

JULIE

EPISODE 17: SHORT STORY (COMPLETE) – LITERARY: HAWSERS BY SAMUEL SIMAS

DATE?
How LONG AGO FROM NOW?

Summary: A couple is separated by military duty.

Q remember when you took me...
We stood on the end of...



You took me to the end of a dock where furled sails and hawsers clinked nautical concertos on metal. Between beats you told me you were leaving, and I watched you scratch your brown beard in the sunlight, massaging the words like lather around your mouth. The gulls stopped screaming, and I heard your heart thump behind the cloud of your breath. Boats undulated on the water, and I kneaded the tendrils of muscles in my arm, shifting my weight from right foot to left.

I don't love the wording heart is lower than breath cloud

You kicked the dock's faded planks until splinters levigated and the wind picked up the dust with a gentle luff. You couldn't bring your eyes to meet mine. It was the same sideways half-glance that met my eyes askance when we bore the palls of my mother's coffin four years prior. You looked so handsome in your suit and tie, shoes shined so that you could see your own frown when you looked down into them. Remember how you told me that look meant you were sorry?

redundant

I asked to where you were sailing, and you said your boss was sending you out on the longest trip yet — Colombo. A place so infrequently spoken of I didn't think it was real until you said: Sri Lanka. You were to bring a shipment of plastic there, tea on the way back.

boss?
commanding officer?

And the way you ran your thumb in quick circles around the button of your peacoat told me you were anxious to go. Were you? You said you had spent too much time waiting in coffeeshops and bars in this New England port town while the fall turned to winter and then to spring again. I didn't blame you.

√*

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misplaced modifier
start with ?
You said you would miss welcoming the morning rain and the smell of roasted coffee (after we let blankets collect by our ankles) You, thinking about the sandpapery feel of my beard on your chest while I laid next to you at night, pawing at your arms and broad tattooed shoulders to ensure I wasn't alone again. Would I miss your warm chuckle when I snuck up behind you to kiss the corners where your ears met your face? Yes.
sneaked
(pet peeve of mine)

From the way you were standing, I swore you would get scoliosis. Your shoulders were slouched, neck tilted to the side. Your hips, off-kilter. Everything about your face made me smile, even the crooked frown you made when you thought too hard about taxes or music or the color blue. But now neither of us ^{*was*} were smiling or frowning. You were watching waves wash seaweed and pebbles and shells onto the shore.

↓
I stared at the cerulean blue-river-veins running under your skin, pumping your life for me to see. I saw the rough patches, the callouses and scars where you nicked yourself building our lopsided shed in the backyard under my favorite oak tree. Ten summers turned to fall while we lived in the house that used to be my parents'. We uprooted the azaleas when they grew too high, we dug into the ground and laid flagstones for a patio, a fire-pit, but we never touched the tree. It was the tree with the red bird-feeder, the one I ran into playing ball with my Dad at the age of eight. It left a scar above my eyebrow, which you found the first night you slept under the down comforter with me, rubbing your feet against mine to keep them warm.

solid gold
I saw the band around your finger from when we married at the town hall, days after Rhode Island told us we had the right. Funny isn't it? It was a small "I-do" surrounded with an extended, pretended family and none of our parents who had sucked in hate through their mothers' milk. We stood together in the town-hall, in a line next to lesbians who cried and clapped and then exchanged the rings they had made for each other out of ornate silver teaspoons.

just pose

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Days later, when I cried on the phone while my mother spewed damnation and retribution, you took my shoulder, and I felt the ring on your hand. It's a product of a generation different than ours, you said, let it go. And so I did because you taught me how to trust myself like a ship taken from its mooring, hawser reeled in and kept coiled, until I met a shore where I could cast it out and draw myself in again.

Good figurative language

You looked at me with baleful eyes steeped brown like coffee, your smile caramel. You took my hand and kissed it between the thumb and pointer because you knew ~~the secret~~ how it was my favorite place to be kissed. And then you held me close to you. Your shirt, the scent of cool smoke from our wood stove, and beyond your shoulder the sun was broken in the rippled water, leading to a thatch of reeds bending to the wind. A man landed his boat and moored it on the end of the dock. He glanced at us, once, twice, and then a third time because he thought neither I, nor you, could see his suspicion. But I did. And I didn't care.

Delete.

I pulled you closer to me and breathed you into the deepest curve of my soul, thinking the deeper I took you, the longer you would stay. You swayed with me in your arms, like the reeds in the breeze, like the boats shifting on the water. How long did we stay like that upon the dock? Was it long enough for you to remember how you came home only months before, bringing back disease that tricked our insides and ate them away until we devoured ourselves whole. When you told me you were sorry, for the first time, we sat upon a cheap set of lawn furniture, watching the trains pass on the railroad and sipping beer. I didn't blame you then, either.

What? From whom?

You don't? Why? When else did you blame him?

Good imagery.

Swans are mammals.

I pulled myself away from you and leaned on the banister of the wharf, running my thumbnail through the aged, gray wood. Odd to see swans swimming in salt water, but there they were, one floating not too far from the other. It dipped its head underwater and came up with seaweed wrapped around its bill. You kissed my neck from behind. You said you would be back

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in two months. Was it really that long? I stared into my reflection below until the ripples blurred it away. I shook my head, but I didn't respond. The space between my ears and my brain was full of to-dos, lonely doctor's visits, and long nights spent wrapped in electric blankets, waiting for the crunching of your key in the lock.

Verb choice

"clicking"

I turned from you, my feet echoing hollow and hard on the wood while I walked to our truck next to a line of neon-colored kayaks. You trailed behind, jangling keys in your hand to fill the silence left between the clanking of boats in the harbor. I climbed in, and you drove up the gravel road that bent hard like a horseshoe. ^{We watched} ~~You could see~~ the whole marina from the top. I saw your boat bobbing between two orange dinghies like tiny fish chasing a whale.

You asked me if it was okay to leave, and I couldn't tell you no.

Why? Cling to him!

Maybe compare protagonist's headache to the coarseness of the gravel.

WELL, THIS CERTAINLY PAINTS A PICTURE.

NICE NAUTICAL VOCAB.

GREAT APPROPRIATE TITLE - HE FEELS UNMOORED.

THERE'S NO REAL MENTION OF THE MILITARY.

DESCRIBE HUSBANDS IN UNIFORM.

Jen's Comments

Summary: A couple is separated by military duty.

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You kicked the dock's faded planks until splinters levigated, and the wind picked up the dust with a gentle luff. You couldn't bring your eyes to meet mine. It was the same sideways half-glance that met my eyes askance when we bore the palls of my mother's coffin four years prior.

redundant

You looked so handsome in your suit and tie, shoes shined so that you could see your own frown when you looked down into them. Remember how you told me that look meant you were sorry?

I asked ~~to~~ where you were sailing, and you said your boss was sending you out on the longest trip yet — Colombo. A place so infrequently spoken of I didn't think it was real until you ^{added:} said: Sri Lanka. You were to bring a shipment of plastic there, tea on the way back.

And the way you ran your thumb in quick circles around the button of your peacoat told me you were anxious to go. Were you? You said you had spent too much time waiting in coffeeshops and bars in this New England port town while the fall turned to winter and then to spring again. I didn't blame you.

was he a waiter?
or was he waiting
for his next
job?

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You said you would miss welcoming the morning rain and the smell of roasted coffee after we let blankets collect by our ankles. You, thinking about the sandpapery feel of my beard on your chest while I laid next to you at night, pawing at your arms and broad tattooed shoulders to ensure I wasn't alone again. Would I miss your warm chuckle when I snuck up behind you to kiss the corners where your ears met your face? Yes.

From the way you were standing, I swore you ^{had} ~~would get~~ scoliosis. Your shoulders were slouched, neck tilted to the side. Your hips, off-kilter. Everything about your face made me smile, even the crooked frown you made when you thought too hard about taxes or music or the color blue. But now neither of us were smiling or frowning. You were watching waves wash seaweed and pebbles and shells onto the shore.

I stared at the cerulean blue-river-veins running under your skin, pumping your life for me to see. I saw the rough patches, the callouses and scars where you nicked yourself building our lopsided shed in the backyard under my favorite oak tree. Ten summers turned to fall while we lived in the house that used to be my parents. We uprooted the azaleas when they grew too high, ~~we~~ dug into the ground and laid flagstones for a patio, a fire-pit, but we never touched the tree. It was the tree with the red bird-feeder, the one I ran into playing ball with my Dad at the age of eight. It left a scar above my eyebrow, which you found the first night you slept under the down comforter with me, rubbing your feet against mine to keep them warm.

I saw the band around your finger from when we married at the town hall, days after Rhode Island told us we had the right. Funny isn't it? It was a small "I-do" surrounded ^{by} ~~with~~ an extended, pretended family, and none of our parents who had sucked in hate through their mothers' milk. We stood together in the town-hall, in a line next to lesbians who cried and clapped and then exchanged the rings they had made for each other out of ornate silver teaspoons.

Symbolism
again
great!

I think you
should move
these
slimpies
into their
life. These
are what
make me
care
about them

move
this
up!

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You looked at me with baleful eyes steeped brown like coffee, your smile caramel. You took my hand and kissed it between the thumb and pointer because you knew the secret — how it was my favorite place to be kissed. And then you held me close to you. Your shirt, the scent of cool smoke from our wood stove, and beyond your shoulder the sun was broken in the rippled water, leading to a thatch of reeds bending to the wind. A man landed his boat and moored it on the end of the dock. He glanced at us, once, twice, and then a third time because he thought neither I, nor you, could see his suspicion. But I did. And I didn't care.

I pulled you closer to me and breathed you into the deepest curve of my soul, thinking the deeper I took you, the longer you would stay. You swayed with me in your arms, like the reeds in the breeze, like the boats shifting on the water. How long did we stay like that upon the dock? Was it long enough for you to remember how you came home only months before, bringing back disease that tricked our insides and ate them away until we devoured ourselves whole. When you told me you were sorry, for the first time, we sat upon a cheap set of lawn furniture, watching the trains pass on the railroad and sipping beer. I didn't blame you then, either. *was there a betrayal?*

I pulled myself away from you and leaned on the banister of the wharf, running my thumbnail through the aged, gray wood. Odd to see swans swimming in salt water, but there they were, one floating not too far from the other. It dipped its head underwater and came up with seaweed wrapped around its bill. You kissed my neck from behind. You said you would be back

EPISODE 17: SHORT STORY (COMPLETE) – LITERARY: *HAWERS* BY SAMUEL SIMAS

in two months. Was it really that long? I stared into my reflection below until the ripples blurred it away. I shook my head, but I didn't respond. The space between my ears and my brain was full of to-dos, lonely doctor's visits, and long nights spent wrapped in electric blankets, waiting for the crunching of your key in the lock.

I turned from you, my feet echoing hollow and hard on the wood while I walked to our truck next to a line of neon-colored kayaks. You trailed behind, jangling keys in your hand to fill the silence left between the clanking of boats in the harbor. I climbed in, and you drove up the gravel road that bent hard like a horseshoe. You could see the whole marina from the top. I saw your boat bobbing between two orange dinghies like tiny fish chasing a whale.

You asked me if it was okay to leave, and I couldn't tell you no.

The language is lovely. It reads like poetry.
Your voice is strong & distinct and I felt the love and the heartbreak of these characters.

Your story is 3 1/2 pages but the first 1 1/2 pages are mostly describing body language. I love the way you weave in the glimpses of their life together. Move this up in the story. These are what make me care. If I don't know this couple, why would I care if they are separated. ~~Let me see them~~ Help me get to know them earlier in the story.

It's interesting that you tell the story as one character telling the other character, even though they both already know the story since they were both there. Makes me think he died on his way to or from Sri Lanka. This isn't a criticism. I do think it was a unique way to tell it.

Great imagery. Good use of all 5 senses. Great setting.
Good transitions between present + past.

Ed

Summary: A couple is separated by military duty.

- I like the way you move the focus both in time + location

* 10/10 for vocabulary!
- but maybe too much

I don't think sails & hawsers clink

You took me to the end of a dock where furl[ed] sails and hawsers clink[ed] nautical concertos on metal. Between beats you told me you were leaving, and I watched you scratch your brown beard in the sunlight, massaging the words like lather around your mouth. The gulls stopped screaming, and I heard your heart thump behind the cloud of your breath. Boats undulated on the water, and I kneaded the tendrils of muscles in my arm, shifting my weight from right foot to left.

You kicked the dock's faded planks until splinters levigated and the wind picked up the

dust with a gentle luff. You couldn't bring your eyes to meet mine. It was the same sideways half-

glance that met my eyes askance when we bore the palls of my mother's coffin four years prior.

You looked so handsome in your suit and tie, shoes shined so that you could see your own frown when you looked down into them. Remember how you told me that look meant you were sorry?

I asked you where you were sailing, and you said your boss was sending you out on the longest trip yet — Colombo. A place so infrequently spoken of I didn't think it was real until you said: Sri Lanka. You were to bring a shipment of plastic there, tea on the way back.

And the way you ran your thumb in quick circles around the button of your peacoat told me you were anxious to go. Were you? You said you had spent too much time waiting in coffeeshops and bars in this New England port town while the fall turned to winter and then to spring again. I didn't blame you.

extremely unusual for a son to carry mother's coffin

? not the right word

? obscure

I don't think this is what mean: cloth please, no!

? winter

- be careful w/ tenses, it's in the past, anything before "now" is past perfect (had)

- this captures a moment, be very careful what adds to or takes away from that moment. vocabulary you have to look up

EPISODE 17: SHORT STORY (COMPLETE) – LITERARY: *HAWSERS* BY SAMUEL SIMAS

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how does narrator know?

* mood killer

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* usually?

* isn't he dressed?

veins don't pump

I stared at the cerulean blue-river-veins running under your skin, pumping your life for me to see. I saw the rough patches, the callouses and scars where you nicked yourself building our lopsided shed in the backyard under my favorite oak tree. Ten summers turned to fall while we lived in the house that used to be my parents'. We uprooted the azaleas when they grew too high, we dug into the ground and laid flagstones for a patio, a fire-pit, but we never touched the tree. It was the tree with the red bird-feeder, the one I ran into playing ball with my Dad at the age of eight. It left a scar above my eyebrow, which you found the first night you slept under the down comforter with me, rubbing your feet against mine to keep them warm.

why?

where?

2
scar above eyebrow not hard to spot

I saw the band around your finger from when we married at the Town Hall, days after Rhode Island told us we had the right. Funny isn't it? It was a small "I-do" surrounded with an extended, pretended family and none of our parents who had sucked in hate through their mothers' milk. We stood together in the town hall, in a line next to lesbians who cried and clapped and then exchanged the rings they had made for each other out of ornate silver teaspoons.

by

with?

two?

EPISODE 17: SHORT STORY (COMPLETE) – LITERARY: *HAWSERS* BY SAMUEL SIMAS

Days later, when I cried on the phone while ^{so this is more than 4 years ago} my mother spewed damnation and retribution, you took my shoulder, and I felt the ring on your hand. It's a product of a generation different than ours, you said, let it go. And so I did because you taught me how to trust myself like a ship taken from its mooring, hawser reeled in and kept coiled, until I met a shore where I could cast it out and draw myself in again. ^{from}

^{baton the dock?} You looked at me with baleful eyes steeped brown like coffee, ^{negative connotations} [your smile caramel]. You took my hand and kissed it between the thumb and pointer because you knew the secret — how it was my favorite place to be kissed. And then you held me close to you. Your shirt, the scent of ^{he is dressed?} cool smoke from our wood stove, and beyond your shoulder the sun was broken in the rippled water, leading to a thatch of reeds bending to the wind. A man landed his boat and moored it on the end of the dock. He glanced at us, once, twice, and then a third time because he thought neither I nor you could see his suspicion. But I did. And I didn't care.

I pulled you closer to me and breathed you into the deepest curve of my soul, thinking the deeper I took you, the longer you would stay. You swayed with me in your arms, like the reeds in the breeze, like the boats shifting on the water. How long did we stay like that upon the dock? Was it long enough for you to remember how you ^{id come} came home only months before, bringing back disease that ^{what is? "that led"?} [tricked our insides] and [ate them away] until [we devoured ourselves whole]. When you told me you were sorry, for the first time, we sat upon a cheap set of lawn furniture, watching the trains pass on the railroad and sipping beer. I didn't blame you then, either. ^{staircase: rail?}

I pulled myself away from you and leaned on the banister of the wharf, running my thumbnail through the aged, gray wood. Odd to see swans swimming in salt water, but there they were, one floating not too far from the other. It dipped its head underwater and came up with seaweed wrapped around its bill. You kissed my neck from behind. You said you would be back

EPISODE 17: SHORT STORY (COMPLETE) – LITERARY: *HAWSERS* BY SAMUEL SIMAS

in two months. ^{would?} Was it really that long? I stared into my reflection below until the ripples blurred it away. I shook my head, but I didn't respond. The space ^{huh?} between my ears and my brain was full of ^{Alexis m} to-dos, lonely doctor's visits, and long nights spent wrapped in electric blankets, waiting for the crunching of your key in the lock.

I turned from you, my feet echoing hollow and hard on the wood while I walked to our truck next to a line of neon-colored kayaks. You trailed behind, jangling keys in your hand to fill the silence left between the clanking of boats in the harbor. I climbed in, and you drove up the gravel road that bent ^{uh...} hard ^{we?} like a horseshoe. You could see the whole marina from the top. I saw your boat bobbing between two orange dinghies like tiny fish chasing a whale. ✓

You asked me if it was okay to leave, and I couldn't tell you no.

- unhappy
- sad
- unfortunate

first time noticing?

DAVE

You've chosen the most difficult of all literary writing: the emotions that everyone understands, but can't get into words. You have the end of a longer story, here. We are told by many extended metaphors, that these two people are in love and, due to circumstances beyond their control, are forced to separate for an extended period of time – two months. Actually, there are some examples that I pointed out, that don't come across as truly a case of crossed lovers. Then there's the sub-text of resentment about the others who are not accepting of same-sex marriages. This is another topic that deserves a first-hand story of its own.

Finally, I'd like to see this as the end of a longer piece where I'd feel, rather than be told, that theirs is the love that they've been waiting for and have to separate, but they will be okay – if you love something...;

Summary: A couple is separated by military duty.

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EPIISODE 17: SHORT STORY (COMPLETE) – LITERARY: *HAWSERS* BY SAMUEL SIMAS

on the water, and I kneaded the tendrils of muscles in my arm, shifting my weight from right foot to left. *This first paragraph needs to be toned down. Don't be afraid to just tell the story without sounding "writerly." There is enough emotion in this that comes through. Try to avoid exaggerated analogies.*

You kicked the dock's faded planks until splinters levigated(?) and the wind picked up the dust with a gentle luff. You couldn't bring your eyes to meet mine. It was the same sideways half-glance that met my eyes askance when we bore the palls of my mother's coffin four years prior. You looked so handsome in your suit and tie, shoes shined so that you could see your own frown when you looked down into them. Remember how you told me that look meant you were sorry? *(Nice paragraph. You've captured the extent of the expression through the supreme situation that elicits grief. On second thought, this might be a distraction to the main thrust of emotion. Tough call on this one.)*

(I asked to where you were sailing, and you said your boss was sending you out on the longest trip yet — Colombo.) *This sentence needs more of an explanation. When did you ask? When did he answer? Under what circumstances)* A place so infrequently spoken of I didn't think it was real until you said: Sri Lanka. You were to bring a shipment of plastic there, tea on the way back.

Switching from past to present. Needs a transitional word or two. And the way you ran your thumb in quick circles around the button of your peacoat told me you were anxious to go. Were you? You said you had spent too much time waiting in coffeeshops and bars in this New England port town while the fall turned to winter and then to spring again. I didn't blame you.

You said you would miss welcoming the morning rain and the smell of roasted coffee after we let blankets collect by our ankles. *(Kind of insincere. Suggests missing coffee and a role in the*

hay and not you.) You, thinking about the sandpapery feel of my beard on your chest while I laid *(lay)* next to you at night, pawing at your arms and broad tattooed shoulders to ensure I wasn't alone again. Would I miss your warm chuckle when I snuck up behind you to kiss the corners where your ears met your face? Yes.

From the way you were ^{when?} standing, I swore you would get scoliosis. Your shoulders were slouched, neck tilted to the side. Your hips, off-kilter. Everything about your face made me smile, even the crooked frown you made *(as)* when you thought too hard about taxes or music or the color blue. But now neither of us were smiling or frowning. (You were watching waves wash seaweed and pebbles and shells onto the shore.) *delete*

(I stared at the cerulean blue-river-veins running under your skin, pumping your life for me to see. I saw the rough patches, the callouses and scars where you nicked yourself building our lopsided shed in the backyard under my favorite oak tree. Ten summers turned to fall while we lived in the house that used to be my parents. We uprooted the azaleas when they grew too high, we dug into the ground and laid flagstones for a patio, a fire-pit, but we never touched the tree. It was the tree with the red bird-feeder, the one I ran into playing ball with my Dad at the age of eight. It left a scar above my eyebrow, which you found the first night you slept under the down comforter with me, rubbing your feet against mine to keep them warm.

The next two paragraphs have a different tone. More bitter or angry. I wonder if the story has two purposes. 1. To examine a romantic separation. 2. To open up the topic of same sex marriages and the bitterness and anger these couples run into. Both topics are worthy. I wonder if the two are compatible in the same piece.

I saw the band around your finger from when we married at the town hall, days after Rhode Island told us we had the right. Funny isn't it? It was a small "I-do" surrounded with an

EPISODE 17: SHORT STORY (COMPLETE) – LITERARY: *HAWSERS* BY SAMUEL SIMAS

extended, pretended family and none of our parents who had sucked in hate through their mothers' milk. We stood together in the town-hall, in a line next to lesbians who cried and clapped and then exchanged the rings they had made for each other out of ornate silver teaspoons.

Days later, when I cried on the phone while my mother spewed damnation and retribution, you took my shoulder, and I felt the ring on your hand. It's a product of a generation different than ours, you said, let it go. And so I did because you taught me how to trust myself like a ship taken from its mooring, hawser reeled in and kept coiled, until I met a shore where I could cast it out and draw myself in again.

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I pulled you closer to me and breathed you into the deepest curve of my soul, thinking the deeper I took you, the longer you would stay. You swayed with me in your arms, (like the reeds in the breeze, like the boats shifting on the water.) *overwritten. Just tell the story.* How long did we stay like that upon the dock? Was it long enough for you to remember how you came home only months before, bringing back disease that tricked our insides and ate them away until we devoured

EPISODE 17: SHORT STORY (COMPLETE) – LITERARY: *HAWSEERS* BY SAMUEL SIMAS

ourselves whole. When you told me you were sorry, for the first time, we sat upon a cheap set of lawn furniture, watching the trains pass on the railroad and sipping beer. I didn't blame you then, either. *No matter what is said about the disease, there is still a sense of resentment.*

Return to present. Needs a transition. I pulled myself away from you and leaned on the banister of the wharf, running my thumbnail through the aged, gray wood. Odd to see swans swimming in salt water, but there they were, one floating not too far from the other. It dipped its head underwater and came up with seaweed wrapped around its bill. You kissed my neck from behind. You said you would be back in two months. Was it really that long? I stared into my reflection below until the ripples blurred it away. I shook my head, but I didn't respond. The space between my ears and my brain was full of to-dos, lonely doctor's visits, and long nights spent wrapped in electric blankets, waiting for the crunching of your key in the lock.

I turned from you, my feet echoing hollow and hard on the wood while I walked to our truck next to a line of neon-colored kayaks. You trailed behind, jangling keys in your hand to fill the silence left between the clanking of boats in the harbor. I climbed in, and you drove up the gravel road that bent hard like a horseshoe. You could see the whole marina from the top. I saw your boat bobbing between two orange dinghies like tiny fish chasing a whale.

You asked me if it was okay to leave, and I couldn't tell you no. *Sad but inevitable ending!*

EPISODE 17: SHORT STORY (COMPLETE) – LITERARY: *HAWSERS* BY SAMUEL SIMAS

Summary: A couple is separated by military duty.

You took me to the end of a dock where furling sails and hawsers clinked nautical concertos on metal. Between beats, you told me you were leaving, and I watched you scratch your brown beard in the sunlight, massaging the words like lather around your mouth. The gulls stopped screaming, and I heard your heart thump behind the cloud of your breath. Boats undulated on the water, and I kneaded the tendrils of muscles in my arm, shifting my weight from right foot to left.

Commented [s1]: I had to look this up (a thick rope or cable for mooring or towing a ship).

You kicked the dock's faded planks until splinters levigated and the wind picked up the dust with a gentle luff. You couldn't bring your eyes to meet mine. It was the same sideways half-glance that met my eyes askance when we bore the palls of my mother's coffin four years prior. You looked so handsome in your suit and tie, shoes shined so that you could see your own frown when you looked down into them. Remember how you told me that look meant you were sorry?

Commented [s2]: In the last two sentences, although I think the sentences are quite good, I think they all have the same structure. Read it out loud and listen. It's good to vary the length of your sentences.

I asked to where you were sailing, and you said your boss was sending you out on the longest trip yet — Colombo — A place so infrequently spoken of that I didn't think it was real until you said: Sri Lanka. You were to bring a shipment of plastic there, tea on the way back.

Commented [s3]: At this point, I'd like to be right there with you. Show us what's going on by changing this to dialogue, and disperse the description within that scene.

And the way you ran your thumb in quick circles around the button of your peacoat told me you were anxious to go. Were you? You said you had spent too much time waiting in coffee shops and bars in this New England port town while the fall turned to winter and then to spring again. I didn't blame you.

Commented [s4]: This doesn't really hint of military service, just a job that requires him to leave.

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You said you would miss welcoming the morning rain and the smell of roasted coffee after we let blankets collect by our ankles. You, thinking about the sandpaper feel of my beard on your chest while I laid next to you at night, pawing at your arms and broad tattooed shoulders to ensure I wasn't alone again. Would I miss your warm chuckle when I snuck up behind you to kiss the corners where your ears met your face? Yes.

nice imagery

Commented [s5]: Again, dialogue in this paragraph. Then you can switch to the protagonist's thoughts.

From the way you were standing, I swore you would get scoliosis. Your shoulders were slouched, neck tilted to the side. Your hips, off-kilter. Everything about your face made me smile, even the crooked frown you made when you thought too hard about taxes or music or the color blue. But now neither of us were smiling or frowning. You were watching waves wash seaweed and pebbles and shells onto the shore.

I stared at the cerulean blue-river-veins running under your skin, pumping your life for me to see. I saw the rough patches, the callouses and scars where you nicked yourself building our lopsided shed in the backyard under my favorite oak tree. Ten summers turned to fall while we lived in the house that used to be my parents. We uprooted the azaleas when they grew too high, we dug into the ground and laid flagstones for a patio, a fire-pit, but we never touched the tree. It was the tree with the red bird-feeder, the one I ran into playing ball with my Dad at the age of eight. It left a scar above my eyebrow, which you found the first night you slept under the down comforter with me, rubbing your feet against mine to keep them warm.

I saw the band around your finger from when we married at the town hall, days after Rhode Island told us we had the right. Funny, isn't it? It was a small "I-do" surrounded with an extended, pretended family and none of our parents who had sucked in hate through their mothers' milk. We stood together in the town-hall, in a line next to lesbians who cried and clapped and then exchanged the rings they had made for each other out of ornate silver teaspoons.

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Days later, when I cried on the phone while my mother spewed damnation and retribution, you took my shoulder, and I felt the ring on your hand. It's a product of a generation different than ours, you said, let it go. And so I did because you taught me how to trust myself like a ship taken from its mooring, hawser reeled in and kept coiled, until I met a shore where I could cast it out and draw myself in again.

Commented [s6]: good

You looked at me with baleful eyes steeped brown like coffee, your smile caramel. You took my hand and kissed it between the thumb and pointer because you knew the secret — how it was my favorite place to be kissed. And then you held me close to you. Your shirt, the scent of cool smoke from our wood stove, and beyond your shoulder the sun was broken in the rippled water, leading to a thatch of reeds bending to the wind. A man landed his boat and moored it on the end of the dock. He glanced at us, once, twice, and then a third time because he thought neither I, nor you, could see his suspicion. But I did. And I didn't care.

I pulled you closer to me and breathed you into the deepest curve of my soul, thinking the deeper I took you, the longer you would stay. You swayed with me in your arms, like the reeds in the breeze, like the boats shifting on the water. How long did we stay like that upon the dock? Was it long enough for you to remember how you came home only months before, bringing back disease that tricked our insides and ate them away until we devoured ourselves whole. When you told me you were sorry, for the first time, we sat upon a cheap set of lawn furniture, watching the trains pass on the railroad and sipping beer. I didn't blame you then, either.

I pulled myself away from you and leaned on the banister of the wharf, running my thumbnail through the aged, gray wood. Odd to see swans swimming in salt water, but there they were, one floating not too far from the other. It dipped its head underwater and came up with seaweed wrapped around its bill. You kissed my neck from behind. You said you would be back

Is he worried that his husband will cheat again?

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in two months. Was it really that long? I stared into my reflection below until the ripples blurred it away. I shook my head, but I didn't respond. The space between my ears and my brain was full of to-dos, lonely doctor's visits, and long nights spent wrapped in electric blankets, waiting for the crunching of your key in the lock.

I turned from you, my feet echoing hollow and hard on the wood while I walked to our truck next to a line of neon-colored kayaks. You trailed behind, jangling keys in your hand to fill the silence left between the clanking of boats in the harbor. I climbed in, and you drove up the gravel road that bent hard like a horseshoe. You could see the whole marina from the top. I saw your boat bobbing between two orange dinghies like tiny fish chasing a whale.

You asked me if it was okay to leave, and I couldn't tell you no.

Beautiful language, and a lovely story. I'd feel more involved, though, if some of this were immediate. Not just telling us how the conversations went, but actually bringing them alive on the page. I'd keep the description, but again, I'd disperse it within bouts of dialogue. I'm also not sure of what happened here. Did his husband cheat on him, perhaps infect them both with AIDS? You don't necessarily have to spell it out, and I don't have to know, but I'm curious.