I answer unconsciously, "I want to sing and story-tell. That's all. Sing and story-tell."
I wait in silence.

Then singggggggg.....and tell the storyyyyyy.....(silence).

In frustration and disbelief there comes a peace. My shoulders drop in sudden comfort. I'm unafraid. At Bird Rock, in the front of the Isthmus, the sloop's nose comes face to face with Pimu's breath. First light in the East dims the morning star. Down companionway steps into the salon...I take a rest