

THE INHERITANCE OF THE  
**GENTLE BOAT**



The sun was brilliant on a postcard perfect morning as the young gentle boat left the bay. Its turquoise-copper complexion glistened in the water. Thorough sunlight washed every inch of the boat. Endless reflections chased the shadows. Saturated in coastal colors the confident, smooth, little boat glided toward the sun.

The blue transparency parted. Disinterested fish in lazy coral fluttered below while a cordial breeze escorted the sails above. The proud boat was off to find its own home, a sunny port miles and miles away. Passing venerable cliffs and gesturing palm trees the young vessel laid back and imagined itself mature. The water did not demur. The rays beckoned.

When beautiful young boats leave the bay there is only one way for them to go. Some, riding long winds of independence seize the day and never look back. Guidance is throttled. Directions are jettisoned. An obtuse wake is all that is left. Others respectfully charted and mapped enjoy tradition's last embrace. Hoisting customs, they set their course. These boats glide away with the gentle push of an older generation. But either way... when boats leave they go out... where manuals and maps are powerless. And while it appears some boats are more prepared than others to make the journey no one really knows until the openness closes in.

So the boat gently sailed out of the bay's open mouth. Like the last guest at a party, an inlet climbed a hill of view but went no farther. Other vessels faded away. Light drifted off and then slept. The night used the stars as insulation. Quietness covered everything above. But, below the boat felt something. Profound trenches began to stir and stealthy coolness billowed up. Alone, for the first time, the craft grew hesitant and searched for direction. Feeling the depth give way to more depth, the boat wrapped itself tightly and struggled on. Finally, long shadows began to appear signaling a change in the sky. Dawn arrived and the boat still intact, reconfigured. Pirouetting, it shook off the evening's interrogation and gently sailed for the light of another day.

The morning offered up mile after reflective mile of graceful, marine-blue water. The boat forgot about the previous night's distress and took a long, impregnable nap dreaming of golden sunsets and bustling ports.

But, gentle boats don't travel open seas without considerable endangerment and the second night wasn't better than the first. The dark came stronger. Below, marauding depths conspired. Above, clouds of pressure clutched at the mast. Anger, like ice began to form around the sail and then the wind squallied throughout the night. This was its first storm. The boat couldn't help but think this was all so unexpected. Unnecessary as well... *why should there be so much difficulty?* The journey was not meeting any preconceived expectations. Try as it could, no charts could be found to help navigate away or around the hardship. So, shivering, the boat settled into itself and weathered the cold. Some-

where deep inside, the boat managed a thin voice, *morning will come*. The boat always felt confident about the light. In this way, the boat journeyed great lengths over several seasons. By day there was light to navigate, but by night there were constant storms.

When storms accost sailboats there are one of two responses plotted. The first is to view the tempest as a minor obstacle, something in the way of where it is going... the destination, the moment it's free of pain, health, or operating at maximum efficiency. In this view the storm is simply a temporary annoyance to be tolerated until the goal is reached. Much energy is expended in denial of the storm's power, rerouting around the storm and otherwise staying occupied. Distraction is elixir.

A second, and less common response is to sail through. Less common for it requires attributes such as patience, courage and faith. Patience, for this way is long. Courage, for this way refuses denial. Faith, for this way acknowledges the risk of a real and lasting shipwreck. In short, going *through* the storm often provides the only way to deal *with* the storm. The storm-tested find strength. The storm-tested find healing, although healing should not be confused with the removal of pain. Those that choose this direction learn joy and pain are not mutually exclusive. So, even when the destination appeared unreachable, the gentle sailboat learned to lean upon the sailing itself. Joy was found right there, in the midst of the journey.

Many assumed the boat was growing strong. And for its part, it was. But, every vessel must singularly face it's own tempest, the ferocity of which is unpredictable.

And then a great season of storms...

Night after night, dark waves shrapneled the hull. Raindrops, those aquatic sentinels of wrath dented and chipped. The squalls tore at the sails and raked at the frame, it's very rivets and seams bitterly complaining. There was no rest. There was no sun. For the clouds, impervious in their personality firmly repelled the light. Doubt followed the boat as silent as a stingray.

One ominous night the boat sailed by a mountainous shoreline. The wind's teeth fashioned sharp by the pressure of the nearby cliffs bit fiercely. The cold rains came like tiny bullets. The boat's shivering figurehead could not dissipate the attack. With wave after wave challenging every rivet the weakest seam began to waver. The boat struggled on to find the light, but the long season had depleted its strength. Finally one violent wave ruptured a batten seam on the starboard side. Water, the color of wet granite, forced its way in. Deconstruction cried out from bow to stern. In the dark hours before the sunrise, through the mouth of the tear, water swallowed water. In bitter irony, the storm began to subside, but it was too late. Death was quick and the boat sank in black, slow motion meaninglessness.

What absurdities lie in the wake of those who attempt such journeys.

With the last moments of night sneering at the first moments of day, dawn arrived. The light, 93 million miles of wave after inexorable wave of sunlight, ignored the derision and carried on. In reconnaissance fashion the first of the light waves reached the water. Then more pierced the surface. Then countless more dove down into the depths creating a deep shaft of luminescence. The water dutifully and quietly pinned the lifeless craft down, watching the light closely.

The boat felt nothing in death... except... what was this? Warmth? First at the batten seam on the starboard side and then quickly along the entire length of the vessel, a fuse of light flashed! With a great heave the boat awoke. Light, brilliant as the first dawn of creation severed the water and retained the darkness. In shock, the water simply let go. It could only watch as the scarred boat mis-siled up. What took years of storms to destroy took moments of light to repair. This boat wasn't made to sink. This boat was made to sail.

It was a postcard perfect morning when the boat, like a great fish, burst above the water. The breach brought cheers from a million water droplets as they atomized into the crystal blue sky. The breeze danced with the brilliant white clouds spreading the news. An immense port slowly came into focus, the color of which the boat had no experience with. At first glimpse the hue was golden, but upon further observation it was something that might be described as deeper or maybe richer. Schooners from a thousand generations parted in genuflection. To the boat it appeared as if each vessel was as new as it was ancient, as curious as it was content. The trees waved delightfully, each limb welcoming more emphatic than the last. Were the flowers giggling? Was the grass trembling? And the land... what could be said of the land, the great terra firma? It was as if the land embraced and supported all that could be viewed in unyielding estimation. To the sailboat, the sum of all these images seemed to give off a smile, the kind of smile one has when the secret of a great riddle is about to be revealed. The sun observed everything and laughed. Gliding into dock, the gentle boat could not believe what it had inherited. ■

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