

SUBMULOC

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He felt trapped by the Western horizon, as he knew most of what was beyond the hills beyond it, and the rest of it was so densely covered by trees and impassable mountains that it closed you in. He felt invited into the Infinity of the Eastern one that set on the big waters that had no land on the other side. His name was Submuloc, a man with strong arms, trustable eyes and, according to some, a strange mind which frustrated others almost as much as it frustrated himself.

It wasn't so much that Submuloc was disrespectful of the Elders, but that he knew in his Innermost heart that they were wrong, and that the Elder he trusted most, Dnanidref, said that the Inner Most Heart and Mind must be honored above all things. Most of his tribe loved to share stories around the campfires about the origins of the Sun. That ball of fire that rose in the East with fresh brilliance which was beyond color and set in the West with a subdued presence that let even his brother, Lazy Eyes, clearly see the many colors which it illuminated on the lands that Submuloc and his people had belonged to for as long as anyone could remember.

Year after year, Submuloc would look over the great water to where the Sun rose, drawn into the cold, empty and scary space beyond the horizon, while his people warmed themselves around the campfires on the beach, preparing for the day's fishing. Snails and clams abounded in the sand. The ponds left behind by tides were plentiful with lobsters. The larger ponds protected by the rocks from the waves always had fish in them, small stupid ones mostly. The bigger fish always seemed to swim beyond the rocks into the open water. Year after year, Submuloc wondered what was beyond the horizon, where there were giant fish, and perhaps giant lands that were not cluttered with trees. Where you could go in any direction without a mountain, forest or rapidly moving river saying 'go on the path around me'.

"You know, I'd wager a pair of my best moccasins that if I take a canoe that can get through the waves, I can sail to the Sun, and the Big Open beyond it. And that there are lands there that can be ours for the taking," he said while preparing the nets and spears for another day of lobster gathering and bass jabbing. "There is a whole other world in the place where the Sun rises."

"Which can and only should be visited by Spirits," Lazy Eyes replied, his mind on the patch of leather he stitched onto the hole in the canoe, still ignoring the bright light in the sky which he said hurt his eyes when he looked at it. "You know what happens to people who try to find that land where the Sun rises? They get eaten by monsters, or their canoe falls down a big waterfall that leads to..."

Lazy Eyes could not say the word, which had a special bite to it in his Native language. It was the name of a bad place. A place where people who violated the rules of the Elders and the Laws of the Creator went to and never came back from. Submuloc wanted to talk with his half-brother about that place, and about the relationship he had, or should be having, with the Creator. The Great Spirit Who seemed to be able to do more than just 'create'. But 'Creator' was the name everyone in the tribe gave to It, and to speak of any other function the Great Spirit did was to be considered slow, stupid or dangerous.

Submuloc looked at the woods he had played in as a boy, then the canoe builders who were carving out another craft. One with room for six men, or four strong women, to paddle. The wind hit his face, reminding him again of the idea he had come up with three children and two wives ago. "If we put a large piece of leather on the canoe, the wind will take us where we need to go!" he asserted to Lazy Eyes.

"And if the wind blows in another direction?" the more-muscle-than-mind fisherman whose eyes always seemed to look in two directions at once replied.

"I have thought of that," Submuloc countered, re-enacting the experiment he had proven to himself as effective but not the canoe makers who decided what kind of boats were used for fishing, or anything else. "You move the leather sheet with the wind and move against it. Weaving in and out of the wind like a snake."

"And going against it, brother," Lazy Eyes shot back, having repaired the hole in the canoe they would be responsible for during the fish 'hunt'. "It is witchcraft."

"And a way to get from here to..."

Lazy Eyes sang a childhood song. Simple words about a moth who wanted to become a butterfly but who got his wings burnt when he flew too close to the Sun. It drowned out having to hear the plans Submuloc had in his head. And to go along with them. By way of a needed reminder, Lazy Eyes drew Submuloc's attention to a woman and three young girls repairing the nets.

"I know, my wife and what is left of my family," Submuloc said and he smiled hello to them with eyes that were clearly elsewhere. "You will take care of them when I am gone?"

"Of course, brother Submuloc. But where are you going?"

Submuloc took a deep breath and looked at the Eastern horizon. The sun had risen, taking its rightful place in the sky. With his inner eye saw something underneath it. A place where his people would be safe from warrior raids, plagues and the 'challenges' the Creator provided through the natural Elements themselves.

Each year on the coast was harder than the last. “Bad years make us stronger, and we have been blessed by being very strong,” he remembered Elder Dnanidref saying each year as his hearing got worse, his skin got tougher and his walk became as slow as a crawl. But one thing Submuloc did remember from the Elder who spoke so little words but said so much. “The source of all Life comes from the Sun.” To most of the Rampapo, it was said to take their minds off the wind, wompom they lost when gambling, or the disappointing night of sex they had with their new bride, or groom, on the eve of their wedding. But to those who really listened, like Submuloc, it meant much more.

Dnaridref sat alone on his tree stump, carving the kind of canoe no one had ever seen, at least not Submuloc. In his prime Dnardref was the best canoe builder in the tribe, and sometimes even the fastest, but others around him were offended when he built faster and bigger canoes than they could. But now, all the Old Man could do was make canoes that children could play with, or men who decided they still had childlike possibilities could admire. The Elder’s hair was now pure white, and had started to fall out. He would forget at mid day what he had eaten in the morning, and sometimes the people who had spoken him that same day. But with respect to what had happened in his past, and the past of his beloved people, he was never sharper.

“Tell me about this canoe,” Submuloc said of the carved gift the Elder with the shaking hands but steady Soul gave to him.

Dnaradref related the tale again, the third time that morning. Each telling seemed fresh, and perhaps was from the Old Man’s perspective. And when Submuloc suggested a leather sheet to catch the wind, the blasphemous suggestion was acknowledged with a smile. “Yes, it will work. If you can keep the canoe on top of the water.”

“Yes, I know, I’ve been practicing.”

“When your wife wasn’t looking?”

“And when my children weren’t watching either,” Submuloc answered, a bit shamefully. “None of them have my spirit for adventure. Is that not something that is passed down from father to son, or father to daughter?”

The Old Man laughed. “Such things are passed down by ways which are quite mystical, or accidental.”

The ocean seemed to turn abruptly angry. The waves were as tall as one or perhaps two men. But there were times when the waves calmed down to the stillness of a windless lake, the Sun in the East shining with warm Brilliance. A temptation to those who considered the Creator a protective father to his children. An invitation to those who sought and felt a relationship with the Creator which was beyond the boundaries of

human fatherhood, motherhood, or any other kind of 'hood' which limited the human mind, and the Perspectives of Spirit.

The Old Man took in a deep breath that felt more like a rattle than Brother Wind entering the chest and handed him the carving of the canoe. "Two sheets to catch the wind, and room to bring back what you must from the land under the Sun. For the sake of our people on this side of the waters, and those on the other side, we must be the first." he said the younger man.

Submuloc held in his hand a model of a canoe which had never been built before. One which he knew now he had to build himself. And one which he had to take to the people on the other side of the waters. For the sake of all people.

Submuloc knew he would have to sleep sometime on the journey to the Big Open over the Eastern horizon, and that when you go to sleep, the demons can take over your soul. Or the Earth Mother would have the Sea Spirits send you where you didn't want to go. Though he wanted to make the trip across the Waters alone, Submuloc knew he couldn't. His wife couldn't swim. His daughters all hated the water.

Submuloc considered using the Slaves the tribe had captured in other raids in better times, now referred to as servants. But these servants valued their own lives of servitude more than the opportunity for freedom in the Big Open offered them if they took the journey. The children were too young, the Elders too old. But the large canoe which he now called a 'pihs' was finished, the leather sheets he now called 'slais' standing tall in the wind. .

"If this were only thirty summers ago, and Dnardref was still young, he would be the one to go on this journey with," Submuloc said to himself, drenched with exhaustion after putting the third layer of sap over the bottom of the craft he had finished constructing. His ears could hear animals he knew were not in the woods, or the sandgrasses. His eyes saw clouds which materialized out of dark sky. The moon above split into three, the faces in each laughing at him.

"I know what I am doing!" Submuloc screamed at the sky. "There is big, wide, open land where the sun rises, and I will discover a way to it. The sea takes more of our sand each year, and puts it there. It is the destiny of my people to find that sand and reclaim it, as ours! Then to claim whatever else is there, for our children, their children and the Great Spirit which is greater than any image the Elders say It is! A Spirit which is..."

A Spirit materialized, one which did have very human form. Emerging from the fog was Dnanidref. His face still old, but his eyes now very young. "A Spirit which requires us to do what some say are transgressions, in Its service," hi said.

“I thought you were...dead,” Subuloc said after confirming with his hands that the illusion of the Elder was indeed real.

“I needed everyone here to think I was dead,” he replied. “I thank you for honoring my ‘last request’ when I died.”

“Taking your body out into the woods and laying it at the head of Stone Mountain,” Submuloc replied. “Your breath was...gone.”

“It was sleeping, my young friend?”

“As maybe I am now, my Old illusion?”

The old man looked at the craft the younger one had built. He nodded with admiration at the rudder in the back, the sticks in the middle and the slais which would capture the wind. “I saw Visions of this canoe, you discovered Visions of how to capture the wind.”

“Which will take me where?”

“Will take US, you mean,” Dnaaidref asserted, pointing to the Eastern horizon .

The journey across the ocean was...long. Lots of water. Lots of horizons whose bigness alternated between being scary and inviting. When the wind was behind them, Submuloc used the hides attached to the stick in the middle of the craft to move them forward. When the wind blew into them, Dnanidref was somehow able to rotate it so that the craft zigzagged ahead. When there was no wind, they dipped oars into the waters and pushed their way towards the Big Open on the other side of the horizon.

Submuloc found himself thinking about the comforts of claustrophobia in the land he left behind rather than the bigness of open he had committed himself to. He missed his loving children, and even his nagging wife. He hoped that Lazy Eyes would keep an eye, and ear, on them. Lazy Eyes was not the smartest of men, but he was the most loyal. Most importantly, he could enjoy the ‘simple’ pleasures with Submuloc’s family. Submuloc always thought about tomorrows and what was over the horizon. Better that Lazy Eyes become more than an Uncle to his daughters and a brother in law to his wife. Below Sumbuloc were fish. Big ones that enjoyed the open ocean on its terms. They were not limited to staying on top of the water.

Sumbuloc asked Dnanidref on many occasions why Mother Nature would create a body of water so spacious and big that men could not drink from, but fish could live in. Yes, there were some fish you could catch from the water, but they left you thirsty.

Submuloc wondered what his leg would taste like. That appendage was going numb with the cold and the heat, and now seemed appetizing to his hungry belly. It would keep his

brain and eyes alive, and most importantly, keep Dnanidref going. If anyone deserved to see with his eyes what his heart felt on the Eastern Horizon it was Dnanidref. The old man seemed to have lived his entire life for that dream, putting everything off till he could make this journey, liberated from his obligations to the tribe by his self-fabricated death. This 'afterlife' enabled the old man to smile in ways he never did as a younger one.

But today there was a sorrow in his voice. "The end of our struggles will be tomorrow," he said, somberly. "And when struggle ends, so does life, my son."

Dnanidref hugged Submuloc like a father, brother, and friend. A tear flowed down his cheek, after which he pulled up a blanket and went to sleep. Submuloc watched the horizon for the rest of the night, waiting till dawn. The night felt eternal. His stomach churned, his heart ached, his eyes grew painful and tired. Finally, the sun rose, and blinded him, as it revealed all of the open ahead. It was the first time the Light did that. It would have been easy to hide his eyes, go back behind the shadows, and even turn the boat around for home, but there was no choice but to look up. Beneath the sun was something solid. Blue, green and...brown, with a fog which had a color he had never seen before, the smell of something that offended his nose, and smelled like death.

A seagull landed aboard the front of the craft, its wings coated with blood of many colors, squawking something in its own language to a confounded and aroused Submuloc.

"Land," Dnanidref translated, picking up on the bird's significance and perhaps message. "Land!" he exclaimed with glee, his ancient and decrepit legs leaping up and down on the ship like a boy who caught his first fish. "The land beyond the horizon, my son!"

The gull flew away, joining a flock. The flock led the way to a pile of debris on the water and finally a shoreline that was more open than forested. Birds feasted on this wide open stretch of land. Upon landing the canoe, and feeling solid ground for the first time in more days than Submuloc could count, he looked closely at what the birds were eating. The entrée was human legs and arms. Desert were heads containing eyes of those who had died terrified and confused. Half of the heads had hair growing on the faces. All bore skin that was pale white, except for portions of it that were speckled with red spots, like barnacles. Submuloc was overcome by the both the big, wide expanses of the treeless hills as much as he was by the dead bodies on the beach. But what aroused him to terror was the wind.

"This is how ghosts talk," Dnanidref assured the young discoverer of the Big Open on the other side of the Eastern Horizon. "But where there is death, there is also life."

"What kind of life?" Submuloc asked.

"The kind we must know about. And tell our children about, son."

Submuloc's father was a kind enough man, but he feared Dnanidref, telling his boy to learn to fish and hunt rather than to dream or to build things that had no defined use in the daily lives of just...living. Dnanidref had carved things in wood that no one in the tribe had ever seen, or could understand, and to be fair, could probably not even use. But it was useful to Dnanidref to carve such things. Such as, right now, a dragon head to put on the front of the boat, along with a cross with a man laying on it.

"It will protect us, and the boat," the Old Man said by way of explanation for the most recent carving he had done, finally revealing it to Submuloc.

Before Dnanidref could begin the ceremony, he, Submuloc and the birds heard he heard the rantings of of angry people over the Eastern horizon. An Eastern horizon that now seemed more cloastrophic than any Western one Submuloc had ever stared into as the birds flew away from it, screeching something to the flock down the beach. "I think they're suggesting that we hide the boat," the young man said to the older one.

"Yes, I know," Dnanidref replied, pointing to a cave as the tide came rolling in, the surf coming up with waves that would show little mercy for a craft build only to travel two days away from shore back home over gentle waters.

Submuloc and Dnanidref carried their craft into a shallow hole in one of the small hills and covered it with brush gathered from the outside. "Be sure to put these bushes around it in the way Nature says," Dnanidref advised. "Not in a line with no curves or an angle that crossed itself unnaturally,"

"Straight line? Right angle? What are you talking about?" Submuloc asked Dnanidref as they ducked for cover.

The Old Man, poised on top of a hill, pointed out to the young one to something on the other side of it. It was a village where people where living in small boxes, the sides of which has sharp angles to each other. Every implement they were holding or using had sharp angles to it, especially the long ones with sharp shiny heads on them. "They seem stupid," Submuloc said. "Don't they know that a spear that keeps the curve of the tree will find its way to more fish?"

"Maybe they make spears like this because they are designed to kill people, and not catch fish," Dnanidref replied. He directing Submuloc's attention to a row of women whose hair was being cut off by shiny sharp paired knives that left blood marks on their heads. They were tied up on stakes, men and women with right angle crosses around their necks yelling something angry their way.

"They seem like gentle women, tied to the stakes about to get burned. With eyes like....Healers," Submuloc said to Dnanidref.

“Which is why they will be burned in those fires, or cut into pieces for the birds to eat, Great Spirit help us. Like we used to do, in the old, ancient times when...”

“When what?”

“It was a long time ago. We were a primitive and savage people. But we are much smarter than that now. Great Spirit willing.”

In the gesture of prayers for the dead, and dying, Dnanidref picked up a flick of grass from the ground and broke it up with his hands. He spread it to the wind. That wind which was foul with excrement, burning poisons, and roasted flesh, coming from the village where all the straight lines and right angles had replaced any natural curves. Dwellings crammed so close together that there was barely room to walk, when there was so much space around the village that one could live in. The better fed people wearing more jewelry than the others were the most miserable, and seemed to make life miserable for those around them. They chanted, moaned, and carted things around which looked like sleds with a circular piece of wood on both sides of it.

“It seems to make moving the sleds around easier,” Submuloc said.

“As long as the ground is flat,” Dnanidref commented regarding the grassless, lifeless and very hard ‘ground’ upon which the village was built. True to his word, the sled with the circular wood on either side seemed hard to move once it hit grass outside of town, and real earth and fell to its side. A large animal was pulled over and attached to it to take the load the rest of the way.

“Big dogs. With ears like small rabbits. And noble eyes,” Sublomuc commented regarding the beasts that seemed capable of being ridden by a man, and when ridden, seemed to not mind it. “Indeed, these are an advanced people.”

“And a dying one,” Submuloc added, as the blanket over the sled fell off, bodies of people, some with much jewelry, some with none of it, falling off of it. Their faces had holes in them. Their lips were blistered. Their eyes were vacant. And they were all still clothed.

People without jewelry were yelled at as they put the bodies of the dead on top of the sled again. “Their sweat smells of death, fear and ignorance,” Dnanidref said, regarding his keen sense of smell. “Like they purposely don’t go into the water to bathe.”

Even though it is a hot day, everyone had their arms and legs covered. “They must have thin skins,” Submuloc proposed. “And thick skulls. And...” His gaze and focus was captured by a young girl who, but for her pale white skin, that looked like his own daughter. Men with crosses and much jewelry around their necks were dragging her out of her hut by her hair. Other men with shiny spears made sure that they met no resistance from the villagers who looked gaunt, hungry and compassionate.

“I have to stop them!” Submuloc grunted, pulling out a stone knife from his belt.

“With that?” Dnanidref replied.

“Someone has to...I can use this as a weapon!” the man who never even struck another in anger found himself asserting.

“Better to use this!” Dnanidref pointed to the muscle between his ears. He motioned Submuloc into the brush, a beautiful collection of trees that were still standing, around a village that seemed to ignore the shelter those tall giants could provide them. “We use the angels inside of us as demons.”

“Like you used to do to us to keep us inside on nights when the coyotes were afoot?”

“Sometimes you have to treat children like children. And sometimes you need to make gifts of life seem like omens of death.” Dnanidref noted around him apples which seemed redder than normal, and softer. And mushrooms. “They sell everything except these on the sleds in town, so many if we become Spirit Animals and fart these down on them...”

It seemed like a good plan. A needed one. The only one available as the fires were being set to burn the women and girls accused of being sorcerers. As Submoluc felt it, evil resided here under the where the Sun rose, not goodness, or Light.

The two visitors from the West side of the Great Waters snuck up the leafed trees above the village, running upon them like they were all manner of animals. They threw down the mushrooms and apples which the scared crowd in front of the condemned healers called ‘tomatoes’, calling them ‘toxic’ and ‘rain from the devil’.

The two First Nations explorers found the foreign tomatoes and mushrooms very tasty. But, it was more important to make ‘devil rain’ to scare away the villagers than to fill their empty bellies. Finally, the only people left in the village were the girls and women tied to the posts in the ground. Submuloc rushed down and untied them. The pale skinned women seemed scared of him. They ran away into the woods, too.

Dnanidref whistled from atop one of the trees and pointed Submluc to another part of the woods. An army of hooded people were coming, very angry, and very armed. They seemed to want to conquer this village, not knowing there were no more people in it. Submuloc scurried up the tree and noted an army of rats following these invaders.

“Death,” Dnanidref said, smelling such in the air. “By tomorrow, everyone who returned to this place will be dead. The lifeless ones and the ones who are Alive between the ears. We had better stay up here till it passes.”

Dnanidref sounded like he was right, again. Though Submuloc felt that he was talking from the Other Side, there was no other choice but to listen, and obey. Indeed he was on the other side of the Earth, the other side of the Great Waters.

Two days passed, then three, during which the two sailors from the West repaired the boat, ate tomatoes and feasted on mushrooms. The sleds with circular sides to them carried more bodies to the burying place till there was no one left to carry the carts, and no one to do the burying. All that remained in the village were the rats, who ate the dead people. Thankfully, the women and girls who were about to be burned stayed in the woods.

“We should take one of them back to where we live. To where there is life instead of death. To tell us about her people here,” Submuloc said regarding the one who reminded him of his daughter, and who seems less frightened of him than the others.

“You have children of your own, and a family, Submuloc,” Dnanidref replied tone. “We have seen what is on the rising side of the Sun, and it is not Light. The land here is not the Source of life. It is...primitive, savage and lacking any kind of civilization. And as for seeking a place of unending Space, the Big Open, with no boundaries.”

“It’s between our ears,” Submuloc said, reading the truth of the matter as well as the Old Sage’s Mind.

But there was one thing that Submuloc was determined to carry back home with him. The thin wood sheets containing scratches on them which the condemned women seemed so attached to and their ignorantly cruel would-be executioners were so intent on burning. “Books”, he remembered them being called, putting them into a large bag to examine on another day.

It was a long sail back home. By the time Submuloc landed the craft on home shore, Dnanidref lay dead beside him. But there was a smile on the old man’s face. He had seen what was on the other side of the world, the Source of the Sun. And had proven to himself, and perhaps Submuloc, that the real discovery is to connect to Life where you are. Where his people were. On the small stretch of land which he now was determined to turn into a Paradise.

Lazy Eyes was the first to greet Submuloc. “Where were you?” he asked.

“No place worth telling anyone about,” Submuloc said as he broke grass over Dnardref’s smiling face, his journey to the Other Side now complete.

Submuloc kissed his wife, hugged his children and became a respectable member of the tribe. He grew old, and in ways that were possible within the limitations around him, happy. He taught wisdom to those who would listen, and learned that the wisest teacher learns more than he ever teaches. As for the books, Dnanidef learned what he could

from them and finally figured out what some of them were saying to him, just before his eyes went dim. As for what lay behind at the time of his passing to the Other Side, it was mirrored into the waters in which his remains were cast. ...”Submuloc sdnif eporue” Submoluc carved in a piece of wood in his native tongue. The mirror image in the water reflected, ironically enough, ‘Columbus finds Europe,’ as he realized that the last and most rewarding Big Open is between the ears, wherever you are.

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