

BUONA FORTUNA

Written by
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FADE IN.

EXT. MARINA BOAT DOCK - EVENING

A sleepy seaside fishing village.

Commercial FISHING BOATS saunter in from the long day's fish. Scattered among them, large, expensive PRIVATE BOATS filled with laughing, partying passengers all loudly blaring a cacophony of MUSIC. CLOSE on one small fishing vessel. Old, creaky and tired-looking could describe both the boat and its pilot, JOHN MERRITT (late 50s). He gingerly pulls the hobbling boat into a slip, its fishing nets piled haphazardly on the stern, obviously empty. The boat sputters, backfires and becomes silent as it floats the remainder of the distance into the slip. John tries in vain to restart the now hissing engine, to no avail. From the STERN side of the boat, the name "ESTELLE" withers, half faded away in peeling paint.

JOHN
[to the boat]
Dammit Estelle! You old worthless
hunk of lard.

John wipes sweat from his weathered face, reaches into his pocket and pulls out a CELL PHONE. He attempts to dial, fails. Attempts again then looks at the phone screen in defeat. From John's POV...

PHONE SCREEN
"Phone service suspended. Please
contact us about payment".

John mutters another curse and throws the phone overboard. It hits the water with a dull SPLASH.

JOHN
(looking after the phone)
Good riddance. Worthless piece
of...

John throws the anchor rope around the pier and ambles onto the decking. He stomps away a few steps and then returns, gives a swift kick to the side of the boat and then turns once more and walks up the pier toward...

A weathered STATUE, one hand extended, holding a PLAQUE: "WELCOME TO FORTUNA". The smiling female GODDESS, the town namesake, seems to leer as John walks by. He tosses the contents of a THERMOS CUP he carries at it, leaving dark liquid to drip down the face like tears.

JOHN (CONT'D)
(muttering to himself)
Bitch.

A MAN'S VOICE
(O.C.)
Ahoy, John!

John turns to see another fisherman, his long-time friend, DUB AVERY (60s) struggling with a net teeming with his catch.

DUB
(puffing)
If you're done with your catch, I could sure use a hand with this.

JOHN
(considering the writhing fish)
Through? I'm through alright. I didn't catch one damned thing all day other than a few beer cans and couple pieces of plastic.

Dub looks toward John's boat and its empty nets.

DUB
Ah gee, John. That's some tough luck, I guess I was just blessed today. I couldn't even haul them all in. I had to cut one of my nets loose or risk sinking my boat!

He shakes his head in disbelief at his good fortune, but then considers John.

DUB (CONT'D)
I tell you what pal, you help me get this load into the dock market and we'll call half of it yours.

He smiles and nods at John.

JOHN
I don't need your charity, Dub. There'll be other days.

Dub nods understanding.

DUB
I didn't mean it as charity, John, but it does seem like you've had a run of back luck lately and I know you'd do the same for me but...

He looks back at the loaded net.

DUB (CONT'D)
I could still use a hand.

John sighs.

JOHN
Sure ...sure. Let's get those fish
outta there before they start to
stink up the whole place.

Dub pats him on the back in gratitude.

DUB
(chuckling)
You know John, you ever think about
asking old Fortuna over there to
change your luck?

He nods toward the stone statue.

John rolls his eyes.

JOHN
Pfft. That old beat up piece of
quarry?

DUB
She's the patron of the town and a
lot of people around here believe
in it. Legend has it she watches
over us fishermen.

JOHN
Yeah, I know the legend. Never set
much store by it. The last thing I
need is to be asking for favors
from a piece of rock.

DUB
Well, you can think about it. All
she requires is an offering, you
know. What would it hurt?

Dub winks playfully at John, looks up to the sky.

DUB (CONT'D)
Moonless night tonight. That's part
of the legend. Might be worth a
try.

John isn't buying it.

JOHN

Yeah well, moonless or not, it's not me. I'm a lot of things, but I'm no gambler and I'm no believer in fate or fortune and especially old Roman goddesses.

He pauses in thought.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Besides, I just threw a cup of cold coffee in her face. That probably doesn't bode well for me.

Dub shrugs and shakes his head.

DUB

Probably not pal, probably not.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

John sits at the kitchen table of his modest, bare-bones home. A whiskey bottle accompanies stacks of envelopes and other papers littering the surface. From John's POV he flips through them: "PAST DUE" "ATTENTION NEEDED" "LATE NOTICE" and the like as he tosses each one aside, only to reveal another: "EVICTION NOTICE - CONTACT IMMEDIATELY". John flings the envelope across the room and slams his fist onto the table.

JOHN

Money, money, money. That's all life is about. If you don't have money you don't have a life. You don't have nothin'. Nothin'!

He grabs the whiskey bottle and takes a long draught from it, wincing as its burn sears his throat.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A FEW HOURS LATER

John lies asleep, still at the kitchen table his head resting atop the pile of envelopes. Dead drunk. He stirs, moans and lifts his head.

JOHN
Why not? What do I have to lose?

EXT. MARINA DOCK - NIGHT

John staggers toward the statue of Fortuna, stops directly in front of her. Her face holds the same timelessness ...and disinterest. John looks up to the dark, moonless sky then back to Fortuna.

JOHN
(slurring his words)
You need an offering do you? Is that it? Pay to play?

He leers drunkenly, fishing in his pocket. He pulls out several one dollar bills and some change and dumps it in her outstretched hand.

JOHN (CONT'D)
That's all I've got, your highness. Will that buy me any of your good fortune?

The statue gazes ahead, unhearing.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Hmmp. Not impressed are you? Well, I'm used to that. I'm not a very impressive man. Never have been.

He stands for another couple moments, righting himself as he nearly falls over. Finally, he pats the statue on the head and staggers back up the gangway into the darkness.

EXT. MARINA DOCK - DAY

John makes his way down the dock, obviously nursing a hangover. Haggard, still clad in the previous day's clothing, holding a hand to his head and squinting into the mid-day sun. Most of the berths are empty, the fishermen leaving long before for the day of work. John stops at the slip where "Estelle" remains moored.

JOHN
[bitterly]
Good morning you old bucket of lard. I see you remained afloat over night.

John gingerly steps aboard, still holding one hand to his head and steadying himself with the other. He spies a PAPER wedged between the wheel and frame of the boat. He is perplexed but retrieves it.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (Reading aloud to himself)
 "Your boat has been repaired.
 Wishing you fair winds and
 following seas."

John looks around for who could have left the note, sees no one. Looks back incredulously at the piece of paper, then lays it aside.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (shaking his head)
 Dub. Has to be.

He attempts to start the engine, which fires immediately to life, lacking the hissing noise of the night before, it settles into an even purr. John then spies his fishing nets, left haphazardly piled on the stern. They now lay neatly folded and stored in their appointed bin. Again, John looks around. Still no one. He shrugs plops behind the wheel and backs the boat out of the her slip.

MONTAGE:

The day passing. John hauling in net after net, brimming with fish.

EXT. MARINA DOCK - EVENING

"Estelle", engine still purring quietly, glides easily through the water, squatted with the day's catch. John guides her expertly into her slip. Other fisherman, unloading their own day's work, stop to stare at the mother lode. John hops out of the boat and throws the tie rope over the pier.

JOHN
 (smiling to himself)
 Wait til Dub sees this.

Another FISHERMAN, HENRY (grizzled, 60s) stops to admire the catch and whistles his approval.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Hey, have you seen Dub?

HENRY
 I guess you haven't heard.

JOHN
Heard? Heard what? I've been out
all afternoon.

Henry gives a downward glance, remorseful, then looks to John.

HENRY
Dub's boat went down this
afternoon.

John is taken aback.

JOHN
What? Where?

Henry points a gnarled finger.

HENRY
Just up the Sound there.

John hesitates. Speechless.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Boat's gone but the Coast Guard got
Dub. He's over at the hospital
now. A little beat up but gonna be
okay, or so I hear.

John is stunned. The paper announcing the repair of his boat
lays on the seat. He stares at it, unbelief clouding his
face.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

John makes his way home on foot. His joy at his day's fortune
overridden by his concern for his friend. Suddenly, he spies
something on the sidewalk, a small slip of PAPER, green in
color. He stoops, picks it up, turns it over. A LOTTERY
TICKET with selected numbers printed across the front. John
looks around to see who may have dropped the ticket. No one
in sight. He studies the ticket again, shrugs and places it
in his shirt pocket.

JOHN
(to himself)
No way, just no way.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

John sits at his littered kitchen table studying the ticket. He reaches for the remote and flicks on the small TV on the countertop. As the reception flickers, a NEWS ANCHORMAN, (30s, TV handsome) is finishing up the evening news.

TV NEWS ANCHOR

And finally in local news, we apparently have a winning lottery ticket sold at a local supermarket! The winning numbers were 7, 9, 13, 29 and 37. No one has come forward at this time, but stay tuned and we will inform you when we know the lucky winner. State Lottery officials say whomever the ticket holder is, is \$100,000 richer this evening.

John stares unbelieving at the screen. He looks down at the ticket stub in his hand. From John's POV the numbers: 7, 9, 13, 29, 37.

EXT. MARINA DOCK - EARLY MORNING

The eastern horizon brightens revealing John sitting at "Estelle's" helm. He holds the ticket in his hand, still staring at it, unbelieving. Henry approaches from the gangway.

HENRY

You're out early. Figured you'd take the day off after the landfall yesterday.

John looks up.

JOHN

Any news about Dub? I was going to go by and see him at the hospital last night but ...something came up.

He glances back down at the lottery ticket.

HENRY

Dub's doing okay, and this is unbelievable, but he's had another stroke of terrible luck.

John furrows his brow.

JOHN

Oh no, poor Dub. What now?

HENRY

I guess you've heard someone in town won the State lottery last night.

John nods, inconspicuously sliding the ticket into his jacket pocket.

HENRY (CONT'D)

As luck would have it, Dub's wife bought that ticket. Said she's been playing those same numbers all year, the ages of their two kids and three grandkids. Trouble is, she can't find it. Thinks it fell out of her purse on the way to the hospital to care for Dub.

John shrinks a little further.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Lord knows they could use that money with all the hospital bills coming and Dub being out of work for no telling how long, not to mention the loss of the boat.

John looks away, unable to look Henry in the eye.

JOHN

(barely above a whisper)
That's terrible.

Henry nods and lingers for another minute.

HENRY

Well, gotta be going on. Those fish aren't going to catch themselves today, now are they?

John looks up, trying to force a smile.

JOHN

No. It takes work...and a little luck sometimes.

Henry nods in agreement and gives a parting wave as he walks away on down the gangway.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

John, again parked at his kitchen table. His companion, the whiskey bottle, stands half full within arm's reach. John holds his head in his hands. The lottery ticket, unredeemed, lays atop a new batch of late notices littering the tabletop.

JOHN

(to himself)

I just needed a little luck to get me going. That's all. Just a little luck.

He reaches for the TV remote. The TV alights to a MESSAGE across the screen:

TV SCREEN

(on screen)

"Service interrupted. Please contact us to settle your account."

John throws the remote forcefully at the TV, takes a large swig of whiskey from the bottle, stuffs the lottery ticket in his pocket and stomps out of the house, slamming the door with force.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

John exits the hospital, head down, hands in his pockets. He strides toward the street ahead with purpose.

EXT. MARINA DOCK - NIGHT

John walks toward the head of the gangway and approaches the ever-watchful statue of Fortuna. He carries an object we cannot make out in the darkness. He stops directly in front of the figure. The money he had left in her outstretched hand is gone, but for one dime. He picks it up.

JOHN

(to the statue)

You're not what they think you are. I know the real legend now. Not just the Goddess of Luck, but also the Goddess of Misfortune. We call that "running hot and cold" around here. I gave you every last cent I had just hoping for a little favor and yeah, I got that favor ...turns out you robbed someone else to give it to me.

John appears to await an answer. None comes.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I may have nothing of value in this world, but I'm an honest man. I needed that money, but it wasn't mine. To keep it would be to steal ...from a good man and a friend at that. So here I am. Empty pockets but a clear conscience. I won't be asking any more help from you, or anyone else for that matter.

A beat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And just so you won't be granting any more wishes, here's a little parting gift from me.

He lifts the object he carries that we now see in the dock light as a SLEDGE HAMMER. He swings it with all the power he can muster. The statue, rended in half, topples. John smirks in self-satisfaction.

A beat as he stares in contempt.

He spies something that catches his eye. He stoops to the base of the statue now partially upended. He scrapes away the debris only to discover CHISELED WORDS, long buried in sand and salt. He runs his finger over the long forgotten words.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(reading to himself)

"Whatever Fortune has raised on high, she lifts but to bring low."

John stands, raises the sledgehammer once more and gives a final crushing blow to the statue of Fortuna.

FADE OUT.

THE END