

Wilderness House Literary Review 14/2

Marni Berger

The Most Powerful Man Fights the Most Powerful Animal: A Fable

The Most Powerful Man in the World had a special device so powerful, hardly anyone else thought it yet even existed. But he had paid one scientist, long before he wished for the demise of scientists, to invent it—this contraption that could annihilate all life at once, with a push of a button.

He always brought it along for fights, as a last resort—and a scare tactic.

The scientist had given it to him with a shaking hand—afraid of him, of his power, after he had raped her. He never meant to use it.



The Most Powerful Man was neither benevolent nor beautiful, but he never saw what he really looked like, because his lackeys gave him fake mirrors, reflective cameras—that made him look sexy, if only to himself. In reality, he was fat, lazy and incessantly sweaty—born with power he could not appreciate, because it was handed to him by his father, who was also fat, lazy and incessantly sweaty; and who was also born with power he could not appreciate. Power was genetic, if not silver, like a spoon. The ilk of The Most Powerful Man in the World was best, he believed, when he learned to believe—age two, eating cheerios with the aforementioned spoon. Looking into his fake mirror. His skin so white. Pearly. Sheen.

When the most powerful man in the world was young, he enjoyed molesting young girls and destroying large cities. His power grew with his age and seven decades in, near what ought to have been the end of his life, when his muscles had atrophied and his belly sagged as though the very fat inside it were fatigued, he had become even stronger somehow, accustomed to raping women and destroying the world.

He said what he wanted—he said, “I like their flesh in my teeth. I like killing them with my bare hands.” Well. It’s not to say no one cared, but no one knew why those who battled him lost.

He was the most powerful man in the world, and he was evil.



The Most Powerful Animal in the Sea was the blue whale. She was the biggest animal in the world—land and sea. She was born with a saltwater hide, subcutaneous blubber several feet deep; and it protected her insides, her organs, her gargantuan heart.

She was, by nature, a pacifist.



He was, by nature, a terrorist.



The Most Powerful Animal in the World, the largest animal in the world, merely ate the smallest—krill, swept into her throat painlessly, brainlessly, making her grow, over the years.

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She was the same age as the man, and she spent her life watching him from below, in ripples in a magical sea, watching with her globular eye, its crystal ball; watching as the most powerful man in the world grew only more powerful, as she grew larger; she grew large enough to swallow him with a simple inhale.

She watched women squirm under his grasp; she watched everyone who fought him lose. She cried each time.

But she wasn't a fighter.

And so, her salty tears filled the sea, increasing its levels, plaguing scientists, who could find no one else to blame but men and women—not least of all The Most Powerful Man.



As the whale grew so did her tears.



And in the decades preceding her age of seventy years, Scientists were sure the world was ending, and as the decades swam by, and The Most Powerful Animal cried, the scientists glared at their data with ever straining eyes, slowly losing their vision, becoming ever more certain that It All was Man's Fault.

On his sixty-ninth birthday, the scientists told the Most Powerful Man in the World about the World's End. They knew he wouldn't care. They did it out of duty, integrity, and with fear, knowing the future, knowing what he'd say. They were correct.

He said, "Liars! You are trying to steal my power! Fuck fuck fuck fuck. I'll sue you."

He wasn't very eloquent. But he stole all of the scientists' money. He paid his henchman to invade all of the banks in the night.

The scientists were unsurprised but depressed.

"Without money for research," one scientist said, the next morning, sitting on a garbage-infested curb, "we can't go on. I have a family. I need to eat. But then again, how will my kids survive without The World?"

The scientists conducted their investigation as ever, without money. They became soldiers in a war against truth.

They wanted to staple reality to the land, at least temporarily, if not save it entirely. They would do whatever they could, they decided.

They started bringing home seaweed to eat. They toiled in the water. They hallucinated mermaids.

They feared for the future—that their predictions would be right.

They had always been right.



One day soon after, the scientists rubbed their eyes. Stared at their charts. Glanced at the sun. Looked down on its reflection in the water, and almost had heart-attacks simultaneously.

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It became clear that The World was ending Tomorrow. They cried and their tears sank down and met the tears of the blue whale, which mingled with the ocean, which were the ocean, after years, after a long life. She lingered far below.

"I give up," one scientist said, his body encrusted with sea salt. His face torn in places from where strange sea creatures had clawed him during times when he eyed the water too feverishly. He'd thought one was a crab, but it could just as easily have been a serpent. Real and fake were merging; scientific uncertainty was to blame for that.

"So do I," said another scientist, falling back into the sea.

Then they all did, becoming overwhelmed by the water, and the loss of a future.

They didn't even bother to say goodbye to their families. They were ashamed that they hadn't saved the world.

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Deep in the sea hovered the blue whale, crying, but when her tears met the scientists', she jerked. The world is ending tomorrow.

So soon.

She saw their bodies floating down toward her.

She saw the lost hope. The clawed faces—gashed with frustration, with human nails digging into their own faces.

Good men and women had existed.

She hadn't thought they had. She had been too focused on The Most Powerful Man, his evil, her tears.

Now she knew of the good scientists—but it was too late.

They were gone.

Was it really too late?

The sun on the light of the water above, so far up. She swam toward it.

Her face in the breeze of dead crabs and gull shit, she cried loudly, but this time not out of sadness. Sadness had fooled her, all this time.

Another dead face floated toward hers: on it, despair, morphing, melting, decaying in the water.

The whale wasn't sad anymore. She was just fuckin' pissed.

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The Most Powerful Man in the world loved a good fight. Because he'd always won, he assumed he always would. Reality was winning. Fantasy was losing.

What was real?

Of course, the scientists had died, so nobody knew.

He heard the battle cry of the blue whale and made his lackeys carry him to the sea.

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The blue whale waited, hovering so close to the surface of the ocean that it was only a thin veil of water that separated her from air, and she appeared as a shadow, like a man-made building glared out by light, casting its long shade upon the sea.

She was not man-made.

She was The Most Powerful Animal in the World.



The Most Powerful Man in the World stood on his yacht and squinted down at the water with his Special Device.

Yes, he used the device to scare people—as a symbol. It worked each time. Of course, he'd never actually pressed the button.

But he could.

Nobody wanted the whole world to disappear for the sake of pride.

He would.

Nobody, that is, except The Most Powerful Man in the World. He would do it. He would push the button and go straight to Heaven—he wasn't afraid. Heaven was where you went when you won the ultimate contest—life.

There would be sexy women everywhere in Heaven. Just like on earth. It made no difference to die.

Anyway, in Heaven they would want him.



Meanwhile, the scientists' children, having been raised on seaweed for a year had undergone something strange—there was something about that seaweed, something unlike your average kelp or algae found in health food stores, or whatever was dried in those packages of green strips tasting like glorious potato chips. No, this seaweed was different. Magic, perhaps.

The children of the scientists had grown fins, small ones that could almost seem like malformed pimples if not for their precise shape noted beneath a magnifying glass. Their certain gleam in the water on a summer day.

They, too, living in their various cities, in foster homes, or strayed here and there with various relatives, or single parents, some orphans, were young and spry and heard the call of The Most Powerful Animal in the World.



I'm not going to kill you, rumbled the sea—or what seemed like the sea to The Most Powerful Man in the World.

It was The Most Powerful Animal in the World.

She emerged from the water. She was seven times the size of the yacht, upon which stood The Most Powerful Man in the World.

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Her waves pulled his yacht down like a shipwreck.

It floated back up.

He sneered in Her face.

He prepared to wag a finger at Her eye.

Her eye was the size of one of his yachts, and in it, he saw his face. It was much more amorphous than his usual mirrors. And much larger. And fatter.

He was disgusting.

He was disgusted.

"It's a lie," he said. "I'm not this fat." He prepared to stab her in the eye. "This is not a real fact!"

But as he reached his arm back, he was restrained an unexpected force. Of children.



Behind the Man stood the scientists' Children, heaving upon him a large fish net.

They had captured him, like a fish.



Still, he had the button that could End the World. He flaunted it at the scientists' children. He waved it in the air like a flag—or the fin of a caught fish who will do anything.



He pressed it.



They had felt summoned, the scientists' children.

Summoned, like robots, to take boats to a place in the sea as mysterious as the Bermuda Triangle, the place their parents had died.

The children merged there like soldiers, and upon seeing each other, saluted without hesitation and without knowing why.

The children floated on the water without humor, an army.



The button didn't work.

The scientist who had made it, had taken revenge, secretly, and, quite frankly, by inventing nothing, and thus, in that moment The Most Powerful Man battled the Most Powerful Animal, saved everything.



When the world didn't end, when The Most Powerful Man was not killed by The Most Powerful Animal, he found himself in the dark strange land of a body.

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A body the size of seven yachts, but smellier, less beautiful.

She swallowed him whole and contained him inside her, reversing him to a baby.

Immediately, he asked for his death, knocking inside of her.

But she was a pacifist.

She smiled.